2026 Africa Sustainable Development Report

Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 for a sustainable future for all

Abridged Version

African Union
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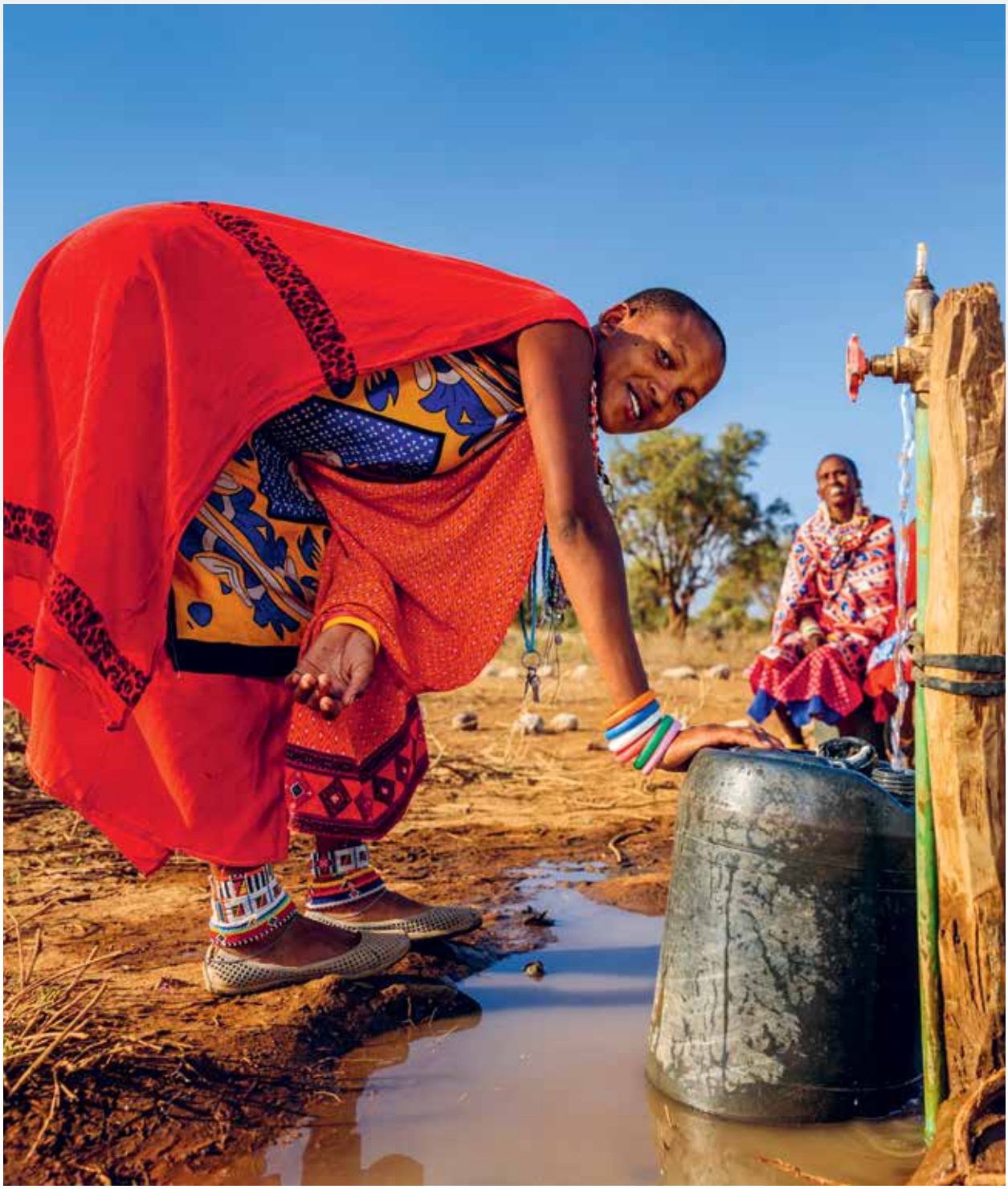

2026
Africa Sustainable Development Report

Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the African Union's Agenda 2063 for a sustainable future for all

Jointly produced by

The African Union, African Development Bank, United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Abridged Version

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Foreword

This 2026 Africa Sustainable Development Report is released as African countries advance through the final phase of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development while continuing implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063. This progress is taking place within a global environment characterized by persistent uncertainty, fragmented economic governance, and mounting climate, fiscal, and demographic pressures - all of which shape the pace and trajectory of development outcomes across the continent. The instability in the Middle East has amplified energy and food price volatility, disrupted trade routes, and heightened global uncertainty, with direct spillover effects on African economies. While recent years have required sustained responses to overlapping shocks, the central challenge now is to move beyond crisis management towards transformative, coordinated, and forward-looking action capable of sustaining development progress over the medium to long term.

Despite continued economic growth in parts of the continent, progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remains uneven. Persistent poverty, inequality and vulnerability reflect deep-seated structural constraints, including low productivity, limited structural transformation, high informality and constrained fiscal space. These challenges are further compounded by demographic pressures, skills mismatches and growing climate risks, which continue to weaken the link between growth and broad-based improvements in well-being. Addressing these constraints requires stronger domestic capacities, improved policy coherence and accelerated implementation across national, regional and continental levels.

The global development landscape is also undergoing significant transitions. The outcomes of the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development reaffirm the urgency of reforming the international development finance architecture to better align resources with development needs. At the same time, Africa's growing role in global economic governance - including through the African Union's membership of the G20 - presents new opportunities to elevate the continent's priorities in debates on debt sustainability, climate finance, multilateral development bank reform and development-oriented trade policies. Realizing these opportunities will depend on sustained coordination among African stakeholders and the effective translation of global commitments into country-level action. At the same time, mobilising private capital at scale will be essential to closing Africa's development financing gap.

Rising trade fragmentation, industrial policy interventions and sustainability-linked trade measures are reshaping global value chains. For Africa, these trends underscore both the risks of marginalization and the importance of deepening regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade

Area. Strengthening productive capacities, regional infrastructure and policy alignment will be critical to enhancing resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly complex global trading environment.

This report underscores that Africa's development challenge is not a lack of frameworks or vision. Multiple global and regional agendas - including those addressing the specific vulnerabilities of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states—offer complementary pathways for advancing sustainable development. When aligned with the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063, these frameworks can reinforce efforts to address structural constraints, enhance resilience and accelerate progress. However, fragmented implementation, limited financing and capacity constraints continue to undermine impact, highlighting the need for more coherent and coordinated approaches.

This analysis focuses on Sustainable Development Goals 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnerships), which are foundational to Africa's structural transformation. Together, they underscore the centrality of expanding access to basic services, strengthening productive capacities, building resilient infrastructure, managing rapid urbanization and mobilizing effective means of implementation.

Looking ahead, emerging dynamics will shape Africa's development trajectory over the coming decade. Digital and technological change offers opportunities to boost productivity and state capacity, while climate change increasingly influences macroeconomic stability, fiscal sustainability and development planning. Pressures on food systems, migration and urbanization further reinforce the need for integrated, cross-sectoral responses.

This report calls for renewed commitment to transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated action. By strengthening policy coherence, mobilizing adequate financing and aligning multiple agendas around shared objectives, Africa and its partners can accelerate progress towards a sustainable future for all, consistent with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

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Guide for readers

What is this report?

The Africa Sustainable Development Report (ASDR) is an annual publication that tracks the implementation status of two complementary global and regional long-term development frameworks: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want.

Who prepared this report?

Since 2017, the ASDR has been produced by the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Union Commission (AUC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The 2026 ASDR is the ninth in the report's series.

The report benefited from consultations conducted during an expert group meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 16 to 17 December 2025 which reviewed, provided feedback and officially approved the draft report. The expert group comprised focal points for the 2030 Agenda/Agenda 2063 from African countries, as well as subject matter experts from United Nations organizations.

How is the focus of the report determined?

The report aligns with the theme and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) centred by the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) every year. In line with the 2026 session of the HLPF, this current report focuses on: Goal 6 – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; Goal 7 – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Goal 9 – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; Goal 11 – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; and Goal 17 – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

This report also monitors the progress of the Agenda 2063 goals. To this end, the goals of Agenda 2063 related to the five mentioned SDGs are also monitored. The report provides analysis for each of the five SDGs, targets and indicators, and the related Agenda 2063 goals, targets and indicators. However, data limitations prevent the analysis of all targets and indicators of the two agendas.

Who should read this report?

This abridged version provides a high-level summary of the findings of the 2026 ASDR. It will be useful for:

1. Stakeholders engaged in policy discussions about the execution of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want. They encompass government officials, intergovernmental group representatives, civil society members, non-governmental organization representatives, media professionals, academics and business representatives.

2. Regional analysts and national specialists seeking to track progress and uncover key concerns that necessitate additional investigation and who devise methodologies to assess a country's progress in attaining the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

Where do the data come from?

The report draws on data from several sources, including the United Nations Global SDG Indicators Database, ECA's African Centre for Statistics (ACS) Database, and the Continental Reports on the Review of Agenda 2063.

For evaluating progress towards the SDGs, indicators are selected based on the availability of two or more data points for more than 40 percent of the countries in the respective country groupings. Data for countries in the African region were drawn from the Global SDG Indicators Database maintained by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), available at https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database.

Lessons based on country experiences are also provided throughout the report, in order to provide insights into how countries are working towards achieving the two agendas. These experiences were gathered from country experts and reports.

How to interpret the results

Readers are advised to consider the following while reviewing the findings of this report.

- The results in this report cannot be compared with previous reports due to the use of a separate set of SDG indicators[1] and updated historical data. Changes are also made annually to incorporate new data as they become available.
- Two different measures are used in the analysis.[2]

  1. The Current Status Index provides a goal-level snapshot of progress and an analysis of where the African region stands on each goal. The analysis is based on the progress made since 2015 in relation to the progress needed between 2015 and 2030.

  2. The Anticipated Progress Index provides a dashboard of expected progress by 2030 at the level of SDG targets and indicators, and an assessment of how likely the region is to achieve individual SDG targets given the pace of progress. It measures the gap between the projected and targeted progress by 2030. In other words, it measures how likely it is that the target will be achieved by 2030.

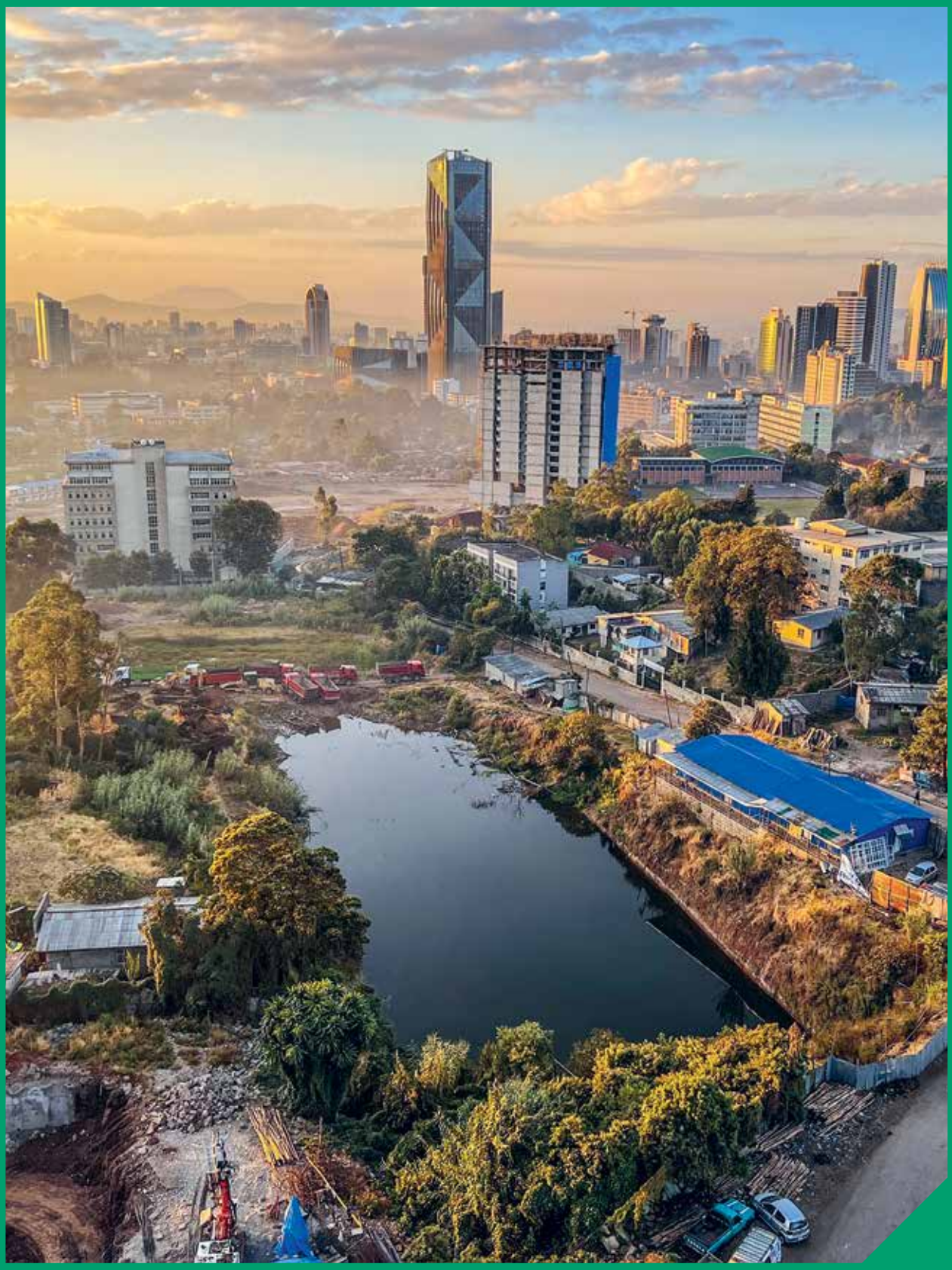
How is the report organized?

This abridged report is organized into seven main chapters. In addition to this guide for readers, it starts with a section titled 'At a Glance: Key Insights', which contains key messages and policy recommendations from the report. It also has an introductory Chapter 1, which provides the socio-economic context for achieving sustainable development in Africa in 2026 and a high-level summary of the goal-level achievement of the five SDGs under consideration at both the continent and regional levels since 2015. The next five Chapters 2–6 provide key messages covering each of the five SDGs and related Agenda 2063 goals. Extensive analysis is provided in the full report.

[1] Each year, the ASDR focuses on five SDGs. Except for SDG 17, which is measured every year, the remaining four change annually in line with the SDGs under review at the HLPF.

[2] Detailed explanations on the methodology are included in the Annex (Chapter 8) of the full report.

At a Glance: Key Insights



The 2026 ASDR reviews Africa's current progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union's Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want, with a specific focus on the five Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under review at the 2026 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation); SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy); SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure); SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities); and SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals). This assessment evaluates progress in relation to both agendas' targets and indicators, while acknowledging the persistent structural and data challenges that constrain a full picture of performance.

Africa's development gains are real, but current trajectories fall short of the 2030 Agenda ambition

Africa continues to make measurable gains across many development indicators, and progress is recorded in 12 of the 17 SDGs, mirroring the findings of previous assessments. However, the overall pace remains insufficient for achieving the SDGs by 2030 under current trajectories. Structural constraints – including financing shortfalls, limited institutional capacities, and frequent climate and economic shocks – have slowed progress and in some areas reversed gains.

Africa's uneven development landscape is underscored by significant disparities among subregions and between urban and rural populations. The continent's youthful demographic profile presents both an opportunity and an urgent imperative: leveraging this demographic dividend hinges on strengthened education systems, economic inclusion and improving access to modern technologies.

What the Evidence Tells Us

1. Ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Progress in access to basic drinking water masks slow gains in safely managed services

Africa has made measured but insufficient progress in expanding access to water and sanitation services since 2015. Access to basic drinking water services reached an estimated 81 percent of the population by 2023, yet access to safely managed drinking water services increased only marginally – from around 33 percent in 2015 to approximately 36 percent in 2023, well below the global average of over 70 percent. Subregional disparities remain stark, with safely managed water coverage exceeding 70 percent in North Africa, but falling below 20 percent in parts of East and Central Africa.

Sanitation remains a critical bottleneck

Progress in sanitation continues to lag behind significantly. Access to safely managed sanitation services rose from about 24 percent in 2015 to around 30 percent in 2023, compared with a global average of almost 60 percent. As a result, an estimated 650 million people in Africa remain without basic sanitation services, and open defecation persists in several countries. Access to basic hand-washing facilities with soap and water stood at approximately 35 percent in 2023, less than half the global average.

Water quality, wastewater treatment and efficiency are lagging behind

Water quality and wastewater treatment remain major challenges. Only about one-third of domestic wastewater is safely treated across the continent, with declining trends observed in some subregions. Water-use efficiency improved modestly, increasing from about US$ 8.8 per cubic metre in 2015 to US$ 9.8 in 2022, still far below the global average of over US$ 21.5 per cubic metre. While many countries report high levels of integrated water resource management implementation, financing constraints remain binding: official development assistance for water and sanitation declined after peaking in 2019, falling to around US$ 3.3 billion in 2023. Under current trajectories, all SDG 6 targets require significant acceleration.

2. Ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Africa continues to face the world's largest electricity access gap

Africa continues to experience the largest energy access gap worldwide. Access to electricity increased from approximately 46 percent in 2015 to about 53 percent in 2023, yet nearly 600 million people remain without electricity. Urban electrification rates exceed 80 percent, while rural access remains below 40 percent in many countries, emphasizing persistent spatial and income inequalities.

Clean cooking access remains critically low

Progress in clean cooking remains critically slow. Only about 34 percent of Africans had access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking in 2023, leaving more than 970 million people reliant on traditional biomass and other polluting fuels. Household air pollution linked to these fuels contributes to an estimated 400,000 premature deaths annually, with disproportionate impacts on women and children.

Renewable energy deployment is not keeping pace with demand

Despite vast renewable energy potential, Africa's renewable energy capacity per capita remains low – around 40 watts per person compared with a global average of almost 480 watts. Recent assessments indicate a reverse trend in the renewable energy share of total final energy consumption, reflecting investment gaps, grid integration challenges and affordability constraints.

Investment shortfalls are the central constraint

Annual investment in energy access is estimated at US$ 4 billion, far below the amount required to achieve SDG 7 by 2030. Without a rapid scale-up of financing and regional energy integration, energy poverty risks becoming further entrenched.

3. Building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fostering innovation

Digital connectivity is advancing faster than other SDG 9 dimensions

Progress under SDG 9 remains uneven and insufficient to support Africa's structural transformation. One notable area of advancement is digital connectivity: access to information and communications technology is assessed to be on track with 92.8 percent of the African population covered by at least one 2G network by 2023. This expansion has supported digital services and new economic opportunities.

Infrastructure and industrialization gaps persist

Limited transport, energy and industrial infrastructure continue to constrain productivity, trade competitiveness and regional integration. The manufacturing value added accounts for less than 11 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in Africa, compared with over 16 percent globally, reflecting limited industrial diversification. Infrastructure gaps persist, particularly in transport, energy and logistics, increasing the cost of trade and production. Access to finance remains a major constraint: fewer than 20 percent of small-scale industries in many countries report access to formal credit.

Innovation systems remain underdeveloped and research is underfinanced

Investment in research and development remains below 1 percent of GDP in most African countries, compared to a global average of almost 2.0 percent, limiting innovation and technological upgrading. Several SDG 9 targets show reverse trends, emphasizing the need for scaled-up investment in resilient infrastructure, industrial policy and innovation systems.

4. Making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Rapid urbanization is outpacing planning and service delivery

Africa is urbanizing faster than any other region. Approximately 45 percent of the population lives in urban areas, a figure projected to reach nearly 60 percent by 2050. While urbanization offers opportunities for economic growth, it is also intensifying pressure on housing, transport, services and the environment.

Environmental conditions in cities are deteriorating

An estimated 49.1 percent of urban residents live in slums or informal settlements in 2022, often lacking secure tenure and basic services. Access to safe and affordable public transport remains limited, in particular for low-income groups. Air pollution levels in many African cities exceed World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, contributing to rising health burdens.

Urban vulnerability to climate and disaster risks is increasing

Reverse trends are evident in urban environmental conditions and disaster impacts. Climate-related hazards – including floods and heatwaves – are increasing in frequency and intensity, disproportionately affecting informal settlements. Data gaps remain significant for several SDG 11 targets, constraining effective planning and monitoring. Without integrated urban planning and climate-resilient infrastructure, African cities risk becoming centres of vulnerability rather than engines of sustainable development.

Data and governance gaps limit effective urban management

Insufficient data and weak coordination undermine integrated urban planning, highlighting the need for climate-resilient, inclusive and data-driven urban development strategies.

5. Strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development

Statistical capacity has improved, strengthening SDG monitoring

Progress on SDG 17 reveals mixed outcomes. Improvements in statistical capacity are notable with strengthened data systems. In 2024, 41 African countries reported having national statistical legislation in compliance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics while 39 African countries reported implementing a national statistical plan. This has improved SDG monitoring and reporting.

Domestic resource mobilization remains insufficient against the backdrop of rising debt and external financing pressures

Challenges persist across many targets. Domestic revenue mobilization remains constrained, with tax-to-GDP ratios averaging around 16 percent, compared to over 34 percent in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Public debt levels have increased markedly, with more than 20 African countries assessed as being at high risk of or already in debt distress, limiting fiscal space for development investment.

Global partnerships remain misaligned with Africa's needs

Official development assistance remains important but insufficient and volatile. Net official development assistance could fall by 9–17%, reaching between US$ 170 billion and US$ 186 billion depending on the scenario, implying a potential reduction of up to US$ 35 billion from 2024 levels. At the same time, foreign direct investment flows to Africa declined in recent years. Trade integration remains limited, with Africa accounting for less than 3 percent of global trade, and access to advanced technologies remains uneven. Achieving SDG 17 will require stronger global partnerships, enhanced policy coherence, and a more supportive international financial and trading system.

