

Recent economic and
social conditions in

Southern **Africa**



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

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The hope for the 2019 version of this report is that, should member States pick the policy and administrative “low-hanging fruits”, then the 2018 socioeconomic setbacks would have been reversed, and the dreary outlook for 2019 and 2020 brightened. Regrettably, no advantage was taken of the few opportunities (such as using the slight uptick in commodity prices to build fiscal buffers) that 2019 presented, and the onset of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in early 2020 worsened the situation. COVID-19 has abruptly halted economic activity: trade and tourism have plunged; the envisaged increased manufacturing for faster industrialization is in abeyance; the State-owned enterprises’ governance woes remain unresolved; and the gravely impaired fiscal situations in 2018–2019 have degraded further, due to economic shutdowns and a sharp rise in health spending needed to save lives and preserve livelihoods in other areas. The relaxed monetary policy has so far had a muted economic impact amid lockdowns and ultra-low business confidence, and the external assistance has not matched needs. Progress in social sectors has stalled and some previous gains have unravelled due to, inter alia, closure of places of education and employment, and the instances of gender-based violence and child abuse have soared.

As member States were safely opening up economies in late 2020 and preparing for the post-COVID-19 “new normal”, they were mindful of the struggles ahead in steering economies out of the pandemic-induced economic slump, and have overcome other long-standing structural impediments to development. They have vowed greater collaboration at continental and regional levels to tackle mutual challenges and embrace opportunities to hasten regional integration for development, including faster implementation of protocols and programmes. Furthermore, the leadership has renewed its resolve to prepare countries to deal better with future pandemics and climatic catastrophes; remove obstacles to macroeconomic stability, job creation and economic growth; improve education and health outcomes; and foster greater social inclusion. Recent economic and health setbacks have made these welcome renewed resolutions timely and, more importantly, their speedy and steadfast implementation urgent.

Member States’ representatives and other stakeholders attending the twenty-sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officials and Experts are invited to consider this report and its recommendations, as well as share updated country data on economic and social conditions, to improve future analysis.

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