

## COMESA Week in Ethiopia: Bringing Regional Integration Closer to the People



CEOs and Representatives of COMESA Institutions

Chief Executive Officers and their representatives from institutions of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, for the 2nd Awareness Forum to raise publicity and visibility about their operations to local stakeholders and partners.

The two-day event attracted delegates drawn from the government, private sector organizations, Export Promotion Agencies, multilateral development partners, women entrepreneurs, the youth, small and medium-sized enterprises, higher learning institutions, and the media.

Anchored on the theme: 'Accelerating Regional Integration through the Development of Regional Value Chains in Climate Resilient Agriculture, Mining, and Tourism,' the event was described as both timely and profoundly relevant, capturing the urgency for the region to embrace resilience,

innovation, and sustainable industrial development amidst a rapidly evolving global landscape.

The COMESA Week was officially opened by H.E. Kassahun Gofe Balami (PhD), Minister of Trade and Regional Integration, Ethiopia, who welcomed the initiative and said the focus of the deliberations directly aligns with Ethiopia's ongoing commitment to economic diversification and resilience, ensuring continued progress across key sectors.

He mentioned the Green Legacy Initiative, which is a flagship reforestation programme that has planted over 40 billion trees, increasing forest coverage to 23.6%, the national wheat initiatives, and the YeLemat Trufat as some of the key programmes that the government is implementing.

"Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, diverse

landscapes, and emerging eco-tourism opportunities position it as a premier destination for both the COMESA region and global visitors. Addis Ababa's transformation through urban renewal and beautification projects has significantly enhanced the city's appeal, expanded attractions, and improved infrastructure," Minister Balami said.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe said the event reflected the region's collective recognition that Africa's sustainable development hinges upon building resilient, competitive, and inclusive value chains across key sectors that are central to our economies and livelihoods.

It builds on the momentum established during the inaugural COMESA Institutions Awareness Forum held in Mauritius in April 2024, which succeeded in increasing institutional visibility, enhanced collaboration

# Member States Advance Towards Unified Investment Framework



*Delegates at the Meeting to consider the revised COMESA Common Investment Area in Nairobi*

COMESA in partnership with the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and support from the European Union under the 11th EDF Regional Enterprise Competitiveness and Access to Markets Programme (RECAMP), convened a high-level consultative meeting with Member States to consider the revised Investment Agreement for the COMESA Common Investment Area (CCIA), marking a significant milestone in the region's efforts to boost intra-regional and foreign direct investment.

The two-day workshop, held on 6-7 May 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya, brought together senior officials responsible for investment and investment promotion from COMESA Member States, investment policy experts, regional stakeholders and development partners. The purpose of the meeting was to finalize the revised CCIA Agreement—a legal framework designed to promote, protect, and facilitate investment across the region. The workshop also consulted and gathered inputs from Member States on a proposed handbook to expedite the domestication and implementation of the revised CCIA.

The CCIA Agreement, developed in 2007 has faced challenges in securing ratification due to factors such as limited awareness and need for better alignment with national investment frameworks. In light of these challenges, COMESA initiated a comprehensive review process to update the Agreement, ensuring that its provisions reflect international best practices and are responsive to new developments and

evolving priorities in the region and the continent.

The revised CCIA Agreement seeks to establish a more liberal, transparent, and predictable investment environment across the COMESA region, and offers clarity on investor and state obligations, dispute settlement mechanisms, and improved provisions for the movement of capital, goods, services, and labour for the sake of investment. These improvements are expected to significantly boost investor confidence and enhance the region's attractiveness as a destination for sustainable investment.

In his address, COMESA Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Ambassador Dr. Mohamed Kadah, highlighted the urgency of enhancing investment frameworks amid low and declining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows to Africa. Citing the 2024 UNCTAD World Investment Report, Dr. Kadah noted that Africa's meagre 4-5% share of global FDI flows dropped further down from USD 54 billion in 2022 to USD 53 billion in 2023. Within COMESA, inflows fell from USD 23.4 billion to USD 18.7 billion over the same period.

He attributed this downturn to factors such as global economic uncertainty, political instability, and burdensome regulatory environments.

"The revised CCIA Agreement is a timely and strategic response to these challenges. It will help Member States to address structural

bottlenecks and provide a harmonized platform to attract sustainable investment into priority sectors," Amb. Dr. Kadah highlighted.

The workshop was officially opened by Kenya's Principal Secretary for the State Department of Investment Promotion, Mr. Abubakar Hassan Abubakar who called on the bloc to work in unity toward the region's economic transformation.

