

Member States Review Progress in Eliminating NTBs



Sixteen COMESA Countries met in Kigali, Rwanda from 8 – 11 December 2025 to review progress in eliminating Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) in the region. Convened by the Trade and Customs Division of the COMESA Secretariat, the 5th Session of the COMESA Regional NTBs Forum meeting took stock of the many achievements recorded in enhancing trade over the past years and called for complete eliminating of all forms of NTBs to further deepen trade.

In addition, the meeting was held to clarify and interrogate the rationale for identification and efficiency in reporting resolution of NTBs, enhance visibility of reporting platforms and support Member States in developing National Work Programmes to strengthen regional integration and boost intra-COMESA trade.

Assistant Secretary General for Programmes Amb. Dr. Mohammed Kadah emphasized the importance of maintaining the market access gains achieved over 25 years of the COMESA

Free Trade Area (FTA) by avoiding NTBs, fostering an enabling trade environment, and promoting trade facilitation to ensure smooth intra and extra-COMESA trade and inclusive growth. He was represented by Senior Trade Officer Mrs. Alice Twizeye.

He observed that despite the low number of reported NTBs in recent years, intra-regional trade as a share of global exports has declined, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the current identification and resolution mechanisms. He further highlighted that persistently unresolved NTBs, some over a decade old, expose weaknesses in the system and suggested that underreporting does not accurately reflect the challenges faced by traders.

"I therefore urge you to adopt a results-based approach to achieve the COMESA Medium Term Strategic Plan (MTSP) target of increasing intra-regional trade from \$14 Billion in 2024 to \$16 Billion by 2030.". He emphasized that success requires collective

action at both regional and national levels to resolve longstanding NTBs, enhance trade and promote inclusive growth across the region.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Rwanda, External Trade Policy Specialist Mr. Gloire Kayitare, said the Forum was held at a critical moment marked by global trade disruptions, shifting supply chains and rising competitiveness pressures. He underscored the need for COMESA to remain resilient and attractive to traders and investors.

Mr. Kayitare emphasized that NTBs continue to impede intra-regional trade by increasing business costs, slowing logistics, and limiting opportunities for small-scale cross-border traders.

During the same meeting, the private sector focal points held a dedicated meeting where they expressed concern with their seemingly modest participation in the meeting and formed a Network which will help coordination of their efforts.

They acknowledged that these periodic meetings provide a unique platform for direct engagement among private sector representatives across COMESA Member States, "This Network will help us strengthen coordination and cooperation among our national private sector focal points," they declared.

The meeting was attended by Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.



COMESA and World Bank Host Webinar on Carbon Markets

On 8 December 2025, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the World Bank convened a high-level webinar under the theme "Fundamentals of International Carbon Markets and Emerging Trends." The session brought together more than 70 delegates from ASCENT Project Implementation Units across participating countries, as part of the World Bank's Accelerating Sustainable and Clean Energy Access Transformation (ASCENT) Carbon Program.

The event aimed to strengthen the capacity of project implementation units and key stakeholders to effectively engage in international carbon markets.

Delivering the keynote address, COMESA Director of Infrastructure and Logistics, highlighted ASCENT's innovative approach to leveraging carbon markets and emphasized that by monetizing emission reductions from renewable energy and clean cooking technologies, countries can unlock new revenue streams, attract investment, and secure a stronger role in the global transition to a low-carbon future.

"Today's webinar is designed to build the capacity of project implementation units and stakeholders to engage effectively in these markets. Over the next ninety minutes, you will gain practical insights into how carbon projects are designed, validated and verified, understand the distinction between compliance and voluntary markets and explore emerging global trends that will shape opportunities for our region," Dr. Dzawanda noted. He was represented by ASCENT Gender Expert Dr. Maria Phiri.

He encouraged participants to engage actively, share experiences and draw on the expertise of facilitators to ensure ASCENT delivers not only energy access, but also climate resilience and financial innovation for communities.

Approved in November 2023, ASCENT is a bold and transformative initiative designed to close the persistent energy access gap across more than 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa.

Through ASCENT, COMESA aims to provide electricity access to 100 million people and deliver clean cooking solutions to 20 million households.

COMESA ASCENT Project Engages Eritrean Government on Climate Finance

A delegation from the COMESA ASCENT Project, led by Project Coordinator Dr. Malama Chileshe, paid a courtesy call on Eritrean Minister of Land, Water and Environment, Hon. Tesfai Ghebreselassie, on Friday, 5th December 2025. The meeting took place during the National Consultation Workshop on ASCENT GREEN, an initiative designed to leverage Green Climate Fund's (GCF) to accelerate energy access and promote sustainable development across the region.

The interaction underscored Eritrea's commitment to climate resilience and its alignment with regional efforts to mobilize resources for green growth.

Discussions centered on the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) proposal, jointly presented by COMESA and the World Bank, who participated virtually. Key areas of focus included funds allocation, results-based financing, risk mitigation strategies, private sector participation and carbon financing

mechanisms. These interventions aim to unlock climate finance opportunities that will support renewable energy projects, enhance energy efficiency, and strengthen adaptation measures in vulnerable communities.