Insights Shaping Africa's Sustainable Future

Transformational, integrated action is essential to close Africa's SDG implementation gap

The 2026 ASDR assessment confirms that incremental and fragmented approaches will be insufficient to deliver the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 under current trajectories. Accelerating progress requires integrated policy frameworks that align national development plans with continental and global agendas, harness synergies across the SDGs, and strengthen system-wide resilience to climate, economic and geopolitical shocks.

Investment in advancing policy and plan implementation is crucial

Strengthening Africa's implementation capacity at the regional, national, sub-national and sectoral levels remains imperative for translating commitments into measurable results. This requires sustained political commitment, clear lines of accountability, and rigorous monitoring, evaluation and learning systems to translate policy intent into measurable results, while investing in core project preparation, procurement, management, data and delivery capabilities across all levels. Furthermore, investment in improving all dimensions of implementation capacities – technical, institutional and financial – will be crucial for accelerating progress on the SDGs and Agenda 2063.

Closing the financing gap is a prerequisite for accelerating progress

Echoing the findings of the 2025 ASDR, Africa faces substantial annual investment shortfalls – estimated to be in the hundreds of billions of US dollars – that continue to constrain SDG implementation. Bridging this gap will require strengthened domestic resource mobilization through tax reforms, improved public investment management and concerted action to curb illicit financial flows, alongside better alignment of public expenditure with development priorities.

Scaled-up and better-aligned international finance is critical to sustaining development gains

Expanded access to concessional finance, climate finance and long-term development capital, combined with effective debt sustainability and debt relief measures, is essential to restore fiscal space and support investment in water, energy, infrastructure and urban systems. Global financial architecture must be more responsive to Africa's development and climate vulnerabilities.

Regional cooperation offers a powerful accelerator for structural transformation

Deepening regional integration and South–South cooperation can unlock economies of scale in energy markets, infrastructure development, trade and industrialization. Strengthening cross-border infrastructure, regional value chains and coordinated policy frameworks will be critical for enhancing competitiveness, resilience and inclusive growth.

Investing in data, institutions and inclusive governance underpins effective implementation

Strengthened national statistical systems, improved data disaggregation and expanded use of innovative data sources are essential for evidence-based policymaking and accountability. At the same time, capable institutions and inclusive governance mechanisms – in particular those engaging women, youth and marginalized communities – are central to ensuring that accelerated progress translates into equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

Chapter 1:
From Data to Insights

The year 2026 marks a critical turning point for sustainable development. As the world enters the second half of the 2030 Agenda and the acceleration phase of African Union's Agenda 2063, the global environment is increasingly complex and uncertain. Rising geopolitical tensions, shifting trade dynamics, climate shocks, tightening financial conditions and rapid technological change are reshaping development pathways, while testing the effectiveness of multilateral cooperation.

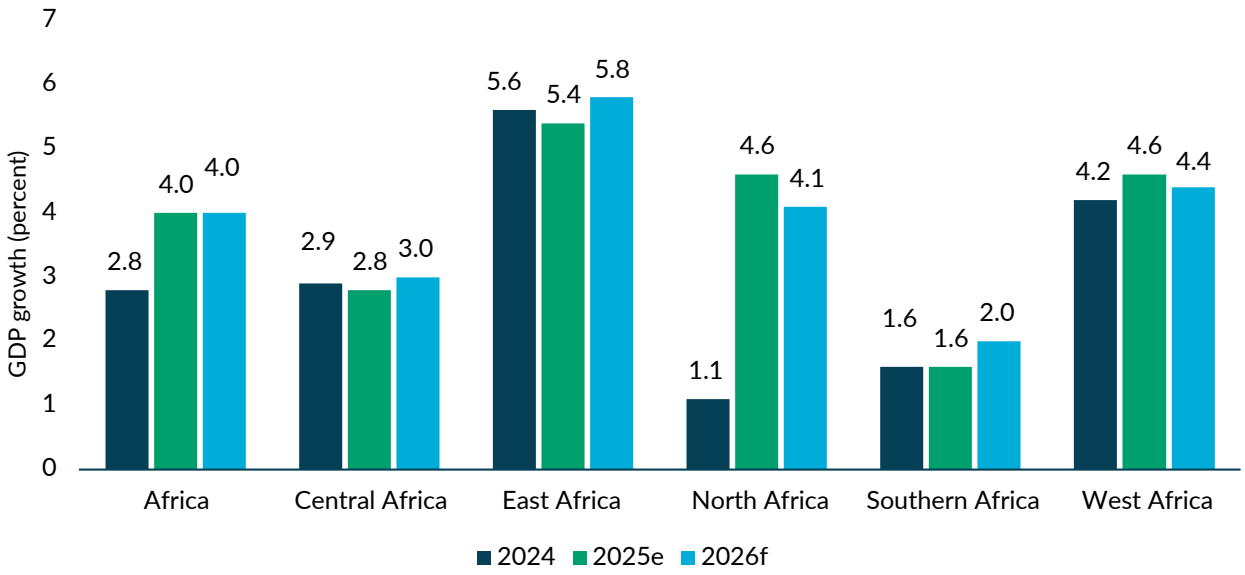
For Africa, decisions taken in 2026—particularly on financing, trade, climate action, technology and social investment—will be decisive in determining whether the continent can accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and strengthen its position in a rapidly evolving global order.

Africa's youthful population represents both a transformative opportunity and a pressing policy imperative.

Recent geopolitical developments, including the escalation of conflict in the Middle East, have created a significant macroeconomic shock for African economies. Rising oil prices, disrupted shipping routes and tighter global financial conditions are increasing the cost of fuel, food and borrowing. These shocks are compounding existing vulnerabilities linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, declining official development assistance and rising protectionism. The impacts are being transmitted through higher energy costs, increased shipping delays, reduced external financing flows and pressures on tourism-dependent economies. These developments highlight Africa's structural vulnerabilities, including dependence on imported energy and limited economic resilience, and pose risks to SDG progress.

Despite these challenges, Africa's economic growth remains relatively strong. Growth is estimated to be 4.0 percent for 2025 and 2026, outperforming several other regions. This resilience is supported by public investments and strategic infrastructure development in sectors such as transport, technology and industrial zones. However, this growth has not been translated sufficiently into improved living standards. GDP per capita growth remains modest and uneven across subregions, and inequality persists at high levels. A small share of the population continues to capture a disproportionate share of income, while poverty remains widespread, particularly in least developed countries.

Figure 1.1: GDP growth in Africa by subregion (%), 2024–2026



Source: ECA calculations using IMF World Economic Outlook Databases .
Notes: e = estimates and f = forecasts

A key structural challenge is the slow pace of economic transformation. Many African economies remain reliant on low-productivity sectors, with limited industrialization and a "missing middle" of firms capable of scaling up. This has resulted in high levels of informality and insufficient job creation, particularly for youth. At the same time, human capital constraints remain significant. With a Human Capital Index of 0.40, Africa is operating far below its potential, reflecting gaps in education, health and skills. These gaps limit productivity, constrain fiscal space and reduce the continent's ability to benefit from emerging opportunities in the global economy.

Labour market pressures are further intensified by demographic dynamics, migration and displacement. Millions of people remain internally displaced due to conflict, climate shocks and insecurity, while migration continues to play an important economic role through remittances and labour mobility. However, uneven migration policies, skills losses and pressures on urban systems present additional challenges. Addressing these issues requires policies that facilitate mobility, strengthen skills development and harness migration as a driver of development.

Africa's development trajectory is increasingly shaped by intersecting climate, fiscal, demographic and geopolitical uncertainties.

Climate change remains a major and growing constraint. Increasing temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events are affecting agriculture, infrastructure, labour productivity and livelihoods. Climate impacts are closely linked to food systems, where Africa faces a paradox: despite abundant natural resources, the continent remains highly dependent on food imports. Strengthening resilience, improving agricultural productivity and linking food systems to climate action are therefore critical priorities.

At the same time, Africa has significant opportunities. The continent holds substantial reserves of critical minerals essential for the global energy transition. Leveraging these resources through value addition, industrialization and regional value chains could position Africa as a key player in green industrial development. Similarly, rapid advances in frontier technologies—including artificial intelligence, digital finance and biotechnology—offer opportunities to accelerate structural transformation, improve service delivery and enhance productivity.

Global processes and agreements provide important frameworks to support Africa's development. Recent commitments on financing for development, climate action and social development offer pathways to address key challenges such as debt sustainability, climate finance and inclusive growth. Africa's increased representation in global governance, including the African Union's membership in the G20, also creates new opportunities to influence global decision-making. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks will depend on implementation and on Africa's ability to articulate and advance coordinated priorities.

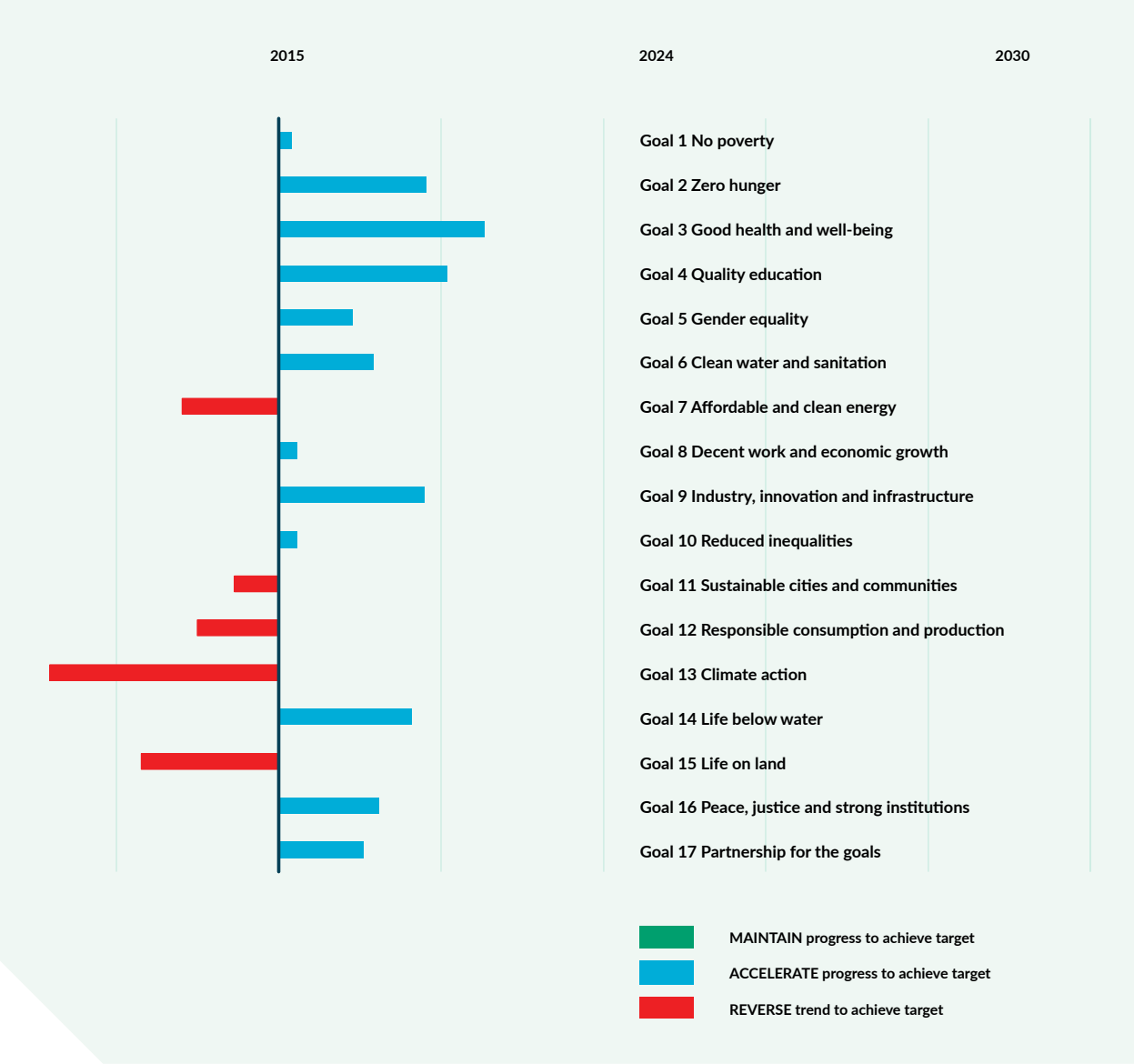
Growth remains robust but insufficiently inclusive to significantly reduce poverty and inequality.

A central challenge is not the lack of frameworks, but fragmentation in implementation. Multiple global and regional agendas—including those for least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States—address different dimensions of vulnerability. When effectively aligned, these frameworks can reinforce progress on the SDGs and Agenda 2063. However, weak coordination, limited financing and capacity constraints risk diluting their impact.

Looking ahead, Africa must shift from reactive responses to shocks towards building resilient and forward-looking systems. This requires stronger coordination across national and regional levels, improved domestic resource mobilization, strategic investments in energy, infrastructure and human capital, and greater use of innovation and technology. At the same time, immediate actions—such as targeted social protection and prudent fiscal management—are needed to mitigate the effects of current global shocks.

Ultimately, accelerating progress on the SDGs and Agenda 2063 will depend on Africa's ability to translate global commitments into concrete, coordinated action. Addressing structural constraints, strengthening institutions and leveraging emerging opportunities will be critical to achieving inclusive, sustainable and resilient development in the years ahead.

Figure 1.2: Overview of SDG progress in Africa, 2025



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Fragmentation in global trade and finance is reshaping Africa's integration into global value chains.

Chapter 2:

Advancing Clean Water and Sanitation for All

Table 2.1: SDG 6 and associated Agenda 2063 Strategic Objectives

Sustainable Development Goals	Agenda 2063 Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP) Strategic Objectives
SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all	**Strategic Objective 1.1:** Enhance inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic growth

Overall progress

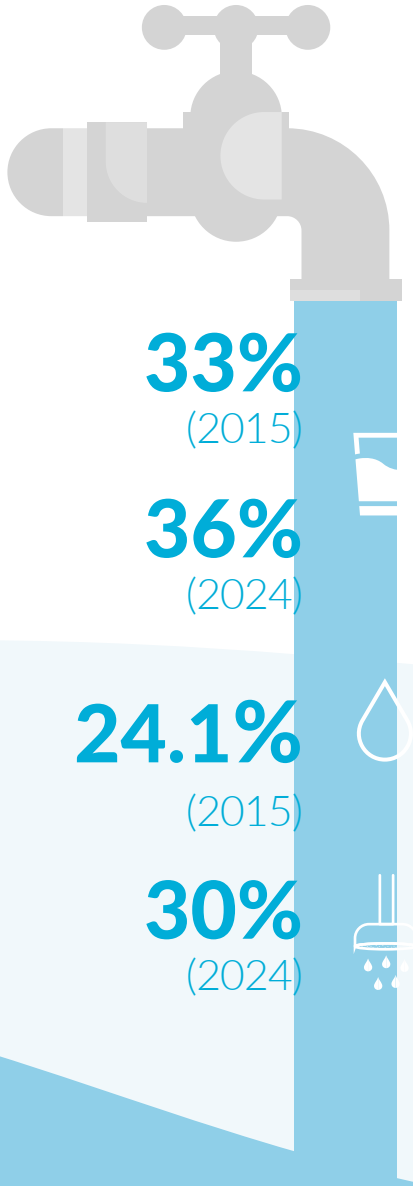
Africa has made progress towards SDG 6, but advances remain uneven and fragile across countries and population groups.

Access to basic water services is improving, but safely managed water remains out of reach for most Africans.

Key Messages

- Access to drinking water in Africa has expanded, with basic access reaching 81 percent in 2023. However, safely managed coverage varies widely, ranging from about 44.8 percent in urban areas to 20 percent in rural access, with rural and peri-urban populations remaining underserved.
- Sanitation progress remains well below global benchmarks, with only marginal gains in safely managed coverage since 2015, highlighting the need for scaled-up investment, stronger policy coordination and community-led approaches.
- Water-use efficiency in Africa has improved modestly, but regional disparities persist, with North Africa facing extreme water scarcity and low efficiency compared to other subregions.
- Water quality and wastewater treatment are deteriorating in many parts of the continent. Declining treatment rates, combined with major data gaps, pose growing risks to ecosystems, public health and economic activity.
- Strong policy foundations for integrated water resources management and participation are in place in North and South Africa, while the other subregions are facing challenges in implementing community participation due to institutional, financial and cultural barriers.
- Financing shortfalls threaten to slow or reverse recent gains. Official development assistance (ODA) for water and sanitation has declined since 2019, and remains unevenly distributed and weakly aligned with national priorities, particularly in Africa.

Limited progress in access to safely managed water and sanitation services



33% (2015)

36% (2024)

24.1% (2015)

30% (2024)

Key Insights

Safely managed drinking water coverage increased only marginally

This means over **60%** of the population in Africa still lacks safely managed drinking water

Progress in sanitation remains the slowest globally

In comparison, the global sanitation average reached **58%** in 2024

Urban–Rural Divide

Urban areas consistently show higher coverage levels

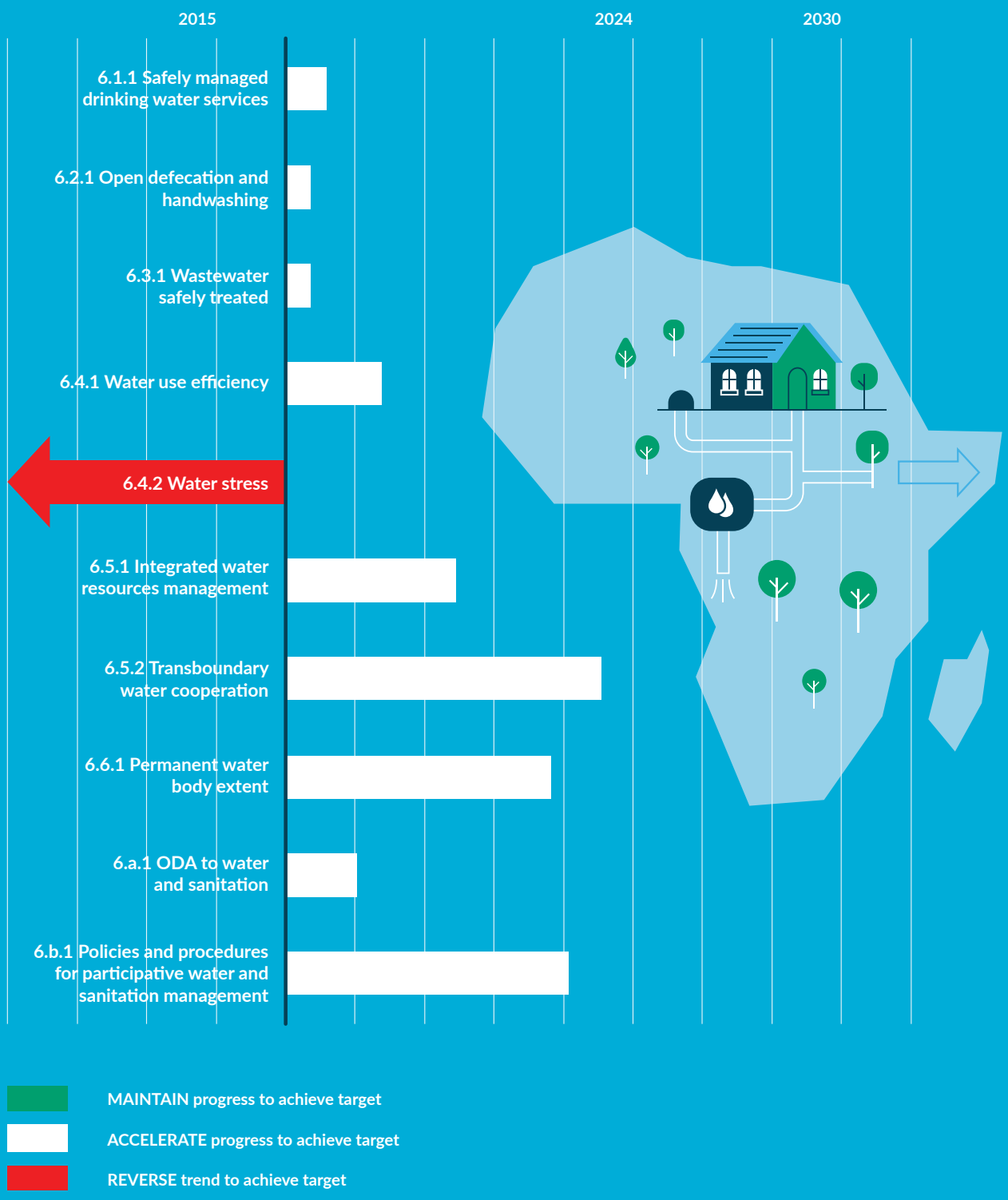
The disparity highlights structural access and infrastructure challenges

Approximately 650 million people in Africa lack access to basic sanitation facilities

Rural areas remain significantly underserved, widening inequality gaps

Despite incremental improvements, access to safely managed water and sanitation remains critically low across Africa, with the majority of the population still underserved.