"We must move beyond competition and embrace collaboration. The revised CCIA Agreement provides us with a unique opportunity to build a harmonized investment climate that benefits all our countries and citizens," he stated.

Mr. Abubakar reiterated Kenya's support to ensure the success of the Agreement and offered to host the forthcoming COMESA Investment Forum scheduled for 2026. The validation of the revised Agreement benefited from technical inputs provided by UNCTAD and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD). Their support ensured the revised CCIA is aligned with international investment principles and reflects the priorities of African economies. Representatives from Burundi, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe actively participated in the workshop. The revised CCIA will go through final validation before submission to COMESA policy organs for adoption then to Member States for ratification and domestication.



# COMESA Week in Ethiopia:...



Delegates at the 6th COMFWB Trade fair

between COMESA institutions and national stakeholders, and promoted the uptake of COMESA instruments by the private sector.

“The second Forum seeks to deepen this engagement and deliver an even more profound impact by advancing the strategic pillars of the COMESA Mid-Term Strategic Plan, especially in fostering integration, industrial development, trade expansion, and resilience,” she stated.

Through these awareness events, the 21-member trade bloc aims to ensure that stakeholders across the region are not only aware of the services and instruments offered by its institutions, but are actively engaged in co-creating solutions, tapping into available resources, and contributing to the regional economic architecture.

The delegates were informed that through an integrated approach encompassing trade facilitation, investment promotion, risk mitigation services, infrastructure modernization, digital financial inclusion, value addition in leather and textiles, and the economic empowerment of women and youth, COMESA institutions continue to redefine and shape the future trajectory of



3<sup>rd</sup> from Left: H.E. Tagesse Chafo, Speaker of Ethiopia's House of People's Representatives, Hon. Kassahun Gofe Balami (PhD), Minister of Trade & Regional Integration, Ethiopia and Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe officially opening the 6<sup>th</sup> COMFWB Trade Fair in Addis Ababa Ethiopia

the regional integration agenda.

The SG added that the growth of Ethiopia's leather industry is another shining example of transformation—built on strong policy direction, private sector development, and support to SMEs through targeted interventions.

Ms. Maureen Sumbwe of the COMESA Federation of Women in Business (COMFWB) also addressed the event and called on Member States to do more in addressing

the various challenges that women entrepreneurs face.

A central highlight of this year's COMESA Week was the COMESA Federation of Women Business (COMFWB) 6th Trade Fair, which attracted over 300 women entrepreneurs from 21 African countries. The women-led businesses engaged in business-to-business sessions, forging export-ready partnerships, and participated in trade deals projected to generate millions of dollars in intra-African trade transactions.

# UNHCR and COMESA Forge Strategic Partnership for Displaced Populations in Southern and Eastern Africa



Left seated: UNHCR Regional Director for Southern Africa Ms Chansa Kapaya and Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe signing the MoU at COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen cooperation and collaboration to find lasting solutions for millions of people forced to flee their homes across the African continent due to conflicts and natural disasters.

This partnership builds on pledges made by COMESA Member States at the Global Refugee Forum in 2019 and 2023 and contributes to advancing the goals of the Global Compact on Refugees.

The signing of the MoU comes at a time when Africa is grappling with a growing displacement crisis, with more than 54 million people forced from their homes by conflict, political instability and natural disasters. Southern Africa alone hosts over 22 per cent of the continent's displaced population.

By combining UNHCR's protection mandate with COMESA's regional development expertise, the partnership aims to promote inclusion of forcibly displaced persons including refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) into national systems across the COMESA's Member States as a

means to providing them with pathways to sustainable livelihoods so they can lead stable dignified lives and live in harmony with local communities in the refugee hosting countries.

"By working closely with COMESA and its Member States, we are building pathways for that hope to become reality. Together, we are not only working to ensure the rights and dignity of displaced people are upheld — we are reaffirming that they matter, and that they have a future," said Ms Chansa Kapaya, UNHCR's Regional Director for Southern Africa.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe welcomed the partnership and emphasized the need to strengthen collaboration at both national and regional level, recognizing that displacement is not confined to national boundaries but has regional spillover effects into other countries requiring coordinated action.

She observed that COMESA has a wide-range of programmes and initiatives in governance, peace and security, trade, infrastructure, agriculture, energy as well as women, youth and gender equality, all of which can support the objectives of the UNHCR-COMESA partnership.