Hon. Ghebreselassie reaffirmed Eritrea's readiness to collaborate with COMESA and development partners to advance the green agenda.

The ASCENT GREEN program is part of COMESA's broader strategy to integrate climate action into regional development, ensuring member states access innovative financing solutions to meet their energy and climate goals.

Dr Chileshe was accompanied by Mr. Kibrom Weldegebrsel, Acting Director General in the Ministry of Land, Water and Environment, Dr. Derick Ndimbwa, ASCENT Carbon Finance Expert and Ms. Ireen Simonga, Administrative Assistant.



Zambia Launches Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment Report



Left: Zambian Vice President Dr. W.K. Mutale Nalumango with Secretary General Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe cutting the ribbon

Zambia officially launched its Country Structural Vulnerability and Resilience Assessment (CSVRA) Report on the 8 December 2025, in Lusaka. The launch marked an important step in advancing peacebuilding, governance reforms and long-term national development planning.

The event, brought together senior Government officials, traditional leaders, development partners, civil society representatives, regional and continental institutions, including COMESA and the African Union. The gathering reflected the broad national and regional interest in strengthening resilience frameworks that support sustainable peace and inclusive growth.

The CSVRA is a comprehensive analytical tool designed to assess structural vulnerabilities while identifying the strengths and resilience capacities within a country. It provides evidence-based insights that support informed policymaking, conflict prevention, institutional strengthening, and strategic development planning. Zambia's voluntary participation in the assessment process demonstrates its commitment to proactive governance and long-term stability.

Delivering the keynote address as Guest of Honour, the Vice President of Zambia, Dr.

Mutale Nalumango, underscored the national importance of the CSVRA Report. She highlighted its role in informing future policy direction and enhancing Zambia's capacity to anticipate, manage and respond to structural risks.

"This launch marks a significant moment in our journey towards peace, prosperity and sustainable development. The CSVRA provides critical insights that will strengthen governance, deepen national resilience and safeguard the long-term stability of our country," Dr. Nalumango stated.

The Vice President reaffirmed Government's commitment to utilizing the findings of the report to guide national planning, strengthen institutions and foster inclusive development that leaves no one behind.

Secretary General Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe commended Zambia for its leadership and willingness to undertake the assessment. She noted that the CSVRA goes beyond surface-level indicators to examine deeper structural factors that influence stability and development.

"The CSVRA helps us look beneath the surface to understand both the underlying pressures and the strengths that Zambia possesses. It offers a foundation for long-term

planning, conflict mitigation, and institutional strengthening," Ms. Kapwepwe said.

She further emphasized COMESA's commitment to supporting Member States in strengthening resilience through data-driven approaches and regional cooperation, particularly in addressing emerging vulnerabilities that could undermine peace and development.

Delegates described the launch as a testament to Zambia's dedication to fostering peace, strengthening democratic and governance institutions, and building a resilient future for its citizens. It also reaffirms COMESA's role as a key regional partner in supporting Member States to address structural vulnerabilities through evidence-based planning, dialogue, and collaborative action.

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(Middle) Secretary General, Ms. Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe with the new Special Representatives from Britain, Germany, Serbia, and Palestine at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka.

COMESA Receives Letters of Credence from Britain, Germany, Serbia and Palestine

COMESA formally received Letters of Credence from four newly appointed Ambassadors to the Republic of Zambia, who have also been designated as Special Representatives to COMESA. The ceremony took place on the 11th of December 2025 at the COMESA Secretariat in Lusaka. This marked an important moment in strengthening diplomatic engagement and cooperation between COMESA and its international partners.

The Letters of Credence were presented by the British High Commissioner Ms. Rebecca Terzeon, the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr Soenke Siemon, the Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia Ms Jasna Zrnovic and the Ambassador of the State of Palestine Mr Eleyan Keswani. The four were officially received by Secretary General (SG) Chileshe Mpundu Kapwepwe.

The event showed the strong and evolving partnerships between COMESA and the four countries, as well as their shared

commitment to advancing regional integration, trade, peace and sustainable development within the COMESA region. It also reaffirmed the importance of diplomatic collaboration in addressing regional and global challenges through multilateral engagement.

Speaking during the ceremony, SG Kapwepwe welcomed the Special Representatives and commended the longstanding cooperation between COMESA and their respective governments. She highlighted areas of collaboration that have contributed to the region's development agenda, including digital transformation, trade facilitation, climate resilience, private sector development and regional peacebuilding initiatives.

Ms. Kapwepwe emphasized that partnerships with international diplomatic missions remain critical in supporting COMESA's strategic objectives, particularly in fostering inclusive economic growth, strengthening institutional capacity, and

enhancing regional stability.

In their remarks, the four Special Representatives reaffirmed their governments' commitment to working closely with COMESA in support of its regional integration programmes. They expressed readiness to deepen collaboration in key priority areas such as regional market integration, productive capacity development, infrastructure connectivity, and inclusive and sustainable development.