Figure 2.1:
Africa Dashboard: *Progress of SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) by indicators for Africa*



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Box 2.1: Water and sanitation under Agenda 2063 – achievements and remaining challenges

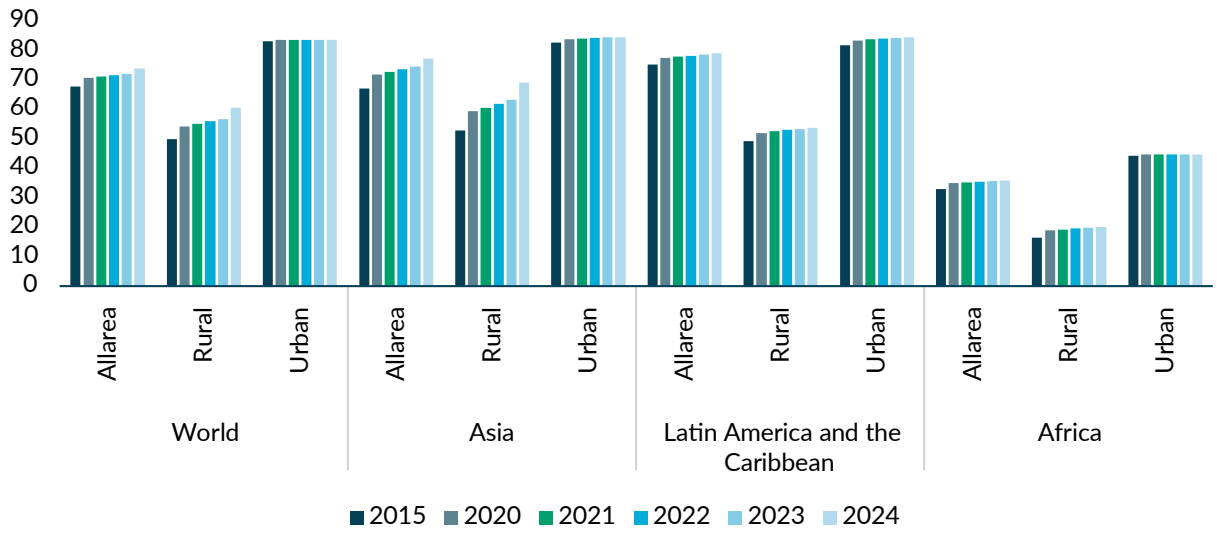
The African Union's Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want constitutes the continent's long-term blueprint for inclusive growth and structural transformation. Within this framework, water and sanitation have been elevated as strategic priorities, reflected in the designation of 2026 as the year of "assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems." This focus emphasizes their catalytic role in advancing economic development, climate resilience, public health, food security and regional stability. Under the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP, 2013–2023), notable progress has been achieved. Access to safe drinking water increased from 56 percent in 2013 to 81 percent in 2023, while sanitation coverage rose from 29 percent to 59 percent, contributing to improved health outcomes (AU, 2024b). However, these gains remain below the established targets, including 95 percent access to safe water, indicating persistent service gaps.

Structural constraints continue to hinder progress. Rapid population growth and urbanization have intensified pressure on already limited infrastructure, leaving millions without adequate water and sanitation services. Rural areas, particularly in the Sahel region, still face limited access to improved water sources, heightening health risks (Fotio & Nguea, 2022). In urban centres, the expansion of informal settlements complicates service delivery and sanitation planning (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2020). Climate change further exacerbates these challenges through increased droughts, floods and hydrological variability (AU, 2024a). At the policy level, the FTYIP has strengthened alignment between national, continental and global frameworks, promoting the adoption of integrated water resources management (IWRM) and participatory governance approaches (UNECA, 2019).

Complementary initiatives, including the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI), climate-resilient water investment guidelines and disaster risk reduction frameworks, demonstrate diverse and context-specific responses. Decentralized solutions, such as solar-powered boreholes, have also improved rural access to safe water (AU, 2024b). Despite these efforts, key challenges remain, including limited financing, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, insufficient institutional coordination and persistent data gaps. Service quality is uneven, with frequent interruptions and inadequate maintenance. The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP, 2024–2033) seeks to accelerate progress through innovation, digital tools and enhanced accountability. Initiatives such as the Africa Water Investment Programme (AU-AIP) and the "Water Investment Summit 2025" have mobilized preliminary commitments estimated at US$ 10–12 billion annually, while platforms like the "SDG-STYIP Impact Labs" promote scalable innovations, including real-time water quality monitoring and results-based financing, to support adaptive policymaking and improved outcomes.

While countries have reported an increase in the access to safe drinking water, there is slow progress in the proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services, with overall coverage rising from 33 percent in 2015 to approximately 36 percent by 2024. This persistent gap shows that more than 6 in 10 Africans are not using safely managed drinking water.

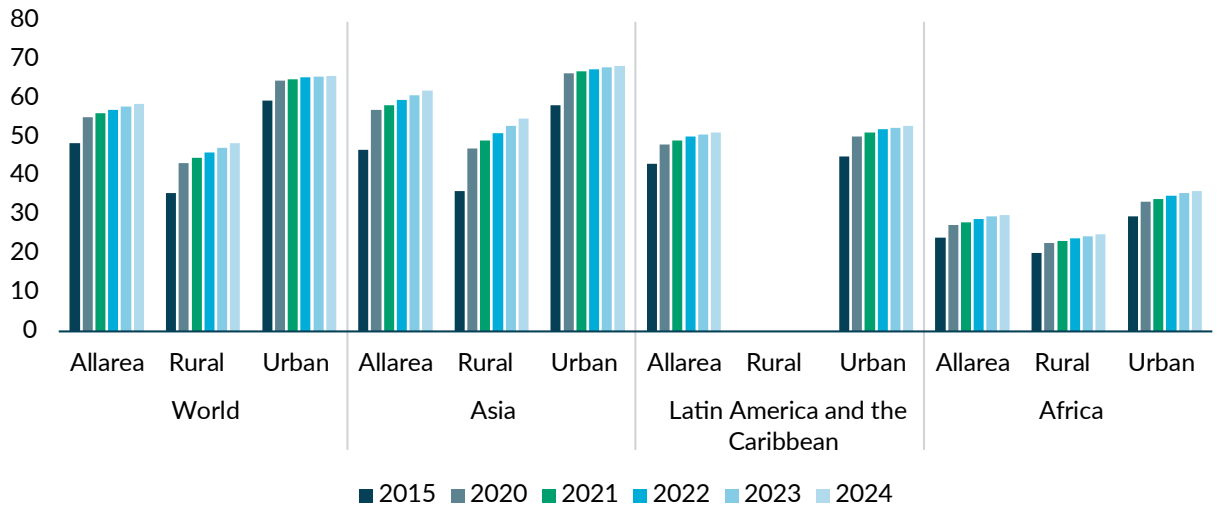
Figure 2.2: Proportion of population using safely managed drinking water services (%), 2015–2024



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Africa faces a profound and multidimensional crisis in achieving Target 6.2 of the SDGs. The continent's progress on safely managed sanitation (SDG 6.2.1a) is the slowest in the world, with coverage inching forwards from 24.1 percent to just 30 percent between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 2.3). This stands in stark contrast to the global average of 58 percent in 2024, leaving an estimated 650 million Africans without access to a basic sanitary facility.

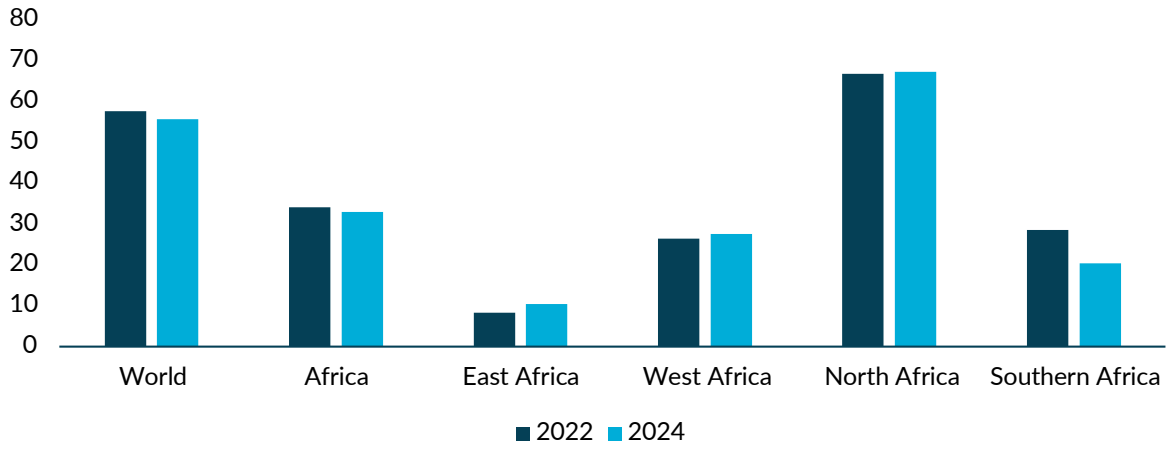
Figure 2.3: Proportion of population using safely managed sanitation services, by urban/rural setting (%), 2015–2024



Source: UN DESA (2026)

The proportion of safely treated domestic wastewater across the continent fell from 34.2 percent in 2022 to 33.01 percent in 2024, a decline that is in contrast to the global average of 55.8 percent in 2024.

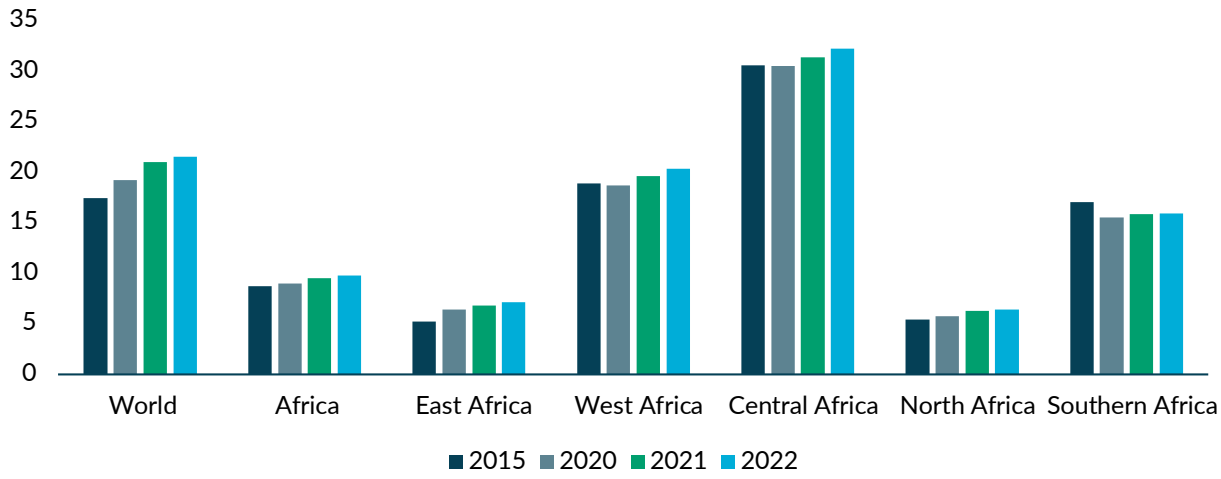
Figure 2.4: Proportion of safely treated domestic wastewater flows (%), 2022–2024



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Water-use efficiency (WUE), which measures how much economic value is created for every unit of water used, essentially showing how well countries and sectors turn water into productive benefits like jobs, production and services, provides insights into how effectively water resources support economic activity. Higher efficiency levels show greater benefits while using less water. Africa's WUE showed modest progress, increasing from US$ 8.75 per cubic metre (m^3) in 2015 to US$ 9.76/m^3 in 2022, as shown in Figure 2.6. However, this level remains significantly below the global average, which rose from US$ 17.48/m^3 to US$ 21.52/m^3 over the same period.

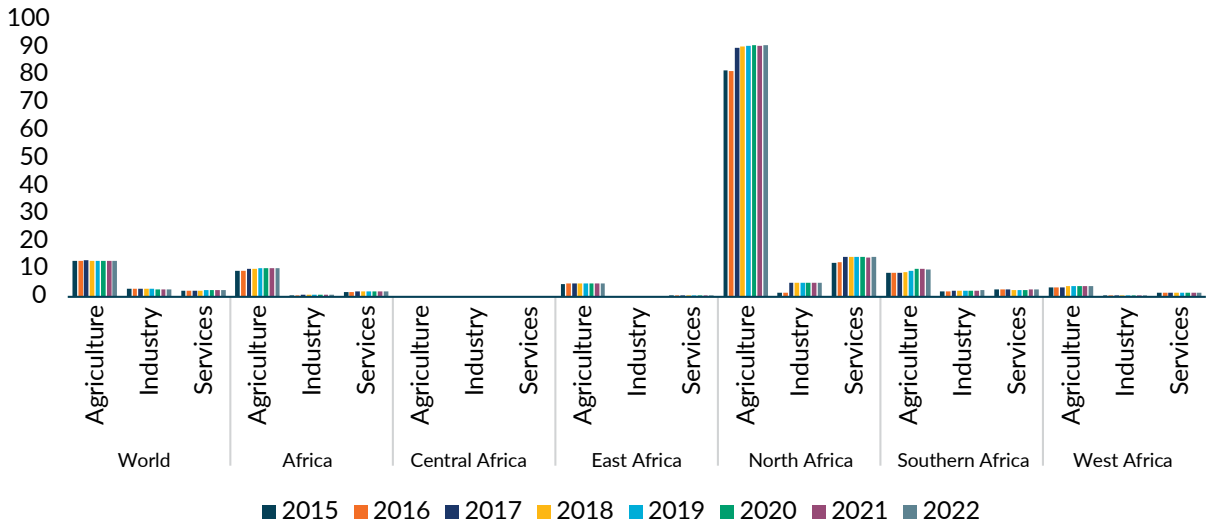
Figure 2.5: Water-use efficiency (US$/m3), 2015–2022



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Water stress—where demand exceeds supply or water quality limits use—varies significantly across Africa. While the continent's overall stress levels remain below global averages, there are sharp regional disparities. Agriculture is the largest consumer of water across Africa, and rising industrial demand—particularly in North Africa—is adding further strain. Addressing water stress will require improved water-use efficiency, stronger resource management, and coordinated national strategies, as demonstrated by emerging approaches in countries such as Morocco.

Figure 2.6: Level of water stress – freshwater withdrawal as a proportion of available freshwater resources (%), 2015–2022



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Box 2.2: Morocco's national programme to address structural water scarcity

As part of its efforts to confront increasingly frequent and intense droughts, as well as mounting demographic and economic pressures, Morocco has developed a comprehensive and evolving National Water Strategy to address its climate vulnerability as a semi-arid country. The strategy comprises four transformative pillars.

Mobilizing surface water resources through dam construction: A significant milestone in this effort is the construction of a vast network, including over 140 large dams with a storage capacity of over 20 billion m³ to regulate irregular flows, store water during wet periods and protect the population from flooding.

Leveraging non-conventional resources to address the scarcity of conventional water: Morocco has launched innovative solutions, such as seawater desalination and the Treated Wastewater Reuse (TWWR) project. These efforts aim to increase national desalination capacity to 1.7 billion m³ annually and reuse 400 million m³ of water per year by 2030.

Optimizing water uses to combat waste: Morocco has focused on water conservation in agriculture to convert 550,000 hectares to localized irrigation with the expansion of drip irrigation systems. Other highlights of this pillar include reducing losses in distribution networks and raising public awareness.

Promoting presentation and governance: The Moroccan government has launched programmes to combat groundwater and river pollution by strengthening governance through River Basin Agencies (RBAs) and introducing a participatory approach by involving users in management, in particular through Agricultural Water User Associations (AWUAs).

Despite the significant progress achieved by Morocco in the implementation of the strategy, challenges remain with increased water stress, overloaded agricultural demand, increasing energy cost of desalination and rainfall deficit.

Source: Government of Morocco (2025), Case study provided for the 2026 ASDR input

Charting the Way Forward: Sustainable Management of Clean Water and Sanitation for All

Access to clean water and adequate sanitation remains a fundamental prerequisite for health, dignity and sustainable development. In Africa, ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all stands at the intersection of human well-being, environmental stewardship and economic transformation. Key facilitators should include the following.

- **Accelerate integrated water security action:** Advance coordinated implementation across all pillars of the SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework by optimizing financing, strengthening data systems and reinforcing integrated water resources management, to deliver resilient and inclusive water and sanitation for all.
- **Enhance sanitation systems and community engagement:** Strengthen investment in sanitation infrastructure, improve policy coordination and promote community-led hygiene initiatives, to accelerate universal access to safely managed sanitation services.
- **Strengthen hand-washing infrastructure and monitoring:** Invest in basic hand-washing facilities with soap and water, and establish robust, continuous data systems to track access, guide resource allocation and close service gaps in both urban and rural areas.
- **Advance community-based water management:** Enhance integrated water resources management by promoting active community participation and providing targeted support in regions with heightened vulnerabilities, to ensure locally adapted and sustainable water and sanitation solutions.
- **Scale up financing and ensure sustainability:** (1) Mobilize domestic and innovative financing beyond ODA to fund water and sanitation infrastructure. (2) Design interventions that remain functional after external funding or donor support ends.
- **Invest in water and sanitation infrastructure:**

  (1) Expand safe drinking water, sanitation and wastewater systems, including for schools and health facilities. (2) Engage private sector actors to complement public investments.
- **Enhance integrated water resources management and climate resilience:** (1) Promote efficient water use across agriculture, energy, industry and other sectors. (2) Protect and sustainably manage groundwater and water ecosystems, linking to blue economy and environmental goals.
- **Promote equity in water management:** Support mechanisms like payment for ecosystem services and livelihood-linked water conservation initiatives to ensure inclusive access, in particular for marginalized and rural communities.
- **Align policies across SDGs and regional frameworks:** (1) Integrate SDG 6 with SDG 5 (gender) and other sectoral goals (energy, industry, food security). (2) Translate the African Water Vision 2063 and national water policies into actionable plans aligned with regional economic communities (RECs) and global frameworks like the UN Water Convention.

Chapter 3:

Energizing Growth Through Clean Solutions

Table 3.1: SDG 7 and associated Agenda 2063 Strategic Objectives

Sustainable Development Goals	Agenda 2063 STYIP Strategic Objectives
SDG 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all	**Strategic Objective 1.1:** Enhance inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic growth
	Strategic Objective 7.1: Strengthen Africa's position and competitiveness in global affairs

Overall progress

Progress towards SDG 7 remains uneven and insufficient, marked by modest gains in electricity access but persistent and deep-rooted energy poverty—particularly in clean cooking and rural electrification. Despite significant renewable potential, structural constraints, investment shortfalls and recent reversals in key indicators underscore the urgency of accelerated and coordinated action.

Key Messages

- As at 2025, SDG 7 is one of the few SDGs experiencing a regressive trend. Despite the achievements made by African actors, the continent could further benefit from climate finance, cross-border power initiatives and an inclusive energy transition.
- Electricity access has improved steadily, reaching 53 percent in 2023. However, Africa still accounts for nearly 85 percent of the global population without electricity, mostly in rural areas, highlighting persistent disparities between rural and urban populations.
- Renewable energy deployment is expanding, as continental renewable capacity continues to grow, yet per capita renewable generation stands at about 40 watts, compared to the global average of 478 watts, reflecting infrastructure constraints and investment gaps.
- Progress in solar mini-grids and off-grid systems by various countries showcases the potential of targeted policies, private sector engagement and multilevel governance.
- Access to clean cooking methods remains critically low, despite growing recognition of their significance. Only about 33.9 percent of Africans had access to clean cooking technologies and modern cooking fuels in 2023, leaving over 970 million people reliant on traditional biomass.
- Energy access gaps continue to constrain social services and productive sectors. A limited and unreliable energy supply hampers healthcare, education, agriculture and small-scale enterprises, slowing human capital development and structural transformation.
- Investment in energy infrastructure and systems is increasing but remains well below requirements. Annual investment in energy access falls far short of the required amount through 2030, limiting grid expansion, system reliability and the scaling up of decentralized solutions.