"It is therefore important to involve our Member States and specifically our communities in finding lasting solutions to the peace, security, and development challenges as they are the most affected and have a better understanding on the most appropriate solutions," SG Kapwepwe said. The MOU sets out areas of cooperation, including the inclusion of displaced persons in national services such as health and education, promotion of legal reforms to strengthen protection frameworks, and support for post-conflict recovery and environmentally sustainable development in refugees hosting areas. Special attention will be given to women, children, persons with disabilities, and survivors of violence.

UNHCR and COMESA will also work together to enhance early warning systems, strengthen data-sharing, create opportunities for socio-economic inclusion—particularly targeting groups most affected by displacement.

To implement the agreement, the two organizations will establish a joint implementation committee and develop a detailed joint action plan to determine priority areas and actions.



## COMESA Advances Trade Integration

Customs experts from COMESA Member States and development partners have continued the process of reviewing and aligning the region's trade rules with current economic realities and continental frameworks. The 19th Meeting of the Technical Working Group (TWG) on COMESA Rules of Origin, meeting from 13 – 16 May 2025 in Mombasa, Kenya described the exercise as a significant stride toward deepening regional integration and accelerating intra-COMESA trade.

The meeting aimed at building consensus around revisions to COMESA's Rules of Origin and ensure they better reflect modern trade, considering the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA). A key agenda item included exploring cumulation between COMESA and AfCFTA to streamline trade and reduce administrative bottlenecks for regional businesses.

Speaking at the official opening ceremony, Assistant Secretary General for Programmes, Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah, underscored the pivotal role that rules of origin play in facilitating industrial growth, enhancing value chains, and fostering regional competitiveness.

"Our region has the potential to realize over US\$ 100 billion in intra-COMESA trade. However, this can only be achieved if our rules of origin are pragmatic, efficient, and

supportive of our production ecosystems," said Dr. Kadah. "They must act as enablers, not barriers, to regional industrialization and integration."

The COMESA Free Trade Area (FTA), operational since 2000, has recorded a notable increase in intra-regional trade, with exports rising from US\$ 2 billion in 2000 to US\$ 14.1 billion in 2023. Yet, as Dr. Kadah highlighted, this represents only a fraction of the region's full potential.

He also commended the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the European Union (EU) for their ongoing technical and financial support under the EU-WCO Rules of Origin Africa Programme while emphasizing the importance of consensus and collaboration, urging delegates to engage constructively with a focus on efficiency and shared regional goals.

Participants at the four-day meeting also reviewed outcomes from the recent Joint COMESA-WCO Regional Workshop on Cumulation of Origin and assessed the progress of the COMESA Electronic Certificate of Origin, launched in November 2024 with pilot implementation in Eswatini, Malawi, and Zambia.

The 19th TWG meeting sets the tone for a new chapter in COMESA's journey toward a more integrated, industrialized, and prosperous trading bloc.

## COMESA Hosts 6th Technical Working Group Meeting on Air Transport Sector Development

Experts and key aviation stakeholders from five Regional Economic Communities and partner organizations namely COMESA, SADC, EAC and IGAD recently met in Livingstone, Zambia for the 6th Technical Working Group Meeting under the Support to Air Transport Sector Development (SATSD) Programme from 13-14 May 2025.

The meeting reviewed progress made under the SATSD programme, adopted the revised 2025–2026 work plan, and agreed on a set of priority actions to fast-track implementation during the no cost extension period of the programme. Discussions focused on enhancing safety, strengthening regulatory frameworks, strengthening regional collaboration, and addressing key implementation challenges.

The TWG reaffirmed its commitment to the goals of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), a flagship project under the African Union Agenda 2063, and acknowledged the support of the European Union under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), in providing the eight million euro grant funding towards the initiative.

Partner organizations that participated in the TWG included the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), (International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the (Civil Aviation Safety and Security Oversight Agency (CASSOA).



Representatives of COMESA Member Central Banks at the training in Nairobi Kenya

## Applicable Macprudential Policy Framework for COMESA Central Banks

Representatives from nine COMESA Member Countries' Central Banks have been trained in the applicable Macprudential Policy Framework by the COMESA Monetary Institute (CMI). This is part of efforts to empower COMESA macroprudential practitioners with the knowledge and expertise to effectively mitigate the likelihood and severity of financial instability by tackling systemic risk in the region, drawing on the home-grown COMESA Financial Stability Framework.

CMI Director Dr Lucas Njoroge says the participants also shared knowledge on each country's implementation of the macroprudential policy framework in the context of the new COMESA Financial Stability Assessment Framework.

