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# Guidelines for developing African Continental Free Trade Area national strategies







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# 1. Introduction and background

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*The present document is aimed at providing guidelines for the development of national strategies for the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for the State Parties to the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area. These Guidelines were prepared by the Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, and were further enriched by inputs from experts during a validation expert group meeting organized in Libreville in March 2019, with financial support from the European Union.*

The signing of the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area in Kigali on 21 March 2018 is a key milestone for the African behind the border agenda. The Agreement covers trade in goods and services, investment, intellectual property rights and competition policy, moving the scope of AfCFTA beyond the requirements of a traditional free trade area. The Agreement recognizes the

importance of gender equality as one of its general objectives and for the development of international trade and economic cooperation. It is further complemented by other continental initiatives, including the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right to Residence and Right to Establishment, which is intended to ease movement of people across the continent and the Single African Air Transport Market, which will contribute towards improving efficiency in continental air transportation and increasing the continent's global share of the aviation industry.

The African Continental Free Trade Area is expected to be a game changer for Africa and a key engine of economic growth and industrialization for sustainable development, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the General Assembly, and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union. Through elimination of tariffs and removal of non-tariff barriers, the Agreement has

the potential to address the fragmentation of African markets. The integrated markets are expected to create a conducive environment for efficiency gains from economies of scale and scope and increased competitiveness with better access to, and efficient use of resources, including labour, capital and technologies. These outcomes will culminate in greater diversification of African economies with the promotion of regional value chains. The development of such chains, in turn, will contribute towards strengthening the continent's drive to integrate into global value chains, while retaining more value at national and regional levels. The perceived integration holds considerable potential for generally female and youth employment, and the transformation of African economies through inclusive and sustainable trade and development on the continent.

The implementation of the Agreement will certainly involve adjustments in countries to overcome potential challenges and seize the opportunities offered by integrated markets. Given the significant diversity in the economic

regional value chains. Inevitably, in the short to medium term, structural changes through the reallocation of factors of production will entail costs of adjustment. For governments, the costs could be materialized by reduced tariffs revenue. Furthermore, the concerns over potential adverse outcomes stemming from AfCFTA do not only relate to inequalities among countries, but also among social groups within each country. The most notable challenge may be related to gender inequality in the accessibility to and the control of economic resources, which remains pervasive in Africa.

Despite the short-term potential challenges associated with AfCFTA, it is expected that in the long run, gains will outweigh short- to medium-term costs. A main underlying argument is that by stimulating economic growth and diversification, AfCFTA will help generate economic activities for higher value added at domestic and regional levels. Accordingly, for example, a decline in tariff revenue underpinned by the implementation of the Agreement will be partially

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