Energy access is improving, but Africa remains significantly behind

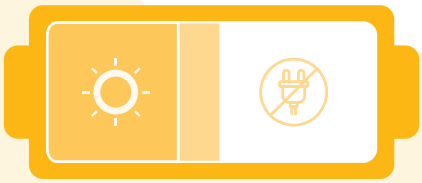
Key Insights

87% (2015) ↑ **92%** (2023)

Global electricity access increased

46% (2015) ↑ **53%** (2023)

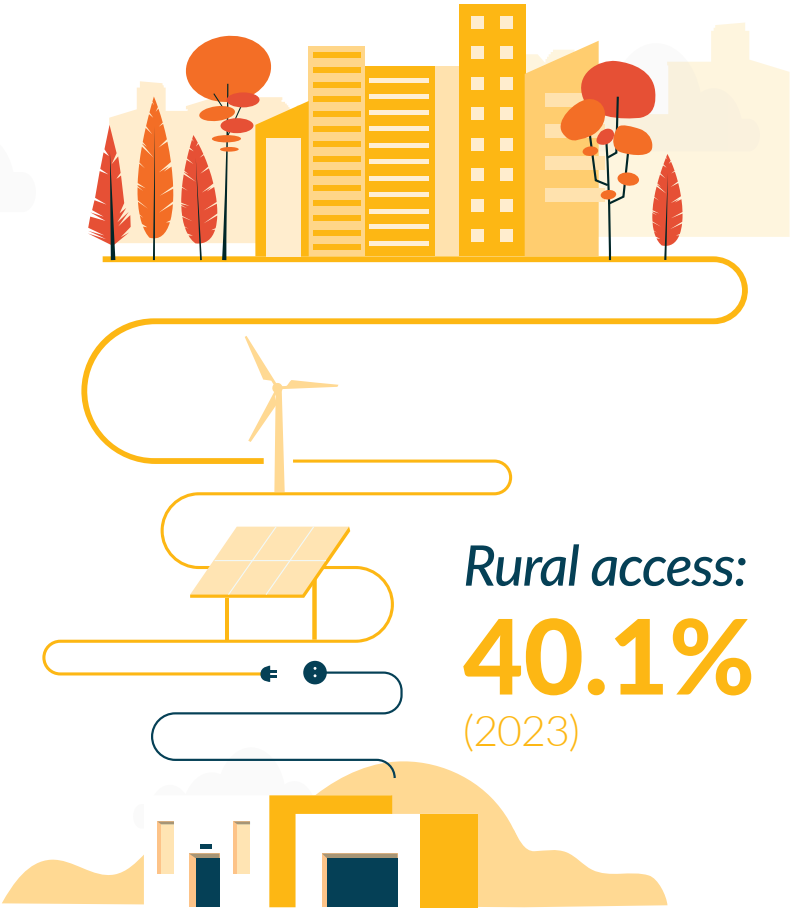
Africa saw only modest progress over the same period



Nearly half of Africa's population still lacks access to electricity

Rural–Urban Divide

Large disparities highlight structural barriers in extending grid infrastructure



Urban access:

85.6%

(2023)

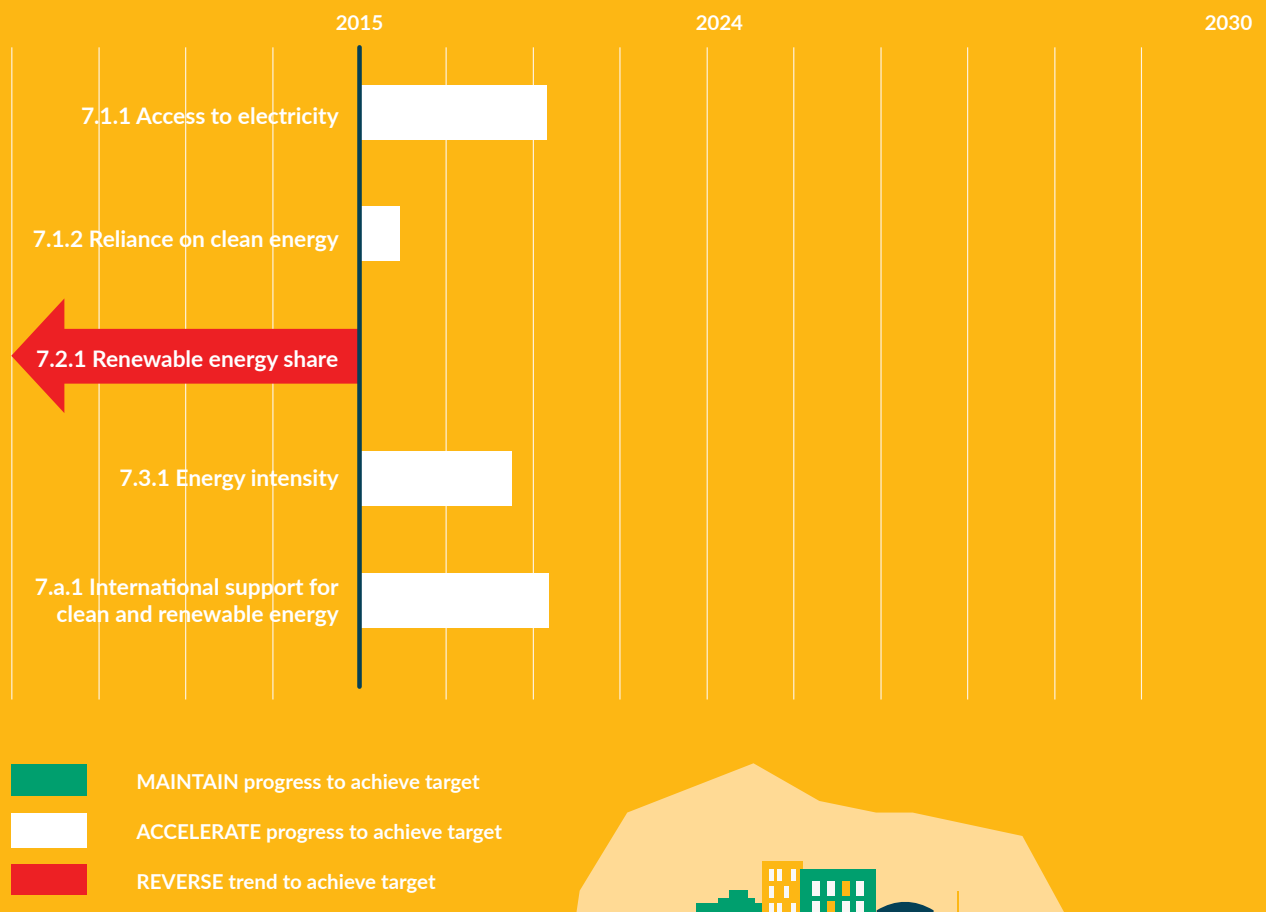
Rural access:

40.1%

(2023)

While global access to electricity has expanded steadily, progress in Africa remains limited, with persistent rural–urban and subregional disparities.

Figure 3.1:
African Dashboard: *Progress of SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) by indicators for Africa*



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Renewable energy potential is vast but remains underutilized.

Box 3.1: Energy sector progress under Agenda 2063 – advances, disparities and transition pathways

The Third Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063's First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP, 2013–2023) highlights substantial progress in Africa's energy sector. Access to electricity has improved markedly, with 67 percent of households now connected (AU, 2024b). This expansion has been driven by increased generation capacity across member states, reflected in additional megawatts integrated into national grids. Improved energy availability has, in turn, supported industrial development, enhanced digital connectivity and strengthened regional integration. The African Union has played a central role in advancing the continental energy agenda by promoting infrastructure development, supporting cross-border power systems and fostering policy harmonization alongside investment mobilization. However, access to electricity remains uneven, with rural areas continuing to lag behind urban centres. Limited investment in renewable energy also constrains the transition towards sustainable energy systems.

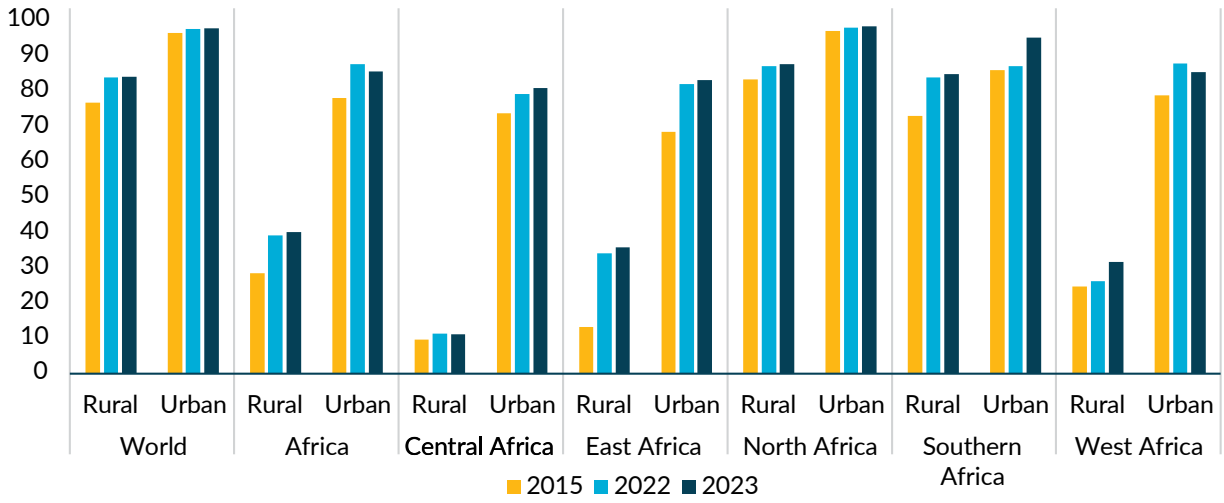
In many African countries, insufficient electrification continues to hinder socio-economic development, particularly in rural communities, where reliance on traditional biomass such as wood and charcoal remains widespread, with negative health and environmental consequences. Structural challenges persist, including inadequate generation capacity, weak transmission networks and vulnerability to climate shocks. Countries such as Zambia and Ethiopia illustrate these risks, as heavy dependence on hydropower increases exposure to climate variability (IEA, 2022).

Policy responses under the FTYIP have focused on integrated and coherent national energy strategies. Several countries have diversified their energy mix while accelerating access. Kenya, for example, has expanded geothermal energy production in the Rift Valley, while Morocco has advanced large-scale solar power through the Noor Ouarzazate Power Complex, one of the world's largest solar facilities (AfDB, 2020). Decentralized solutions, including solar mini-grids and off-grid systems, have proved effective in extending access to remote areas. In Ethiopia and Rwanda, such approaches have supported rural electrification and enabled productive uses of energy, highlighting the importance of innovation and public–private partnerships (UNECA, 2019). Large-scale initiatives, such as the Grand Inga Dam Project, aim to further expand access to affordable and clean electricity across the continent.

Despite measurable gains, progress remains uneven, with persistent challenges related to affordability, service reliability, financing gaps and institutional capacity (IEA, 2022). The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP, 2024–2033) prioritizes innovation-driven solutions, including smart grids and digital monitoring systems, to accelerate progress and improve sector performance (AU, 2024b).

Globally, the proportion of the population with access to electricity rose from 87 percent in 2015 to 92 percent in 2023. In Africa, access improved only modestly – from 46 percent in 2015 to 53 percent by 2023, with 40.1 percent of the population having electricity access in rural areas and 85.6 percent in urban areas, so wide rural–urban and subregional disparities persist.

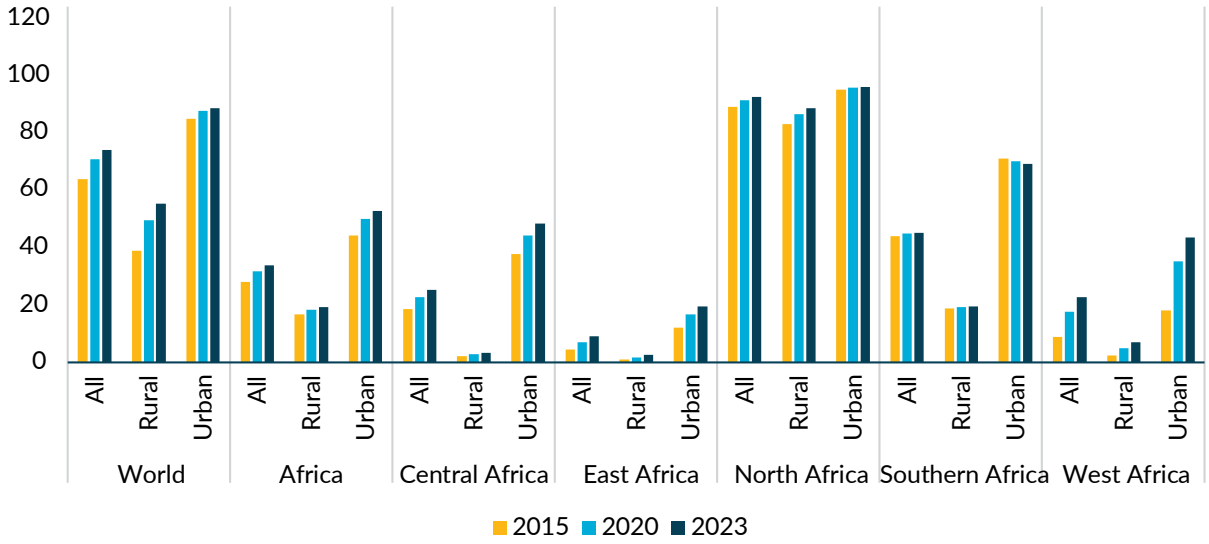
Figure 3.2: Access to electricity in rural and urban areas, % of population, 2015–2023



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

In terms of clean cooking access, global figures rose from 64 percent in 2015 to 74 percent in 2023. Africa lags sharply behind, with just 33.9 percent of the population having access to clean fuels and technologies for cooking in 2023. This means that over 970 million Africans continue to rely on traditional biomass, which contributes to environmental degradation and causes more than 400,000 premature deaths annually from indoor air pollution (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022). Beyond this modest improvement, significant disparities persist between rural and urban areas, and across subregions.

Figure 3.3: Population using clean fuels and technology by subregion (%), 2015–2023

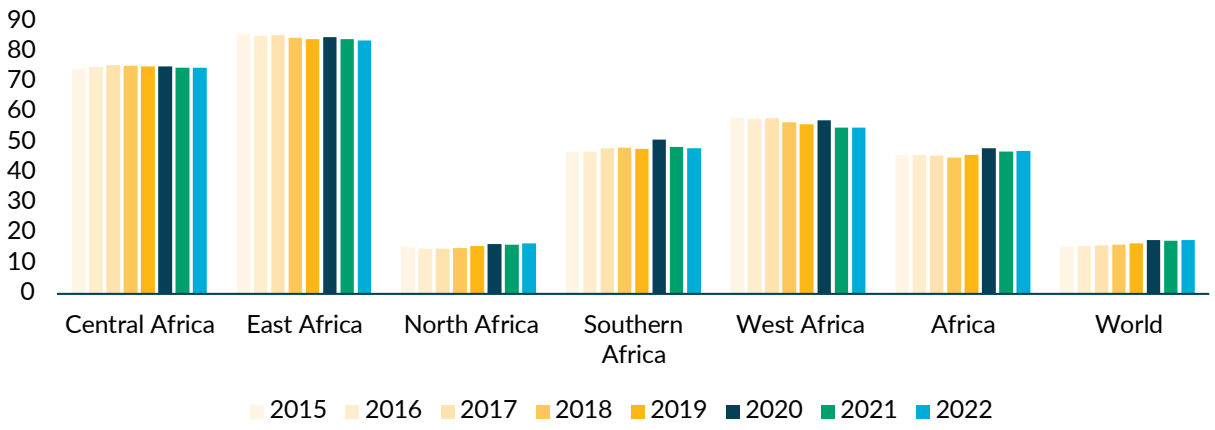


Source: ECA Stats (2026)

In 2022, Africa's share of renewable energy as part of total final energy consumption stood at 47.2 percent, higher than the global average of 17.9 percent. At the subregional level, East and Central Africa reported the highest share of renewable energy as part of total final energy

consumption, at 83.8 percent and 74.7 percent, respectively, in 2022, while North Africa has the lowest renewable energy share.

Figure 3.4: Renewable energy share of total final energy consumption (%), 2015–2022

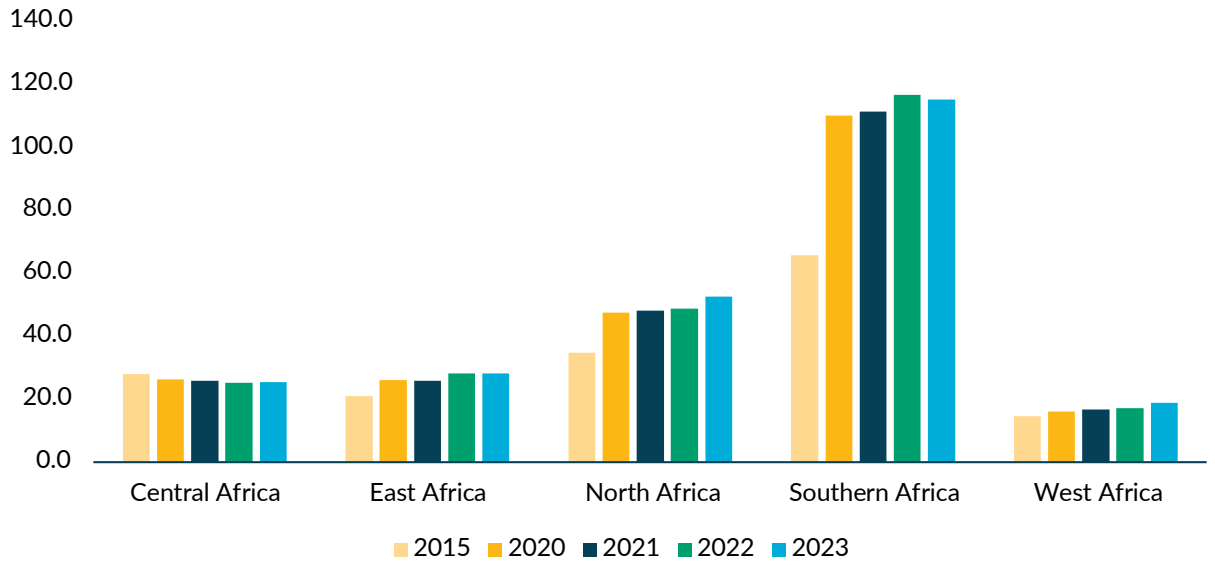


Source: UN DESA (2026)

Africa's renewable capacity per capita increased to about 85 watts in 2024, up from 50 watts in 2020. At the subregional level, Southern Africa led growth with 115 watts per capita, followed by North Africa, with an increase of 51.6 percent, reaching 52.6 watts per capita in 2023. Both East and West Africa show modest growth, whereas Central Africa experienced a 9.1 percent decline over the same period.

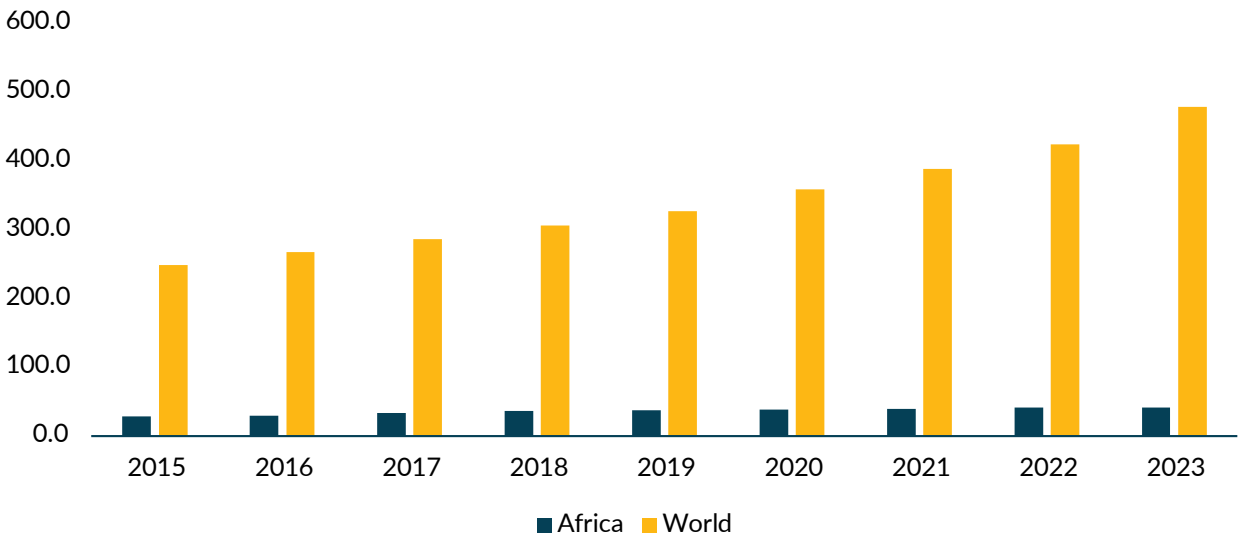
Africa has made some progress – especially in mini-grid deployment and solar home systems – but large infrastructure gaps remain. Grid networks are outdated, sparsely connected and poorly maintained. Transmission losses in some African countries exceed 20–30 percent, and rural connection costs remain prohibitively high (KfW Development Bank et al. 2021).

Figure 3.5: Installed renewable electricity capacity (watts per capita), 2015–2023



Source: UN DESA (2026)

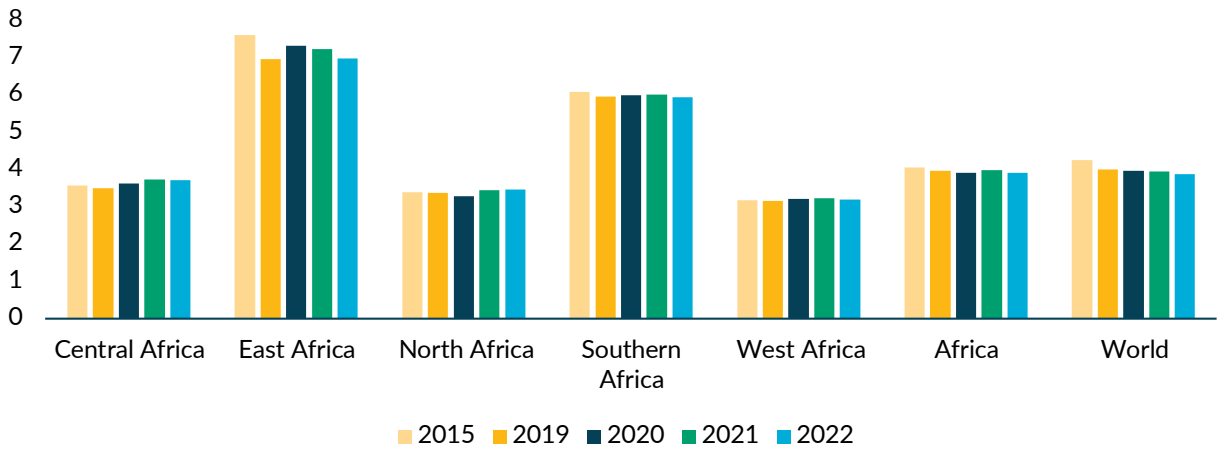
Figure 3.6: Installed renewable electricity-generating capacity: Africa vs. world (watts per capita), 2015–2023



Source: UN DESA (2026)

In Africa, energy intensity has shown a slight decline, 4.05 to 3.91 megajoules per constant 2017 United States dollars of gross domestic product (at purchasing power parity) from 2015 to 2022. This corresponds to an average annual energy efficiency improvement of 0.5 percent per year. The slower pace in Africa indicates that energy efficiency improvements in many African countries are insufficient to meet the SDG 7.3 target. At the subregional level, West and North Africa demonstrate the greatest improvements in energy efficiency, reflected in their lower energy intensity levels, while East Africa exhibits the highest energy intensity, indicating the lowest efficiency.

Figure 3.7: Energy intensity level of primary energy (megajoules per constant 2021 US$ of GDP, at purchasing power parity), 2015–2022



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Box 3.2: Expanding access to clean cooking among SADC members

In 2025, a meeting of energy and water ministers from member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was held in Harare, Zimbabwe. Against the backdrop that reliance on traditional biomass fuels such as firewood and charcoal for cooking can pose health and environmental risks, the ministers reached an agreement that it is crucial to initiate a robust implementation plan for the SADC to scale up clean cooking energy access, together with regional cooperation, technology transfer and a public–private investment thrust. The SADC's strong advocacy for clean cooking complements the proactive measures taken by member states in this regard (The Guardian, 2025).