The presentation of the Letters of Credence serves as a renewed affirmation of mutual trust and shared values between COMESA and its international partners. It also reflects a collective resolve to strengthen cooperation that promotes economic integration, peace, and prosperity across the COMESA region.



Analysis of October 2025 Inflation in the COMESA Region and Its Economic Implications

By Amb. Dr Mohamed Kadah
Assistant Secretary General Programmes

Overview of Inflation Trends

In October 2025, the COMESA region recorded a year-on-year Harmonized Consumer Price Index (HCPI) inflation rate of 13.3%, unchanged from September 2025 but a significant decrease from 21.3% in October 2024. This indicates a continuing but decelerating inflationary trend across the region. Inflation rates among Member States vary widely, with Burundi experiencing the highest inflation at 29.3%, followed by Malawi (25.3%) and Ethiopia (18.6%), while Seychelles posted the lowest at just 1.0%.

Key sectors showing pronounced inflationary pressures include Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco (+83.5%), Health (+26.8%), and Transport (+18.2%), reflecting both supply and demand-side shocks in these key expenditure components.

Impact on Market Integration and Regional Trade

The persistence of double-digit inflation in many Member States creates multiple challenges for COMESA's agenda of regional economic integration:

- Price Disparities and Trade Frictions: Inflation differentials result in variable costs of goods and services across member countries, complicating price harmonization crucial for the smooth functioning of the common market. Higher inflation in some countries raises the cost of exports, potentially reducing competitiveness in intra-COMESA trade.
- Currency and Exchange Rate Volatility: Inflationary pressures can exacerbate exchange rate volatility, particularly in countries dependent on imports, further

complicating cross-border trade and investment decisions.

- Trade Facilitation Costs: Inflation-driven increases in transportation, energy, and logistics costs (reflected in the +18.2% transport inflation) raise overall trade facilitation costs, undermining the efficiency and attractiveness of the regional market.

Investment Environment Considerations

The inflation scenario has significant implications for investment development:

- Erosion of Real Returns: Higher inflation, especially when not matched by wage growth or productivity gains, diminishes investor returns and increases risks for both foreign and domestic investors.
- Sector-Specific Risks: Inflation in critical sectors such as housing/utilities (+15.8%) and health (+26.8%) adds to operational costs for businesses, potentially dampening investment appetite in infrastructure and social sectors critical for sustainable development.
- Monetary Policy Responses: Central banks in the region may tighten monetary policy to counter inflation, causing higher interest rates and increased cost of capital, which can dissuade new investments.

Forward-Looking Assessment and Outlook

Despite ongoing inflationary challenges, the notable reduction from the high inflation rates of 2023-2024 signals an improving macroeconomic environment. Key strategies to sustain this trajectory

and support COMESA's integration and investment objectives include:

- Enhanced Monetary Coordination: Member States need closer monetary policy alignment to mitigate divergent inflation effects and stabilize the regional economic environment.
- Supply Chain and Infrastructure Investments: Addressing inflation drivers through improved infrastructure, enhanced supply chain logistics, and regional energy projects will help reduce costs and improve price stability.
- Focus on Inflation-Resilient Sectors: Targeted support to sectors with lower inflation volatility and high growth potential, such as technology and telecommunications (13.5% inflation), can attract diversified investment.
- Policy Harmonization and Market Facilitation: Strengthening policy and regulatory harmonization to reduce bottlenecks and costs associated with inflationary pressures will be key to boosting market integration and investor confidence.

Conclusion

The October 2025 inflation data reflect a critical juncture for the COMESA region. While inflation remains a macroeconomic risk, the downturn from peak levels offers an opportunity to consolidate gains toward regional integration and investment development. A coordinated policy approach focusing on stabilization, infrastructure improvement, and sectoral focus will be instrumental in sustaining economic growth and deepening the COMESA market.



COMESA Secretariat Goes on Break

The COMESA Secretariat will go on industrial break from 22 December 2025 and reopen on 12 January 2026. This was announced by the Division of Administration and Human Resources.

Secretary General has approved the three week break and extended sincere gratitude to all staff members for their hard work, commitment and dedication in implementing the 2025 COMESA activities and programmes.

This year has witnessed several successful events, including the COMESA Summit of Heads of State and Government the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Governance, Peace and Security and the Business Forum held in Nairobi, Kenya. The Secretariat also successfully convened the Policy Organs Meetings in Lusaka, Zambia from 2nd to 4th December 2025.

"On behalf of the Secretary General, we are pleased to inform you that the Secretariat will observe the following Industrial Break schedule:-

Last working Date : Friday 19th December 2025

Closing Date : Monday 22nd December 2025

Opening Date : Monday 12th January 2026

...the internal Memo read in part, ".

Calendar of Events

No.	Name of Event	Dates	Location	Organiser
01.	National Workshop on Abuja safety Targets	15 – 19 Dec	Eswatini	Support to Air Transport Sector Development Programme
02.	COMESA Secretariat Closes for Break	19 December 2025		Secretariat
	COMESA Secretariat Opens after Break	12 January 2026		Secretariat



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