While addressing the delegates in Mombasa on 5 May 2025, Dr Njoroge recalled that regulatory failure, to identify the build-up in vulnerabilities relating to excessive credit growth, risk-taking, and risk concentrations across the financial system, in the run-up to the global financial crisis of 2007-08, paved the way for the systemic

crisis.

Since then, there has been recognition for the need for microprudential supervisory and regulatory reforms to reinforce the safety and soundness of individual financial intermediaries, including the need to reinforce national regulatory frameworks with a systemwide approach to financial regulation and oversight.

Against this backdrop a macroprudential policy framework (MPPF) is seen as an appropriate policy response to changing financial environment and is considered necessary to promote financial system stability.

Considering that there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to the implementation of an effective macroprudential policy framework due to the heterogeneity in the national legal frameworks and financial sector structures, the training leveraged on data from COMESA Member States to provide a better understanding of the COMESA Financial Stability Assessment Framework—a tool which has only recently

been adopted and is being used to prepare the COMESA wide Financial Stability Report.

At the end of the training, participants noted that they had understood the important elements of a macroprudential policy framework including the different tools used to monitor and analyse the build-up of systemic risk in financial systems and acquire skills to prescribe appropriate macroprudential policy tools to mitigate identified systemic risk.

The training was attended by delegates from the central banks of Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



Participants at the training joined by Baringo County Deputy Governor Felix Kiplagat Maiyo (seated 3rd right)

## Training on Mediation of Natural Resource Based Conflicts for Kenya

COMESA in collaboration with the Horn of Africa Youth Network conducted a training of stakeholders from Kenya on mediation using the COMESA Handbook on mediation of Natural Resource Based Conflicts. The training that took place on 23-25 April 2025 in Baringo County, Kenya and was officially opened by the Deputy Governor of Baringo County Mr. Felix Kiplagat Maiyo.

In his remarks, the Governor commended COMESA for the timely intervention of imparting skills and knowledge to grassroot mediators who are at the

forefront of ensuring peaceful coexistence of communities. He emphasized the significance of natural resources in the context of local conflicts in the targeted counties, noting that mediation is a vital tool for resolving such disputes and achieving lasting and sustainable peace.

"I hereby reaffirm the commitment of both the national and county governments of Kenya to support peace and security initiatives both of which are necessary ingredients for development," said Mr Maiyo.

Speaking on behalf of COMESA Secretariat, Head of Governance, Peace and Security Dr. Oita Etyang emphasized that peace and security are essential pillars for regional integration. He noted that without stability, development and cooperation remain out of reach. Dr. Etyang highlighted that the primary objective of the workshop was to explore practical strategies for supporting communities residing in conflict-prone areas, particularly through mediation efforts. He stressed the importance of empowering local stakeholders to actively engage in peace-building processes that would ensure long-term harmony and resilience within their regions.

The training attracted participants from the counties of Baringo, Turkana, West Pokot, Samburu and Elgeyo Marakwet. The targeted counties host huge proportions of pastoral populations and are the ones most affected by resource-based conflicts especially pasture and water. It is important to note that, recently, natural resource-based conflicts in the region have been exacerbated by the impact of climate change associated drivers whereby the propensity, complexity and intensity is expected to increase as witnessed through recurrent cycles of droughts and flooding.

COMESA aims to create a pool of trained mediators in the region who are able to respond and mediate localised natural

## Former COMFWB CEO Honoured

Former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the COMESA Federation of Women in Business Mrs Katherine Ichoya has been honoured for her role in supporting advancement of women in Business in the COMESA region. She was presented with an award at the recently held 6th COMFWB Gala Dinner held in Addis Ababa Ethiopia on 9 May 2025.

This was part of the 2nd COMESA Week and 6th COMFWB Trade Fair and Business Conference held at Ethiopia's Skylight Hotel in Addis Ababa.

Mrs Ichoya served as CEO of FEMCOM in Lilongwe, Malawi before the name changed to COMFWB from 2009 until her retirement



Mrs Katherine Ichoya with a painting of her presented during the COMFWB Gala Dinner

in 2017. Before that, the Kenyan born Harvard trained economic development expert worked in the Women in Business and Gender Affairs Division at COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka, Zambia for 10 years. COMFWB Chairperson Mrs Maureen Sumbwe described Mrs Ichoya as a

champion of women empowerment and she was credited for playing a critical role in the establishment of the COMFWB Secretariat in Malawi.

COMFWB has so far established National Chapters in 21 COMESA Member States.



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