Tanzania has launched a TZS 130 billion (US$50.4 million)[3] National Clean Cooking Communication Strategy in 2025 in collaboration with the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), aiming to ensure that 80 percent of Tanzanians adopt clean cooking energy by 2034. The strategy was introduced together with a nationwide awareness campaign emphasizing that the strategy must be implemented at all levels of government, as well as by the private sector, development partners and the media. To monitor the implementation of the strategy, the Government of Tanzania directed the Clean Cooking Energy Unit within the Ministry of Energy to oversee the project development, supervision and adoption of national education and awareness campaigns. Introducing a targeted national strategy has shown great potential in promoting clean cooking. The use of clean cooking energy in Tanzania has increased from 6 percent to 16 percent since the launch of the National Clean Cooking Energy Strategy (2024–2034) in 2024 (TanzaniaInvest, 2025).

South Africa has made a great contribution to the promotion of clean cooking worldwide by elevating clean cooking as a standing item in G20 discussions under the country's G20 Presidency in 2025. This breakthrough was accompanied by the launch of the G20 Clean Cooking Legacy Programme and the Voluntary Infrastructure Investment Action Plan (Connors Belopolsky, 2025). The action plan is further supported by a detailed Clean Cooking Infrastructure Investment Action Plan, which was co-developed by the International Energy Agency (IEA), South Africa's Department of Electricity and Energy (DEE), and South Africa's Energy and Water Sector Education Training Authority (IEA, 2025b).

Malawi announced in 2025 its aims to ensure that 75 percent of the population uses clean energy for cooking, with the government intensifying efforts to promote affordable, accessible and sustainable clean cooking solutions. Currently, Malawi is pioneering clean, renewable cooking solutions in 13 schools across Chikwawa and Kasungu districts (School Meals Coalition, 2025). According to the Deputy Director in the Ministry of Natural Resources of Malawi, more than 70 percent of previously deployed clean cooking technologies have failed, largely due to challenges such as limited repair services and the unavailability of spare parts. As a result, only 24 percent of the population currently relies on clean energy for cooking, highlighting the need for more resilient and locally supported clean cooking systems (Kayira, 2025).

[3] Official exchange rate by the Bank of Tanzania on 24 March 2026.

Priority Actions for Accelerated Progress to Achieve Affordable and Clean Energy for All

Africa has made promising strides towards SDG 7. However, to fully realize this goal by 2030, the continent must intensify efforts across several key areas. Key strategic actions should cover the following.

- **Mobilize investment:** Leverage multilateral, private sector and innovative financial instruments to fund large-scale renewable projects, expand grid infrastructure and support off-grid and mini-grid solutions, especially in rural and remote areas where over 80 percent of those without electricity reside.
- **Enhance infrastructure and efficiency:** Address the energy infrastructure deficit by upgrading existing systems and promoting energy efficiency measures to reduce waste and improve reliability.
- **Policy and regulatory reforms:** Develop and implement clear, consistent policies and frameworks to attract private investments, facilitate technology transfer and foster regional cooperation.
- **Expand access and social safeguards:** Promote inclusive policies that prioritize rural electrification, social safeguards and affordable clean cooking solutions, to mitigate health and environmental hazards associated with polluting fuels.
- **Leverage regional cooperation and technology:** Foster regional collaboration to harness Africa's enormous clean energy potential through shared infrastructure projects, capacity-building and adoption of innovative technologies.
- **Climate and social vulnerabilities:** Recognize the continent's climate vulnerability and minimal contribution to global emissions by focusing on clean energy solutions that support climate resilience, economic growth and social equity.
- **Harness renewable energy potential:** Countries should scale up investments in solar, wind, hydropower and green hydrogen projects to accelerate energy transition. (1) Introduce incentive packages, such as duty-free importation of renewable energy equipment, to stimulate production and utilization. (2) Facilitate access to financing, including climate funds, concessional loans and innovative financial instruments, to support renewable energy deployment.
- **Strengthen institutional arrangements and data systems:** Member states should align national energy strategies with SDG 7 indicators to monitor electricity access, clean cooking adoption and energy efficiency progress. (1) Integrate energy data collection, monitoring and reporting into national and regional systems, to enable evidence-based policy decisions. (2) Simplify accreditation processes for climate and renewable energy financing, to ensure member states can efficiently access available funds.
- **Promote gender and social inclusion:** Energy initiatives should explicitly benefit women, youth and marginalized groups by ensuring their participation in planning and access to productive energy uses. (1) Support energy solutions for SMEs, agriculture and value-added activities, to create income-generating opportunities and inclusive development outcomes.

- **Strengthen regional cooperation and energy transition planning:** African countries should cooperate to develop a continental grid and implement regional renewable energy projects. (1) Promote cross-border energy trading and shared infrastructure to reduce dependency on neighbouring countries. (2) Integrate energy transition strategies that balance climate objectives, financial sustainability and economic development benefits.

- **Expand electricity access with reliability and affordability:** Countries should prioritize investment in both on-grid and off-grid solutions to reach rural and underserved communities. (1) Develop mini-grids and solar home systems that target off-grid households. (2) Promote cross-border and regional energy infrastructure projects, to leverage economies of scale and shared resources. (3) Encourage public–private partnerships (PPPs) to scale up energy access while improving service quality and system resilience.

- **Promote clean cooking and reduce biomass dependency:** Governments should accelerate the transition from biomass to LPG and other clean cooking solutions, in particular for rural households where one in four families revert to biomass. (1) Design interventions to ensure affordability and accessibility. (2) Combine these initiatives with community awareness campaigns highlighting health and environmental benefits.

- **Improve energy efficiency and standards:** African countries should develop and enforce mandatory energy efficiency standards across industrial, commercial and residential sectors. (1) Promote energy-efficient technologies and practices to reduce the continent's high energy intensity. (2) Provide technical assistance and capacity-building programmes to support effective implementation of energy efficiency measures.

Investment gaps are the primary constraint to expanding energy access.

Chapter 4:

Building the Foundations of Transformation

Table 4.1: SDG 9 and associated Agenda 2063 Strategic Objectives

Sustainable Development Goals	Agenda 2063 STYIP Strategic Objectives
SDG 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation	**Strategic Objective 1.2:** Increase economic resilience
	Strategic Objective 2.2: Increase connectivity infrastructures that criss-cross countries
	Strategic Objective 6.1: Increase access to quality, inclusive and relevant education and skills learning system for all citizens
	Strategic Objective 7.1: Strengthen Africa's position and competitiveness in global affairs

Overall progress

Progress on SDG 9 remains uneven and insufficient to drive structural transformation, with notable advances in digital connectivity but persistent gaps in infrastructure, industrialization and access to finance. While some areas show momentum, recent reversals in key indicators highlight the need for scaled-up investment and stronger policy coordination to attain SDG 9.

Key Messages

- Progress towards SDG 9 in Africa continues to support structural economic transformation. Aside from regional disparities, financing gaps and limited technological upgrading, Africa is benefiting from advances in infrastructure development, industrial activities, innovation capacity and digital connectivity.
- Transport connectivity shows mixed but encouraging trends across Africa. North Africa recorded relatively higher freight volumes on roads during 2015 to 2022, while North and East Africa dominated air transport, with respective volumes of approximately 76 and 75 billion passenger-kilometres in 2022.
- Manufacturing value added (MVA) remains modest but unevenly distributed, averaging about 10.6 percent of GDP continent-wide in 2024, with stronger performances in Central and North Africa.
- Manufacturing employment remains limited, with North Africa and West Africa recording the highest percentage across the continent, standing at around 11 percent in 2025, but lower than the global benchmark (14 percent).
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in Africa, contributing more than 30 percent of GDP. However, access to finance remains a major challenge for SMEs.
- Africa retains a relative advantage in industrial carbon efficiency, with most subregions emitting below the continental average per unit of manufacturing value added (MVA), offering opportunities to align industrialization with low-carbon pathways.
- Innovation capacity is improving gradually but remains underfunded. Egypt has emerged as the African leader in research and development (R&D) investment, with R&D expenditure accounts amounting to 0.8 percent of its GDP.

Manufacturing remains structurally weak, with low productivity and wide subregional disparities

Manufacturing Value Added (Share of GDP)

13.1% *Central Africa*

12.4% *North Africa*

exceed the continental average

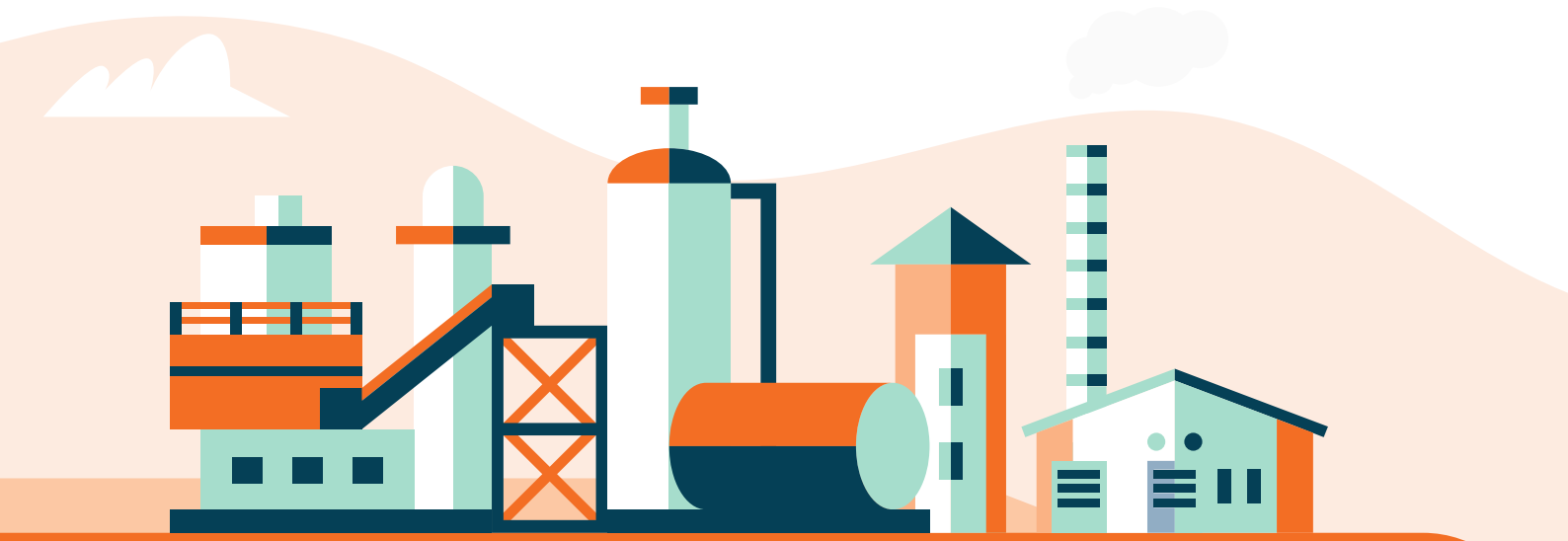
10% *Southern Africa*

9.5% *West Africa*

remain below average, reflecting gradual industrialisation

8.8% *East Africa continues to lag, indicating a limited industrial base*

Variations reflect differences in resource-based industries, diversification policies, and industrial ecosystems



Global comparisons indicate that Africa remains far behind Asia in per capita industrial output

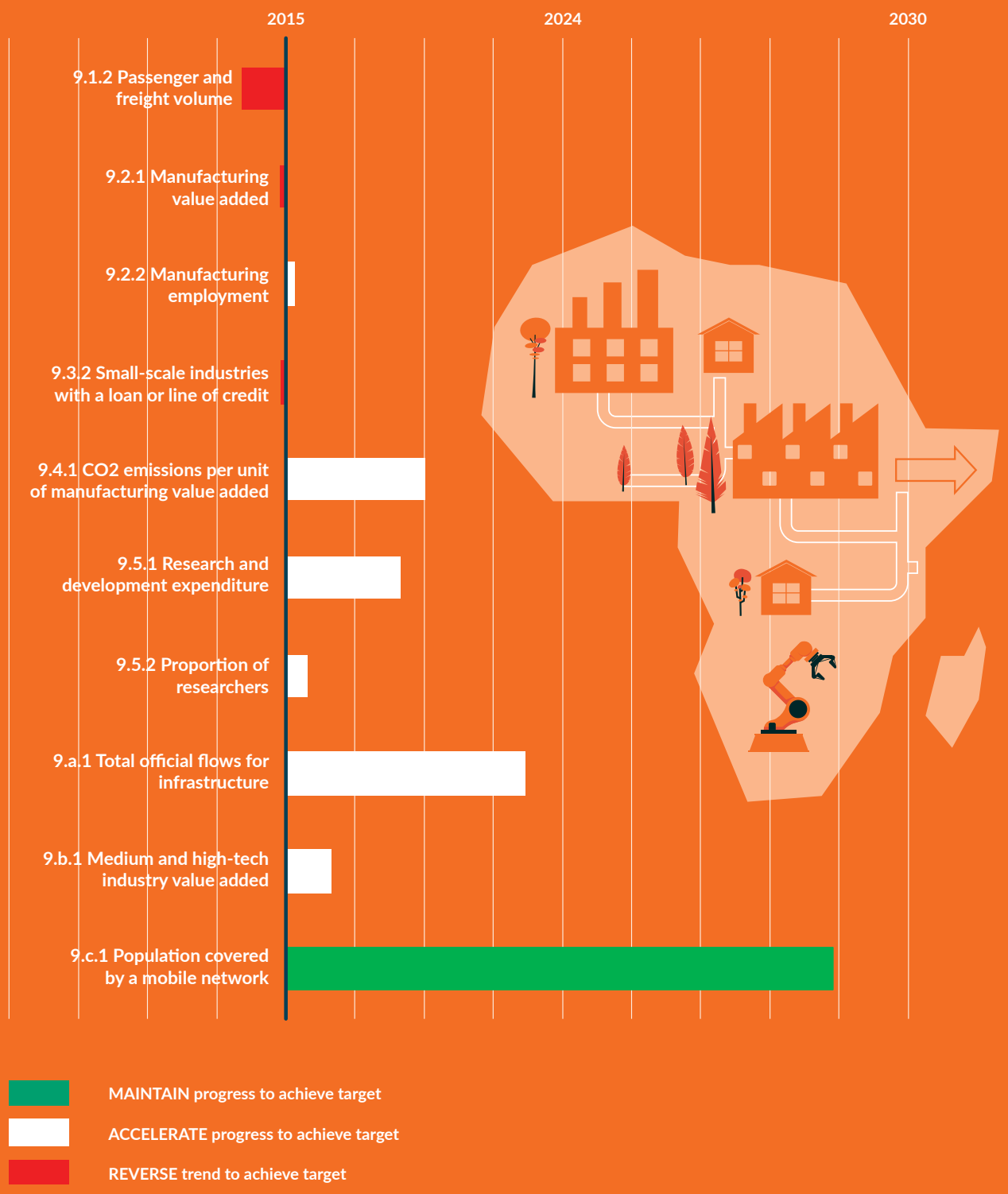
Manufacturing Value Added per Capita

Continental average: US$ **212** (2024)

US$ **442.3** *North Africa*	US$ **295.2** *Southern Africa*	*lead in productivity*
US$ **199.6** *Central Africa*	US$ **182.8** *West Africa*	*remain below average*
US$ **79.2** *East Africa*		*shows significantly lower industrial productivity*

Africa's manufacturing sector shows limited structural transformation, with uneven contributions to GDP and low per capita output across most regions.

Figure 4.1:
Africa Dashboard: *Progress of SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) by indicators for Africa*



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Box 4.1: Infrastructure, industrialization and innovation under Agenda 2063 – progress and structural constraints

The 2024 Third Continental Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063 highlights significant advances in infrastructure development across Africa, driven by the expansion of road, rail, air transport and ICT systems. Digital connectivity has improved markedly, with mobile penetration reaching 86 percent of the population, reflecting broader access to communication technologies (AU, 2024b). Despite these gains, industrialization remains limited, as manufacturing continues to contribute a relatively small share to GDP in many countries. At the same time, low levels of investment in research and development (R&D) constrain innovation and technological progress.

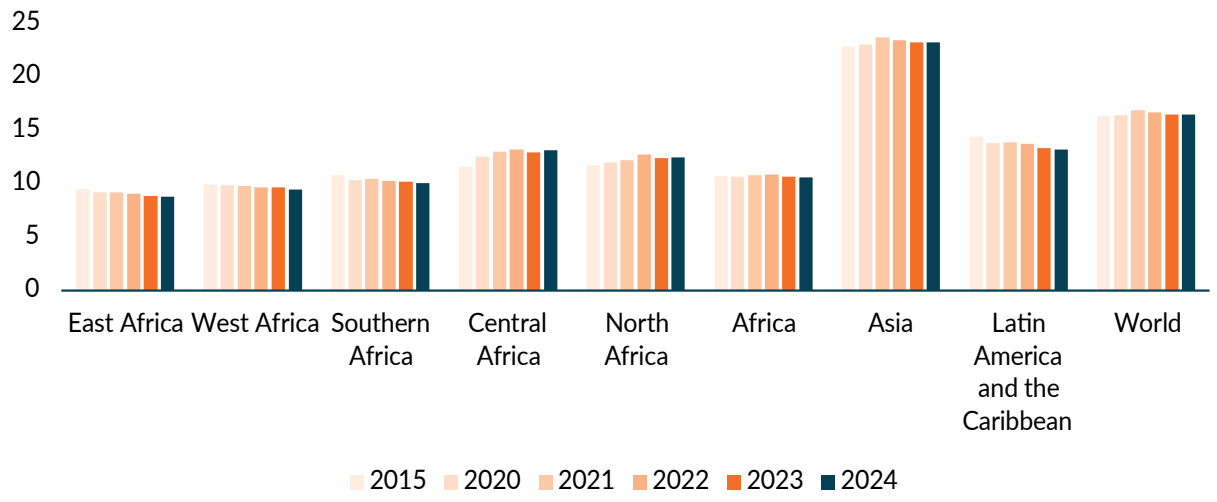
The African Union has responded through strategic initiatives aimed at strengthening economic integration and productive capacity. Flagship programmes such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) are central to enhancing trade and connectivity. In parallel, the AU has promoted science, technology and innovation (STI), and supported large-scale infrastructure programmes spanning transport, energy and digital sectors. Nevertheless, a weak industrial base and limited financing for innovation continue to hinder structural transformation. Under the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP, 2013–2023), efforts have focused on aligning national and continental priorities to modernize infrastructure and build industrial capacity (AU, 2024a). However, structural bottlenecks persist. Transport and digital infrastructure gaps continue to limit competitiveness and regional integration. In landlocked countries, transport costs can reach up to 50 percent of product value due to logistical inefficiencies (UNECA, 2019). Manufacturing value added (MVA) remains low, often below 10 percent of GDP, while innovation ecosystems face constraints related to limited financing, research capacity and access to technology (AfDB, 2020).

Policy responses have included the development of special economic zones, industrial parks and digital ecosystems. Ethiopia's Hawassa Industrial Park has attracted investment in textiles and apparel, while Rwanda has advanced digital transformation through expanded telecommunications and support for tech start-ups (UNECA, 2019). Continental initiatives such as the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) have strengthened regional connectivity, exemplified by projects like the Abidjan–Lagos corridor. Emerging innovation hubs, including Nairobi's "Silicon Savannah", further illustrate growing ICT dynamism (AfDB, 2020; AU, 2024d). Although infrastructure expansion and industrial investment have progressed, outcomes remain uneven. Financing gap – estimated at US$ 68–108 billion annually – alongside institutional and data limitations, continue to constrain implementation (AfDB, 2020). The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP, 2024–2033) and "SDG-STYIP Impact Labs" prioritize innovation-driven approaches, including digital infrastructure, smart value chains and new financing mechanisms, to accelerate transformation (AU, 2024a).

Digital connectivity is advancing faster than other dimensions of industrial development.

Manufacturing value added (MVA) as a percentage of GDP in Africa over the period 2015–2024 highlights the persistence of structural disparities among the subregions. MVA remains higher in Central (13.1 percent) and North Africa (12.4 percent), where it exceeds the continental average, supported by industrial bases linked to the extraction and processing of natural resources, as well as by targeted diversification policies. On the contrary, Southern Africa (10 percent) and West Africa (9.5 percent) had lower than continental average, reflecting a gradual convergence driven by light industrialization, agribusiness and the emergence of intermediate manufacturing segments. Furthermore, East Africa (8.8 percent) continues to lag behind structurally. International comparisons also highlight Africa's relative lag.

Figure 4.2: MVA (constant 2015 US$) as a proportion of GDP (%), 2015–2024

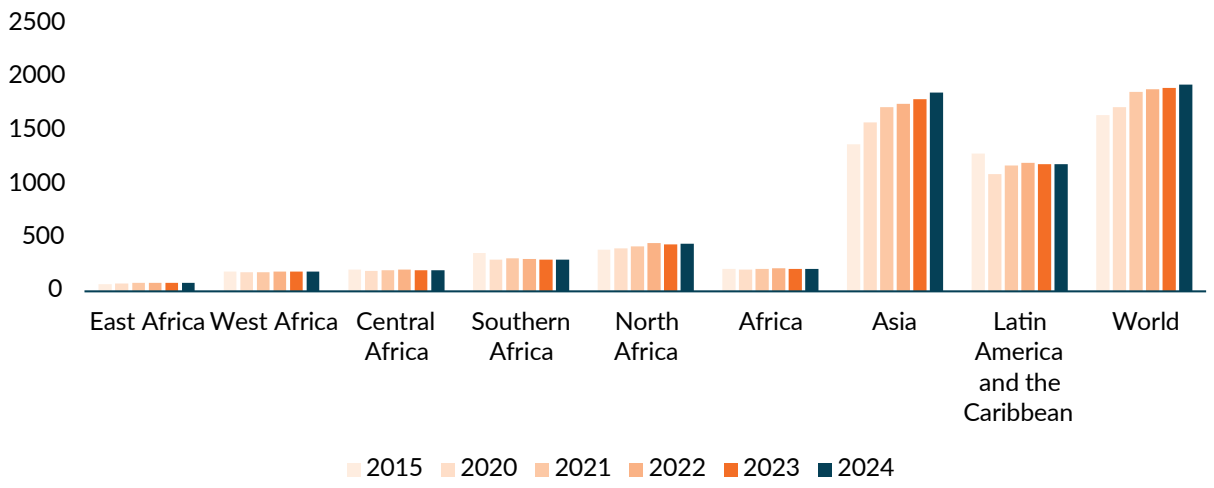


Source: UN DESA (2026)

In 2024, MVA per capita amounted to US$ 442.3 (constant) in North Africa, US$ 295.2 in Southern Africa and US$ 199.6 in Central Africa, compared to a continental average of US$ 212 in constant dollars. West Africa (US$ 182.8) and especially East Africa (US$ 79.2) remain significantly behind, reflecting persistent gaps in industrial productivity and technological sophistication. Globally, MVA per capita in Asia far surpasses Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, again highlighting the extent of Africa's lag in capital- and technology-intensive industrialization. As such, despite some progress, the manufacturing sector's contribution to African GDP remains structurally weak by international standards, revealing a structural transformation deficit and limited industrial competitiveness.

Achieving SDG 9 requires coordinated investments in infrastructure, industry and innovation ecosystems.

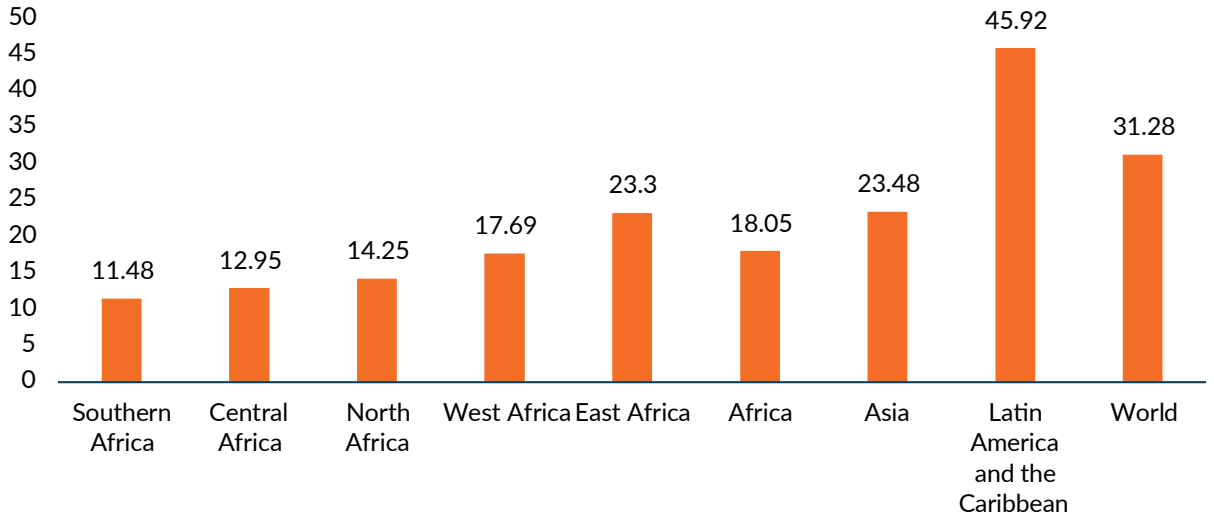
Figure 4.3: MVA per capita (constant 2015 US$), 2015–2024



Source: UN DESA (2026)

In Africa, the private sector is mainly composed of SMEs. In 2025, access to finance for African SMEs remained well below the global average. Significant regional disparities illustrate the differentiated effect of policy frameworks, local financial structures and the adoption of innovative financial technologies to access credit. In 2025, East Africa had the highest rate of access to SME financing (23.3 percent), while Central Africa (12.95 percent) and Southern Africa (11.5 percent), had lower than continental average of 18.05 percent. It highlights the importance of regional financial systems and public policies in expanding credit opportunities.

Figure 4.4: Proportion of small-scale industries with a loan or line of credit (%), in 2025

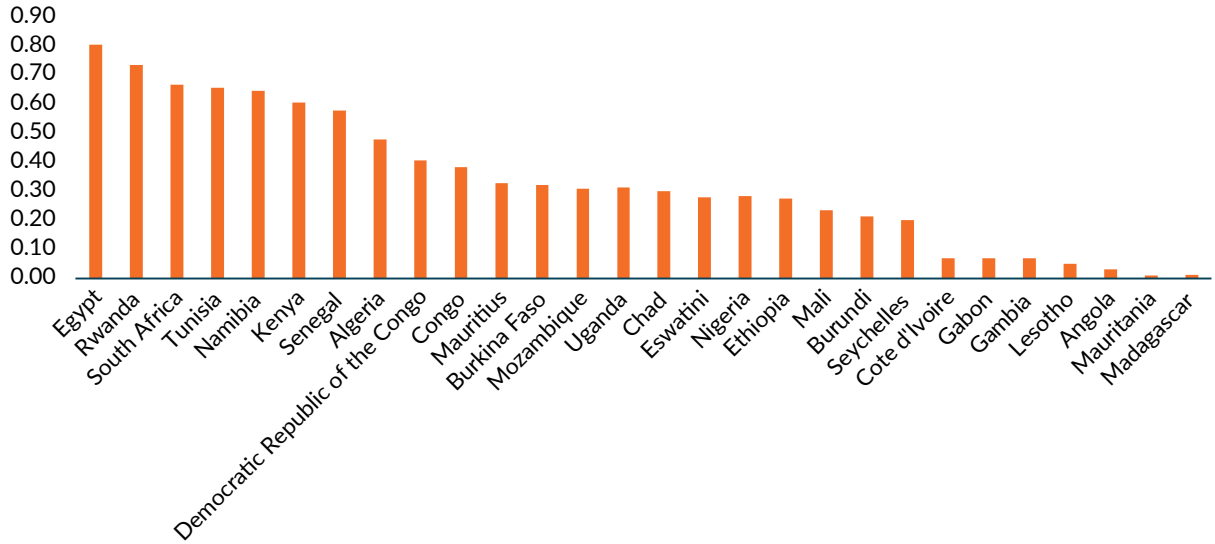


Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Research and development (R&D) spending is essential to stimulate technology adoption, strengthen local productive capacities, and support inclusive and sustainable growth. However, R&D investment levels in Africa remain low with significant country disparities.

These disparities emphasize the importance of strengthening public policies to support R&D, in particular through the introduction of tax incentives, the development of PPPs and the integration of R&D into national development strategies.

Figure 4.5: R&D expenditure as a proportion of GDP (%), 2015–2023, selected countries

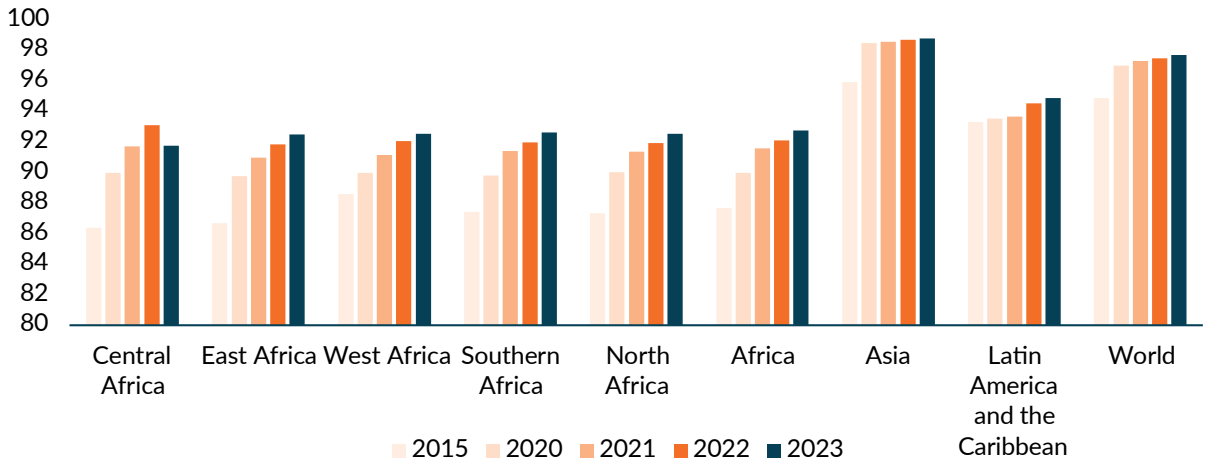


Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Note: Data refers to the latest available year for each country, ranging from 2015 to 2023.

In 2023, 92.8 percent of the African population was covered by at least one 2G network, a rate that, although high, remains below the global average (97.7 percent) as well as below the levels of Asia (98.8 percent) and Latin America (94.9 percent). This difference reflects challenges related to investment in rural infrastructure and the perceived profitability of sparsely populated areas. At the subregional level, Southern Africa, North Africa, West Africa and East Africa benefit from 93 percent 2G coverage, while Central Africa reaches 92 percent. Strengthening 2G coverage and moving beyond it with more advanced technologies such as 4G and 5G remains essential for reducing the digital divide.

Figure 4.6: Proportion of population covered by at least a 2G mobile network (%), 2015–2023



Source: UN DESA (2026)[4]

[4] The proportions of populations in the subregions were established based on a simple average calculation, in accordance with the classification of subregions defined by the ECA.

Box 4.2: Manufacturing employment dynamics in West and Central Africa

West Africa – Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana

Côte d'Ivoire is a prime example of agro-industry-driven industrialization, with significant effects on manufacturing employment. Local processing of cocoa, cashews and palm oil has led to a gradual increase in industrial employment, supported by national strategies aimed at capturing a larger share of value added. The National Industrial Development Plan (PNDI, **Plan National de Développement Industriel**) and tax incentives for processing companies have contributed to the growth of the formal manufacturing sector. However, most of the jobs created remain concentrated in low-productivity segments, limiting income gains and skills development, which highlights the need for increased support for industrial small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and targeted investment in advanced processing technologies (World Bank, 2025; UNIDO, 2025).

Ghana has followed a complementary path, marked by an explicit commitment to decentralized industrialization through the One District, One Factory programme. This programme has promoted the creation of local manufacturing units, contributing to an increase in industrial employment, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. The agri-food, textile and basic materials processing industries have played a central role in this dynamic. Nevertheless, the effects on employment remain constrained by high energy costs, difficulties in accessing long-term financing (US$ and the weak integration of local businesses into regional value chains, thus limiting the overall impact on structural transformation (UNIDO, 2025; UNECA, 2025a).

Central Africa – Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo

In Central Africa, Cameroon stands out for having a relatively more diversified manufacturing base than its neighbours, covering agri-food, wood, construction materials and certain light industries. This diversification supports a relatively higher level of manufacturing employment, although it is heavily dominated by the informal sector. Import substitution strategies and policies to promote industrial SMEs have led to job gains, but their impact remains limited by persistent structural constraints, including infrastructure deficits, regional market fragmentation and institutional weaknesses (UNECA, 2025a).

Conversely, the Republic of the Congo illustrates the limitations of industrialization that is heavily dependent on natural resources. Manufacturing employment remains marginal, concentrated on primary processing and poorly integrated within the rest of the economy. This configuration reflects weak productive diversification and the manufacturing sector's limited capacity to play a leading role in job creation. Analyses by UNCTAD (2025) emphasize that without a targeted industrial strategy aimed at diversification and upgrading, Central African economies risk remaining locked into growth trajectories that are not very inclusive and create few jobs.

From Evidence to Action to Support Infrastructure and Innovation for a New Growth Era

Goal 9 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which aims to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation, is closely aligned with the priorities of Agenda 2063. To ensure further progress can be achieved within the proposed timeline, key strategic actions should include the following.

- **Invest in climate-resilient transport infrastructures:** Strengthen infrastructure investment strategies by prioritizing high-quality, well-maintained and climate-resilient transport infrastructure, ensuring that infrastructure development supports sustainable and inclusive economic transformation over long-term regional integration (cross-border physical connectivity).

- **Support SMEs and start-up industries with multiple approaches (helping job creation and value addition):** Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems to better monitor SMEs and start-ups, while implementing context-specific policies that improve access to finance, skills development, formalization and integration into regional value chains. Such policies should include actionable measures such as tax incentives, subsidies, streamlined regulations, and the development of IPs and SEZs, to provide shared infrastructure and reduce barriers for investors. Align vocational and technical training with sectoral needs, to ensure a skilled workforce for manufacturing and industrial growth. Together, these efforts can enhance financial inclusion, resilience, and the contribution to inclusive and sustainable industrialization.

- **Strengthen industrialization by encouraging local production and job creation:** In order to improve Africa's manufacturing share of GDP, there is a need to strengthen national and regional industrial strategies, underpinned by the effective use of strategic instruments to boost production through value addition and enhance job creation, while strengthening the capacity to design, manage and finance innovative industrial projects, thus addressing gaps in investment readiness.

- **Foster innovation and emerging technologies:** Member states should enhance Africa's innovation ecosystem to support industrial development and R&D, to enhance competitiveness, structural transformation and technological resilience. (1) Promote the adoption of emerging technologies such as AI across sectors, including agriculture and public services, in alignment with Agenda 2063. (2) Expand innovation hubs and technology clusters, including apps, digital tools and platforms that address local needs. (3) Establish incubators and programmes to support tech-driven start-ups and SMEs, ensuring that projects are bankable and attractive to private investors. (4) Support STEM education and digital skills development at all levels, to strengthen the continent's human capital for innovation.

- **Enhance digital infrastructure and connectivity:** Robust digital infrastructure is essential for industrialization, innovation and inclusive growth. (1) Expand broadband connectivity, including 3G, 4G and 5G networks, to enable participation in the digital economy. (2) Invest in data centres, innovation hubs and digital public infrastructure.

- **Accelerate clean and low-carbon energy adoption in industrial sectors:** Industrial growth should be aligned with energy transition and environmental sustainability. (1) Scale up investments in energy efficiency and green industrial practices to reduce carbon intensity. (2) Promote the use of renewable energy in manufacturing, including solar, wind and low-carbon technologies. (3) Encourage policies and incentives that facilitate energy transition, while supporting industrial competitiveness.
- **Promote regional cooperation and AfCFTA utilization:** Continental industrialization should leverage regional integration for scale and efficiency. (1) Accelerate AfCFTA implementation to facilitate cross-border trade and harmonize industrial standards. (2) Develop regional infrastructure and shared facilities to reduce costs and increase industrial competitiveness. (3) Encourage collaboration among member states to attract investment and strengthen value chains across Africa.

Industrialization levels remain below global averages, limiting productivity growth.

Chapter 5:

Shaping Inclusive and Resilient Cities

Table 5.1: SDG 11 and associated Agenda 2063 Strategic Objectives

Sustainable Development Goals	Agenda 2063 STYIP Strategic Objectives
SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable	**Strategic Objective 1.1:** Enhance inclusive, equitable and sustainable economic growth
	Strategic Objective 1.6: Enhance resilience to climate change and disaster risks for sustainable and socio-economic development
	Strategic Objective 5.1: Integrate African culture and heritage into formal education curricula at all levels, emphasizing the importance of cultural diversity, tolerance, and mutual respect

Overall progress

Progress towards SDG 11 remains uneven and increasingly challenged, as rapid urbanization continues to outpace planning, infrastructure and service delivery. Emerging reversals in environmental conditions and rising climate-related risks underscore the urgent need for more integrated, resilient and inclusive urban development strategies.

Key Messages

- The share of Africa's urban population living in slums declined marginally from 50.4 percent in 2014 to 49.1 percent in 2022, but it remains about twice the global average. North Africa records the largest reductions.
- Access to public transport remains critically low across African cities, with fewer than 40 percent of residents enjoying convenient access, significantly below the global average of 51.6 percent in 2022.
- Land-use efficiency shows signs of improvement in several subregions, although extreme inefficiencies persist in some cities. Disparities across cities are significant, with some locations facing overcrowding due to limited land expansion, while others expand far faster than population growth, highlighting uneven urban planning.
- Environmental pressures in cities are intensifying, as average PM2.5 concentrations in Africa increased slightly between 2010 and 2019, contrasting with a global decline and posing growing risks to urban health and liveability, especially in West and Central Africa.
- Access to basic urban services and public spaces remains very unequal, with wide variations across regions and cities, highlighting persistent gaps in waste management, air quality management and inclusive urban design.
- Data for the share of municipal solid waste collection and controlled management remain limited, with only 29 cities across 13 countries reporting between 2020 and 2023.
- The number of African countries with national urban policies or regional development plans that respond to population dynamics, ensure balanced territorial development and increase local fiscal space grew from 46 in 2020 to 49 in 2023, with notable progress in West Africa, where countries with qualifying policies rose from 11 to 14.

A large share of Africa's urban population continues to live in informal settlements

Key Insights

x2 *The proportion of the urban population living in slums remains approximately twice the global average*

1.3 **2014 2022** *the rate declined only slightly by 1.3 percentage points indicating slow progress*

17.7% 2022 *North Africa recorded the lowest rate, reflecting relatively stronger urban infrastructure and housing systems*

64.6% *East Africa recorded the highest rate, highlighting persistent structural challenges in housing provision*

Other subregions, including Central, West, and Southern Africa, also maintain relatively high levels, reflecting rapid urbanization and limited planning capacity

Despite modest improvements, the prevalence of slums and inadequate housing remains significantly higher in Africa than the global average, with wide subregional disparities.

Limited access to transport and mixed land-use efficiency reflect challenges in urban planning

Access to Public Transport

40%
All subregions

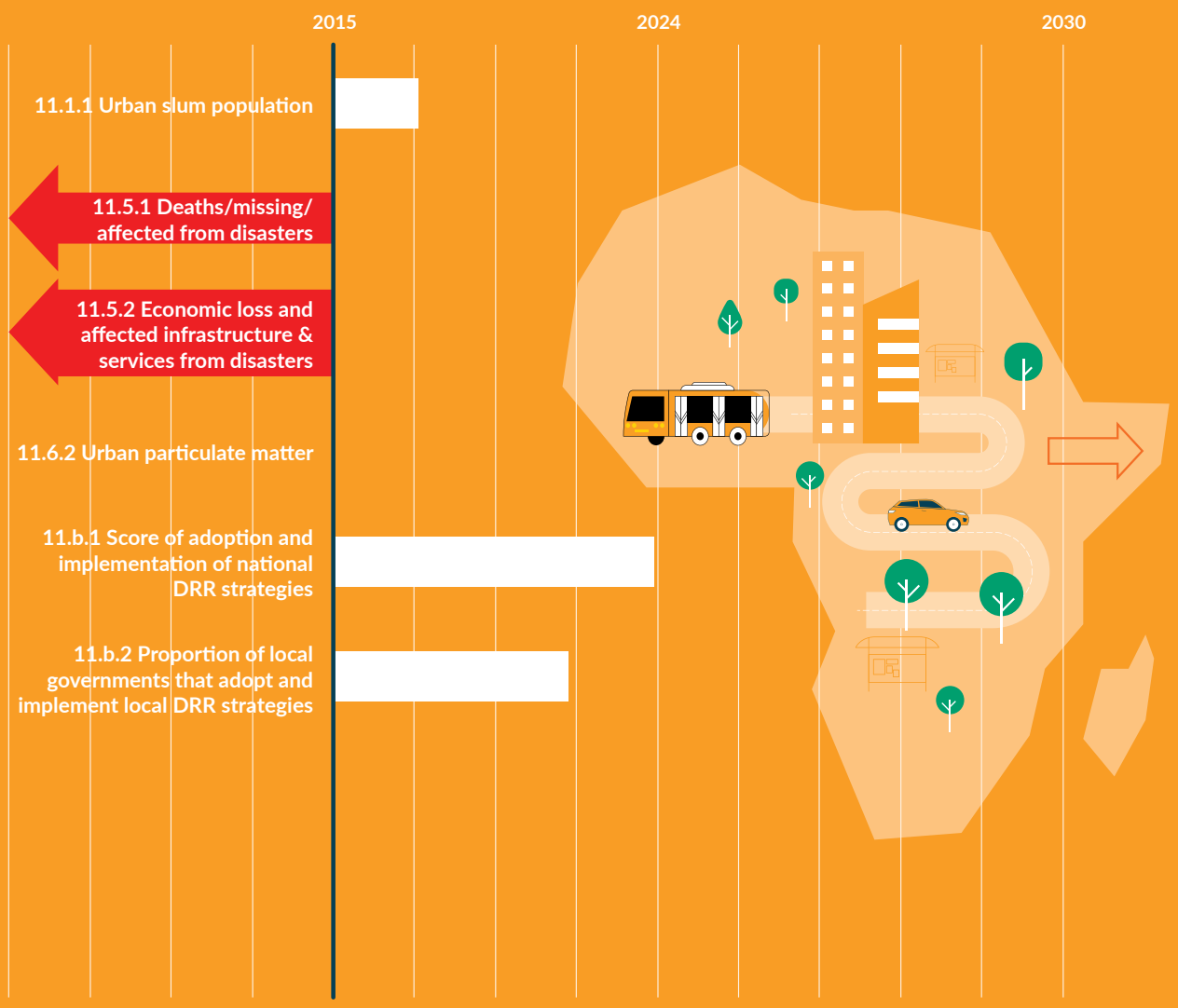
Access to convenient public transport remains below 40% across all subregions, significantly lower than the global average of 51.6 (2022)

Coverage is particularly limited in non-capital cities, where transport networks are less developed

Significant disparities exist between the top-performing cities and subregional averages, indicating uneven service provision within countries

Urban infrastructure and planning systems remain underdeveloped, with low access to public transport and uneven progress in land-use efficiency across subregions.

Figure 5.1:
Africa Dashboard: *Progress of SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) by indicators for Africa*



MAINTAIN progress to achieve target

ACCELERATE progress to achieve target

REVERSE trend to achieve target

Source: ECA *Stats (2026)*

Box 5.1: Sustainable cities and communities under Agenda 2063 – urban growth and policy responses

The Biennial Report on the Implementation of Agenda 2063 highlights uneven progress in urban development across the continent. Despite improvements in infrastructure, particularly in transport systems, electricity access and ICT connectivity, a significant share of the population continues to live in informal settlements, reflecting persistent pressure on urban systems (African Union Development Agency [AUDA-NEPAD], 2022). Rapid urbanization remains a defining trend, often outpacing the provision of adequate housing and basic services, and thereby constraining the achievement of inclusive and sustainable cities. The Africa Urban Forum, established following the 2022 Cairo Declaration, has emerged as a flagship platform for coordinated engagement. Its Addis Ababa Declaration emphasizes inclusive urban policies, climate resilience, innovative financing and strengthened regional cooperation as essential pillars for managing Africa's urban transition.

Under the First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP, 2013–2023), urban development strategies have focused on improving planning systems, expanding access to basic services, and enhancing resilience to environmental and climate risks (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022). However, structural challenges persist due to the speed and scale of urban growth. In cities such as Nairobi, large populations reside in informal settlements like Kibera, where access to water, sanitation and adequate housing remains limited. Similarly, Lagos faces severe congestion and increased exposure to flooding linked to rapid expansion and geographic vulnerability (AU, 2024a).

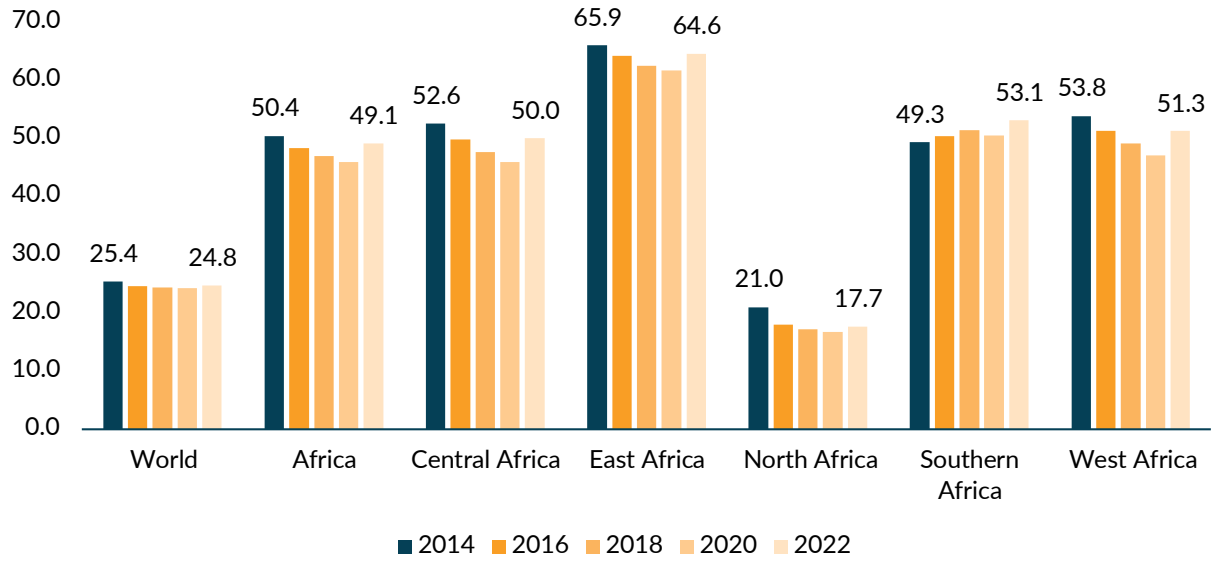
Government responses have included more integrated and forward-looking urban strategies. Rwanda has implemented master planning approaches in Kigali to guide structured expansion, while Morocco has advanced slum upgrading programmes to improve housing conditions and reduce inequalities (AUDA-NEPAD, 2022). Additional initiatives include investments in sustainable urban transport, such as the Bus Rapid Transit system in Dar es Salaam, and housing programmes in countries like South Africa aimed at expanding access to safer living environments. Urban resilience interventions, including flood management projects in Dakar, further illustrate efforts to address climate-related risks (UNECA, 2019).

Although these initiatives have contributed to improved urban services and stronger policy recognition of urbanization, progress remains uneven. Persistent constraints include infrastructure financing gaps, limited local institutional capacity, weak governance and insufficient monitoring systems. The Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP, 2024–2033) prioritizes innovation-driven solutions, including smart urban systems, geospatial planning tools and new financing mechanisms, to accelerate the development of inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities (AU, 2024b).

Africa is urbanizing faster than any other region, creating both opportunities and risks.

In Africa, the proportion of the urban population living in slums has been about twice the global average, but it declined slightly, by 1.3 percentage points, between 2014 and 2022. In 2022, the lowest subregional rate was in North Africa, at 17.7 percent, whereas the highest, at 64.6 percent, was in East Africa.

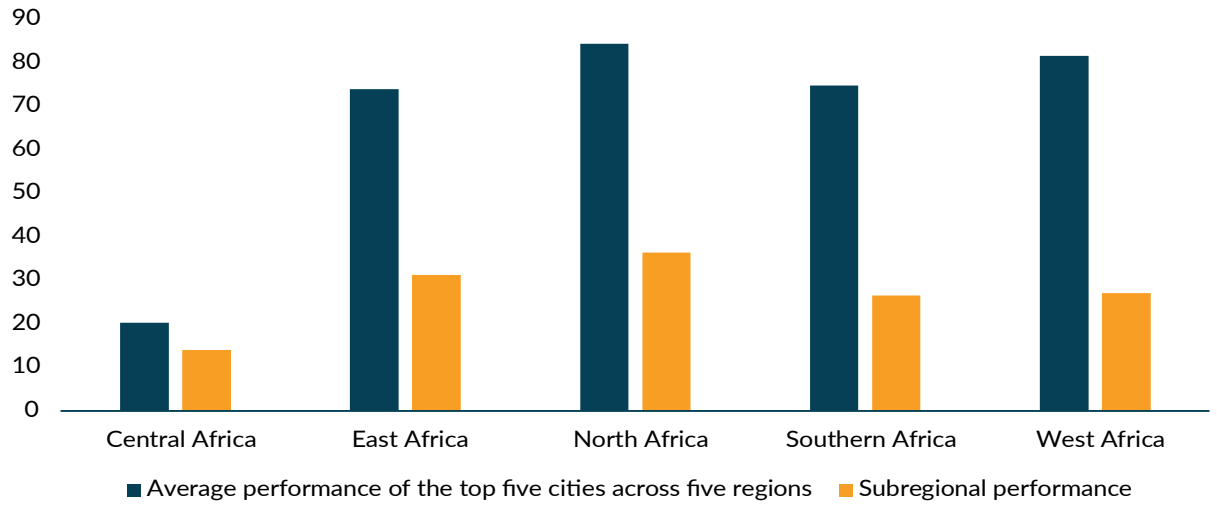
Figure 5.2: Proportion of urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing (%), 2014–2022



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Convenient access to public transport, defined as a stop within 500 metres, has remained low across Africa. Coverage was below 40 percent in all subregions, which was significantly below the 2022 global average of 51.6 percent. Access was even lower in cities that are not capitals, owing to limited networks and rapid, often unplanned, urbanization. Indeed, significant disparities persisted within subregions in terms of the average performance of the top five cities in each subregion in respect of convenience of public transport compared with the subregion as a whole.

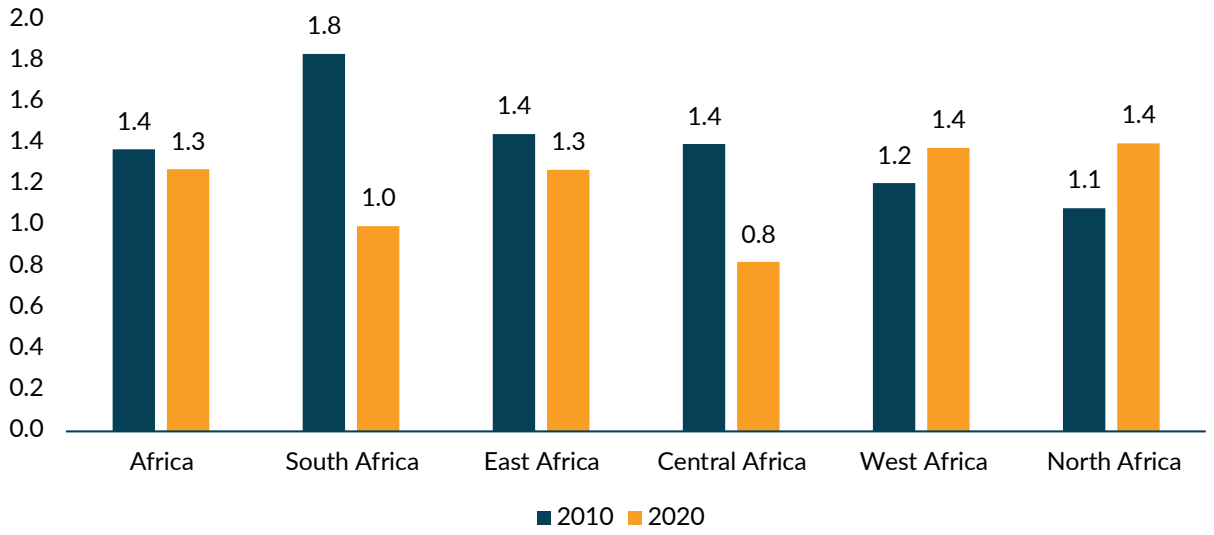
Figure 5.3: Proportion of the population that has convenient access to public transport, average of the five best performing cities in each subregion compared with the subregion as a whole, 2020 (Percentage)



Source: UN DESA (2026)

The ratio of land consumption to population growth is a measure of urban land-use efficiency, with values less than or equal to one indicating compact growth. There was mixed progress from 2010 to 2020 among over 200 African cities. Generally, Central, East and Southern Africa became more efficient, whereas North and West Africa became slightly less efficient.

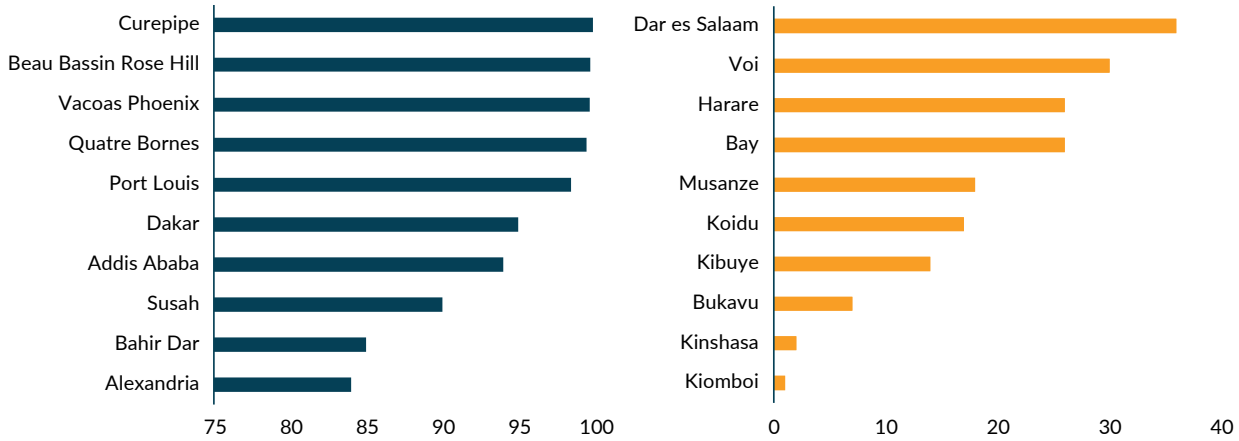
Figure 5.4: Ratio of land consumption rate to population growth rate, 2010–2020



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Limited waste management capacity and rising air pollution are increasingly affecting urban environmental performance across Africa. Rapid urbanization, population growth and infrastructure gaps have increased pressure on municipal systems. Strong municipal solid waste collection coverage is widely viewed as a proxy for institutional capacity, effective urban governance and economic development. The reported data are limited: only 30 cities across 17 African countries have information for 2020–2023, making it impossible to generate reliable subregional estimates. However, the data reflects significant disparities of performance.

Figure 5.5: Municipal solid waste collection coverage, by 10 top and bottom cities (%), 2020–2023[5]

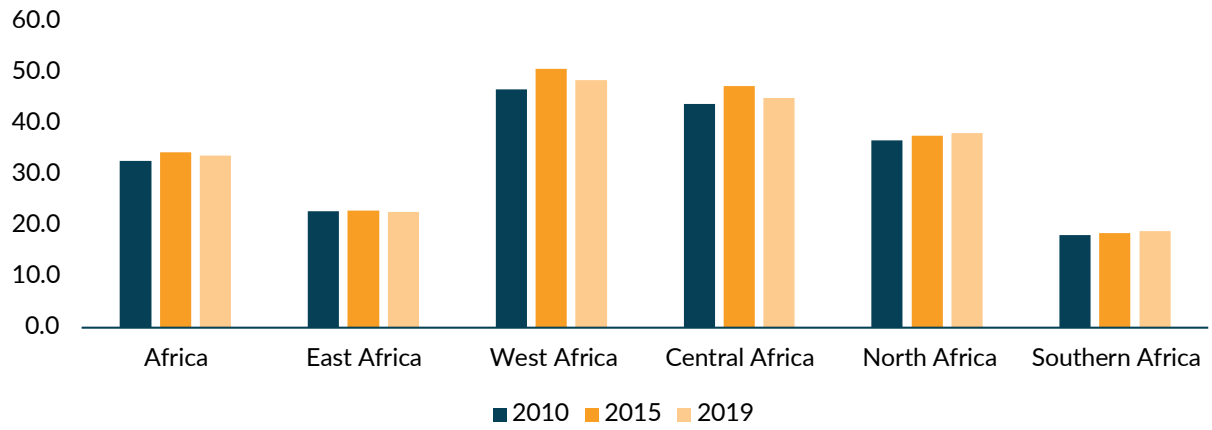


Source: UN DESA (2026)

[5] Data refer to the most recent year available for each country; reference years vary between 2020 and 2023. *Note:* The order of cities is based on the cities' best performance during 2020–2023 based on the available data.

As a measure of air quality and pollution, average annual fine particulate matter rose from 32.8 percent in 2010 to 33.7 percent in 2019 in Africa. The highest levels were in Central and West Africa, and the lowest were in East and Southern Africa.

Figure 5.6: Annual mean levels of fine particulate matter (particulate matter with a diameter of <2.5 micrometres), 2010–2019



Source: ECA Stats (2026)

Box 5.2: African Cities for Clean Air Initiative (2022–2026)

The African Cities for Clean Air Initiative is a continental air quality support programme established in 2022 by C40 Cities, aimed at empowering African cities to improve urban air quality management and protect public health. Targeted at cities with high pollution exposures and limited monitoring capacity, the initiative has provided technical assistance, knowledge exchange and capacity-building to cities including Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Dakar (Senegal), Durban and Johannesburg (South Africa), and Lagos (Nigeria).

Through tailored workshops, policy support and peer learning opportunities, this programme helps city governments to develop evidence-based air quality action strategies, establish monitoring systems and strengthen local regulatory capacity. By facilitating the sharing of best practices covering diversified topics, the initiative aims to reduce harmful airborne pollutants and align urban climate and public health goals. Designed to run through 2025–2026, it highlights the growing priority African cities place on clean air governance, integrating environmental health concerns into urban planning processes (C40 Cities, 2025).

In parallel, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) regional office for Africa, together with its partners, is collaborating with the cities of Nairobi, Kampala and Addis Ababa under the initiative "Clean Air for Enhanced Urban Climate Resilience in African Cities". The project aims to strengthen urban climate resilience and air quality management using low-cost sensors, while promoting public health. It focuses on delivering science-based, integrated solutions to improve air quality across the three East African cities (Macharia, 2025).

Action Pathways for Inclusive and Resilient Cities

Africa's cities have made notable progress, including reductions in slum populations in North Africa and expanded policy coverage for urban planning across most countries. However, significant challenges remain, such as limited access to public transport and open spaces, uneven land-use efficiency, rising air pollution and stark disparities across subregions and cities. In order to achieve SDG 11 by 2030, key actions should include the following.

- **Promote balanced urban expansion:** Align land development with population growth to prevent both urban sprawl and overcrowding, optimize existing infrastructure, support sustainable city planning and reduce the risk of informal settlements.
- **Enhance participatory urban governance:** Institutionalize regular, democratic mechanisms for civil society engagement in urban planning and management, while expanding data coverage and monitoring, to reduce disparities and support more inclusive city-level decision-making.
- **Expand access to public spaces:** Prioritize equitable urban planning and investment to reduce regional and city-level disparities, ensuring underserved areas benefit from inclusive, well-designed spaces that enhance liveability and social inclusion.
- **Scale up urban infrastructure and services:** Invest in affordable housing, public transport, water, sanitation, electricity and basic urban services in underserved and fast-growing cities, ensuring that all investments are climate-resilient and support community resilience, to reduce urban–rural disparities and enhance overall urban liveability.
- **Improve urban environment management:** Enhance management of air quality, waste services and environmental sustainability, while integrating disaster risk reduction and climate resilience measures into urban planning and city development.
- **Scale up rural infrastructure and social services:** Invest in roads, electricity, water, sanitation and digital connectivity, while strengthening access to quality education, healthcare and social protection, to reduce rural–urban disparities and support inclusive rural development.
- **Strengthen city-level data systems and evidence-based governance:** Build institutional capacity for local authorities to collect, verify and manage urban data, incorporating forward-looking projections on population growth, land consumption and related SDG impacts to guide planning and policy decisions.
- **Empower local authorities and foster peer learning:** Enable local governments to lead urban development and service delivery, while promoting cross-country collaboration and knowledge exchange to share best practices across Africa.
- **Mobilize financing and integrate urbanization into national plans:** Leverage governance frameworks to address urban financing gaps and mainstream urbanization considerations into national development plans and investment strategies, to ensure sustainable, inclusive urban growth.

Chapter 6:

Stronger Together: Advancing Sustainable Development through Partnerships

Table 6.1: SDG 17 and associated Agenda 2063 Strategic Objectives

Sustainable Development Goals	Agenda 2063 STYIP Strategic Objectives
SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development	**Strategic Objective 1.2:** Increase economic resilience
	Strategic Objective 7.1: Strengthen Africa's position and competitiveness in global affairs
	Strategic Objective 7.2: Enhance Africa's capacity for financing her development

Overall progress

Progress on SDG 17 in Africa presents a mixed picture, with notable gains in statistical capacity and data systems but persistent challenges in financing, debt sustainability and global partnerships. Strengthening alignment between domestic efforts and international support remains critical to closing implementation gaps and accelerating progress across the SDGs.

Key Messages

- Africa's performance under SDG 17 remains mixed and reflects how the continent's sustainable development is constrained by global and structural pressures, including weakening multilateralism, volatile capital flows, high inflation, persistent current account deficits and rising debt burdens, against the backdrop of macroeconomic vulnerabilities.
- Domestic resource mobilization presents encouraging progress in domestic tax financing. However, government revenue stands at around 23 percent of GDP in 2022, well below the global benchmark of 32.4 percent. When considering tax revenue alone, the ratio declines further to about 16 percent of GDP, highlighting continued challenges in expanding the tax base and strengthening revenue collection.
- External financing shows divergent trends in Africa; official development assistance (ODA) from the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members totalled US$ 35.9 billion in 2023, marking an 8.8 percent real-term decline compared to 2021. Net ODA could fall by 9–17 percent, reaching between US$ 170 billion and US$ 186 billion depending on the scenario, implying a potential reduction of up to US$ 35 billion from 2024 levels. In contrast, remittances, exceeding US$ 104 billion in 2024, have emerged as a stable and significant external financial flow on the continent.
- Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Africa remain highly volatile and marginal in global terms, swinging from lows of around US$ 40.9 billion (2020) to a peak of US$ 97 billion (2024), and accounting for only 3–6 percent of global FDI, despite the fact that the continent hosts 18 percent of the global population.
- Digital connectivity has expanded rapidly but unevenly. Around 73 percent of the population in urban areas have 4G access, while only 49 percent of rural populations have access to 4G networks. Africa remains behind global performance levels, given its limited participation in the digital economy across rural areas.
- Policy coherence mechanisms are being strengthened, with over 60 percent of African countries having institutional arrangements in place, particularly in North and East Africa, while gaps in coordination, capacity and data availability persist in other subregions.
- Statistical capacity and data systems show steady improvement, with rising data infrastructure scores, expanded national statistical legislation and increased domestic investment in data systems. Nevertheless, persistent data gaps, quality challenges and limited disaggregation continue to constrain evidence-based policymaking and accountability.

Domestic resource mobilization remains limited and uneven across subregions

Government Revenue

23% of GDP

In 2022, government revenue in Africa averaged 23% of GDP, significantly below the global average of 32%

57% domestic budgets

Taxes financed 57% of domestic budgets, broadly aligned with the global average (59%), but from a smaller revenue base

Tax revenue as a share of GDP shows marked variation across subregions (2015–2023)

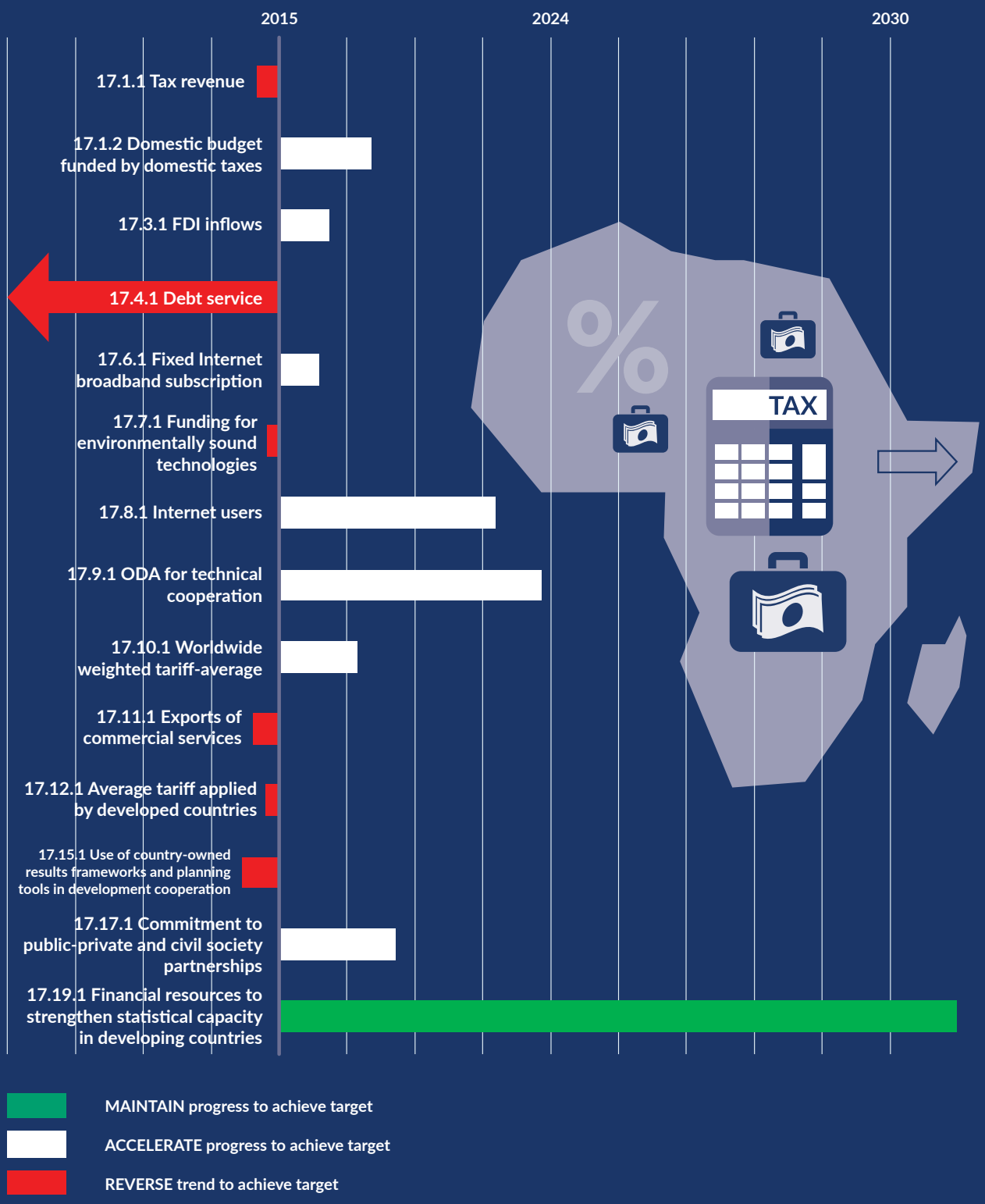
Tax Revenue Performance

Southern Africa
records the highest levels of tax collection, followed by North and West Africa

Other subregions
continue to lag, reflecting differences in economic structure, administrative capacity, and informality

Government revenues in Africa remain below global levels, with significant disparities in tax collection capacity across subregions, constraining sustainable development financing.

Figure 6.1:
Africa Dashboard: *Progress of SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) by indicators for Africa*



Source: ECA *Stats (2026)*

Box 6.1: Financing, partnerships and governance under Agenda 2063 – progress and structural constraints

The implementation of Agenda 2063 continues to face critical constraints related to financing gaps, weak coordination and limited data availability. Many countries rely heavily on official development assistance (ODA), restricting fiscal space. Fragmented initiatives and insufficient stakeholder coordination further reduce the effectiveness of development efforts. In addition, weak national statistical systems limit the availability of reliable and disaggregated data for monitoring progress (AU, 2024b).

Development partnerships remain essential. Key contributors – including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United States, the Global Fund, the European Union and Taiwan – continue to support implementation. ODA as a share of national budgets increased from 14 percent in 2013 to 18 percent in 2020, reflecting high disbursement rates. However, domestic financing remains limited in several countries. In Eswatini, public capital market funding rose modestly, while tax revenue reached 24 percent of GDP in 2022, although innovative financing mechanisms remain underdeveloped.

Country experiences illustrate diverse approaches to resource mobilization. Botswana has strengthened its trade and investment landscape following its ratification of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), alongside hosting the 2023 US–Africa Business Summit to enhance global value chain integration. Seychelles has expanded cultural partnerships through bilateral agreements, fostering knowledge exchange and international exposure. Zambia has pursued ambitious fiscal reforms to reduce aid dependency and increase domestic financing, although declining revenue performance highlights ongoing vulnerabilities. Burkina Faso has made progress in domestic resource mobilization, with rising tax revenues and reduced reliance on external financing, supported by reforms such as tax digitalization and anti-corruption measures, despite persistent funding gaps.

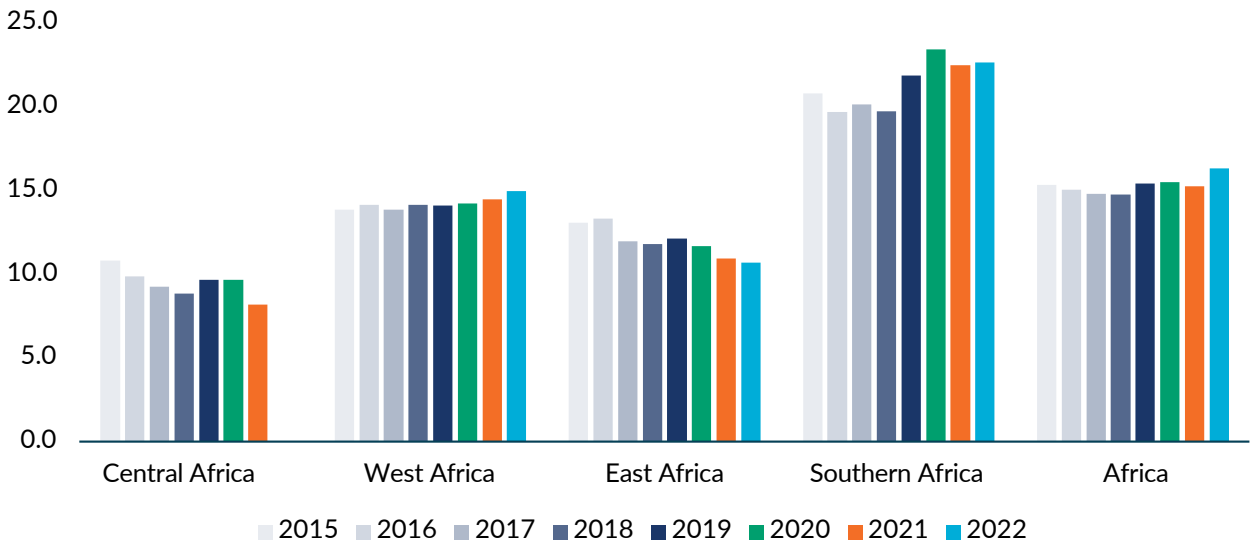
The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (FTYIP, 2013–2023) has promoted diversified financing strategies and stronger partnerships. Reforms in countries such as Rwanda and Ghana have improved tax collection and fiscal transparency, while public–private partnerships (PPPs) have been leveraged to support infrastructure and energy investments (AU, 2024a). Continental initiatives such as the AfCFTA have further strengthened economic integration, while efforts to enhance statistical systems have improved data for policymaking (AU, 2024b).

Despite these advances, progress remains uneven. Persistent financing gaps, weak coordination mechanisms, and limited institutional capacity continue to constrain implementation. Data limitations further hinder effective monitoring and evaluation. Looking ahead, the Second Ten-Year Implementation Plan (STYIP, 2024–2033) emphasizes innovative financing, strengthened partnerships, and digital monitoring tools – particularly through initiatives such as the "SDG-STYIP Impact Labs" – to enhance accountability and accelerate development outcomes (UNECA, 2025b).

The central challenge is to translate commitments into coordinated, transformative and scalable action.

Government revenue (Tax and non-tax) in Africa represented 23 percent of GDP on average in 2022, which was significantly lower than the global average of 32 percent. In 2022, 57 percent of African domestic budgets were financed by taxes, which was close to the global average of 59.9 percent. An analysis of tax revenues as a percentage of GDP reveals marked disparities among African subregions for the period 2015–2023). Southern Africa has the highest levels of tax collection, followed by North and West Africa. The persistent gaps between the subregions highlight significant structural disparities in domestic resource mobilization, which poses a major challenge for financing sustainable development.

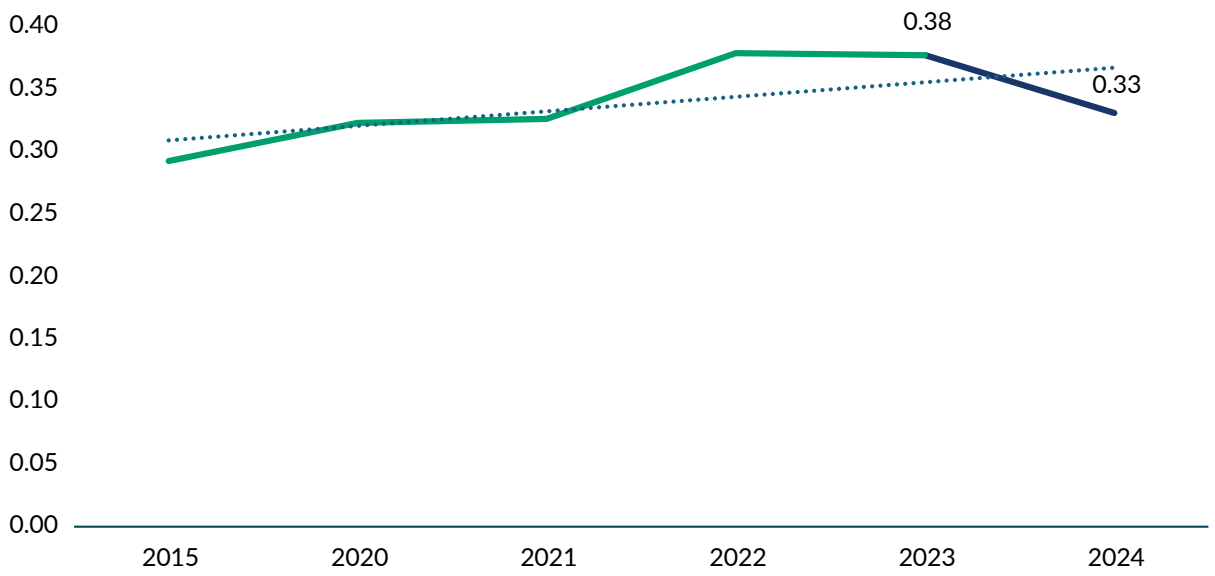
Figure 6.2: Tax revenue as a proportion of GDP (%), 2015–2022



Source: UN DESA (2026)

ODA is projected to decline in 2025, extending the downward trend observed since 2020. OECD estimates suggest that net ODA could fall by 9–17 percent, reaching between US$ 170 billion and US$ 186 billion depending on the scenario, implying a potential reduction of up to US$ 35 billion from 2024 levels (OECD, 2025). In 2024, members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development allocated an average of 0.33 percent of their gross national income to ODA, compared with 0.38 percent in 2023, which was significantly below the level of 0.7 percent included in target 17.2. Only Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden met that target. Furthermore, ODA to Africa totaled $35.9 billion in 2023, representing a real decrease of 8.8 percent compared to 2021.

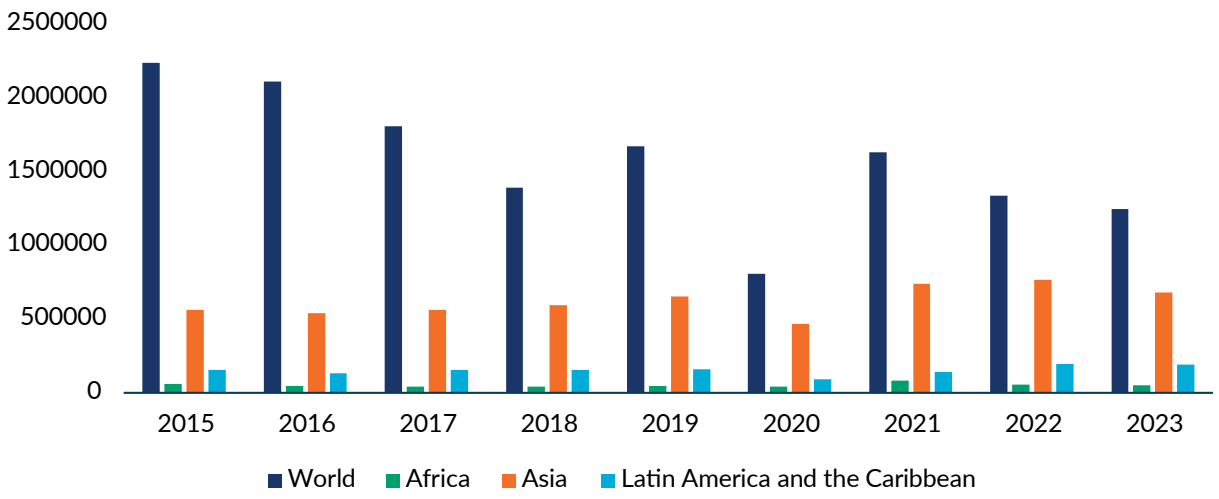
Figure 6.3: Average allocation to ODA by DAC members, 2015–2024 (% GNI)



Source: OECD, "DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private)", OECD Data Explorer. Available at: OECD Data Explorer • DAC1: Flows by provider (ODA+OOF+Private) (accessed 25 March 2026)

Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows to Africa demonstrate pronounced volatility and uneven regional distribution which undermine the continent's development financing stability. Furthermore, FDI inflows to Africa remain very low compared to the total flows to Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean

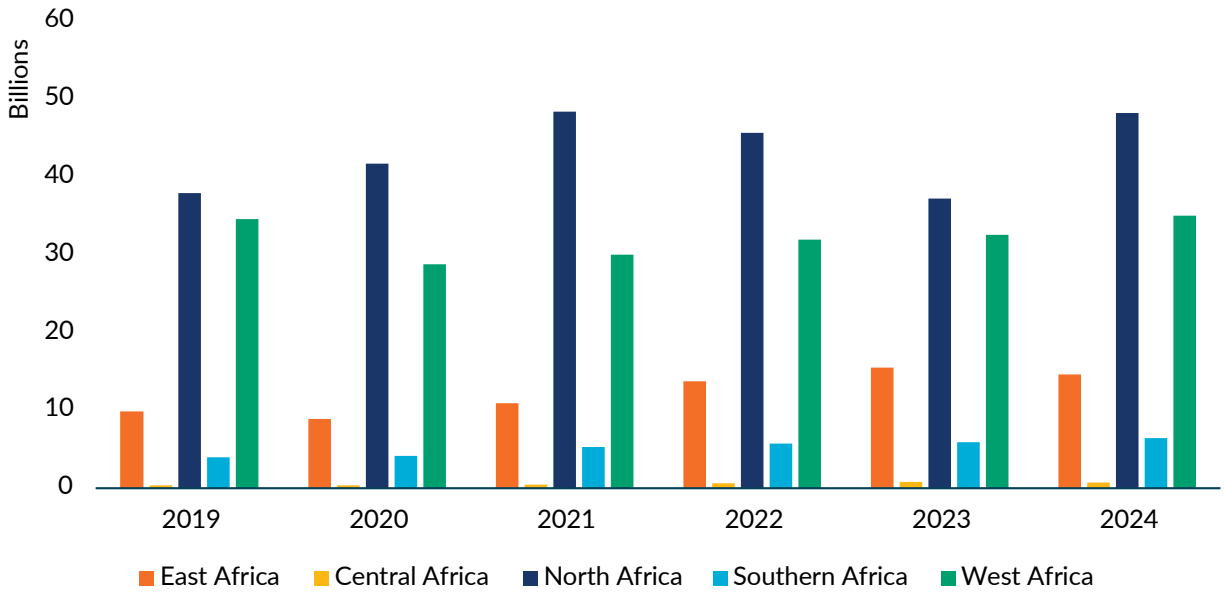
Figure 6.4: FDI inflows (millions of US$), 2015–2023, regional comparison



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Remittances to Africa demonstrated remarkable resilience and growth between 2019 and 2024, with total inflows increasing from approximately US$ 86 billion to US$ 104.5 billion. The volume and share of GDP continue to exhibit positive trends for Africa, outperforming global, Asian, and Latin America and the Caribbean averages. North Africa consistently recorded the highest absolute remittance inflows across all the African subregions, receiving between US$ 37 billion and US$ 48 billion annually between 2019 and 2024. West Africa follows as the second largest recipient region, with annual inflows ranging from US$ 28.7 to US$ 34.5 billion, showing a strong upward trend through 2024. East, Central and Southern Africa all received smaller volumes. The stability of Africa's remittances shows resilience to global economic disruptions and strong remittance-sending capacity among its diaspora communities.

Figure 6.5: Personal remittances received (billions of current US$), 2019–2024

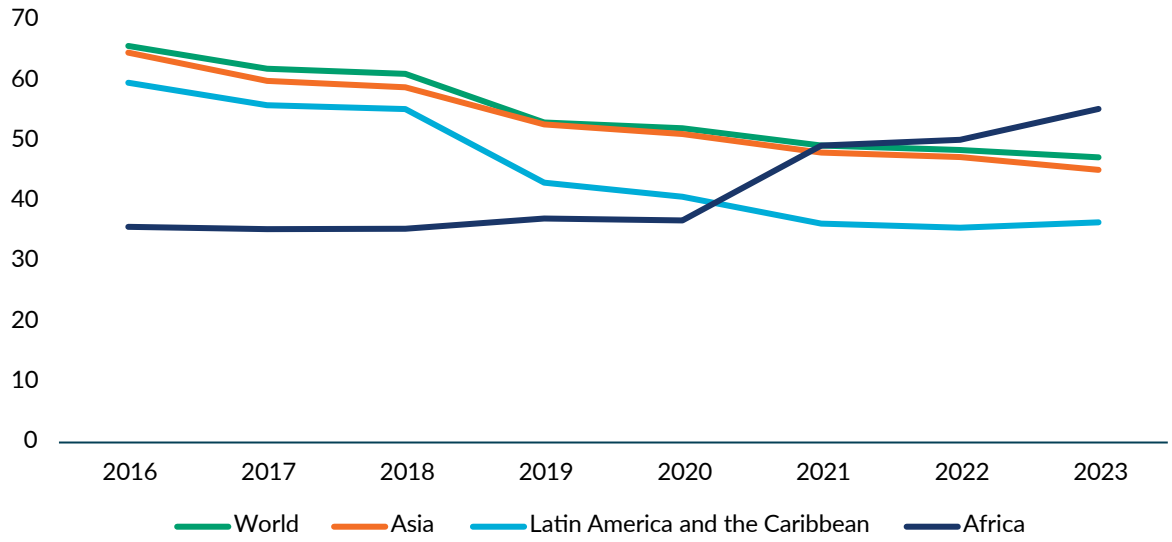


Source: World Bank Group (2026)

High-quality and timely data are crucial for monitoring progress on the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and national plans. Over the past decade, African data infrastructure has improved, with performance index scores rising across all subregions from 2019 to 2023, at which point North and Southern Africa led, followed closely by West Africa.

Progress on SDG 17 is mixed, with gains in data systems but persistent financing challenges.

Figure 6.6: Data infrastructure performance index, 2016–2023, regional comparison



Source: UN DESA (2026)

Box 6.2: Zambia's digital transformation – boosting revenue collection through digitized public services

Zambia has leveraged digital transformation to strengthen domestic resource mobilization and improve public sector efficiency. As part of its public service modernization agenda, the Zambian government has prioritized the digitization of government services to enhance transparency, reduce leakages and improve revenue collection.

At the centre of this reform is the Government Service Bus (GSB), a digital platform that integrates and automates government services and payment systems. By October 2025, 380 government services had been onboarded onto the GSB, enabling real-time digital capture and traceability of public transactions.

The reform has contributed to significant gains in both tax and non-tax revenue (NTR) collection. NTR increased from US$ 0.51 billion in 2022 to US$ 1.21 billion in 2024, a 137 percent increase within two years, and reached US$ 1.27 billion by October 2025. Beyond revenue gains, the GSB has strengthened transparency, oversight and fiscal management across public institutions.

Zambia's experience demonstrates how investment in digital public infrastructure can enhance domestic resource mobilization and support sustainable development by strengthening sustainable financing for development.

Source: Government of Zambia (2025) Case study provided for the 2026 ASDR input.

Action Agenda for Stronger Collaboration and Financing

Goal 17 focuses on essential enablers as the key drivers for achieving all SDGs. It serves as a cornerstone for realizing the 2030 Agenda. Hence, the following key actions should be taken.

- **Strengthen revenue-driven fiscal consolidation:** Focus on mobilizing revenue rather than cutting spending to protect key investments, by broadening tax bases, leveraging digital tools, ensuring transparency, cushioning vulnerable groups and implementing medium-term revenue strategies to unlock Africa's fiscal potential.
- **Reform international and climate finance:** Restructure ODA, blended and multilateral financing, to ensure fully disbursed, untied and concessional resources aligned with national priorities, streamline procedures, standardize metrics, and integrate climate and development finance to enhance accessibility and impact, in particular for smaller and lower-capacity countries.
- **Promote sustainable investment and regional integration:** Shift FDI strategies from costly tax incentives to quality infrastructure, stable policies and skilled labour, while accelerating regional integration, to create larger, more attractive markets for efficiency-seeking and diversified investors with support from the AfCFTA Secretary.
- **Mobilize diaspora finance and remittances:** Maximize remittances' impact by reducing transaction costs, expanding mobile money platforms, and implementing diaspora engagement strategies that mobilize skills, networks and capital, with national governments serving as the anchor. Complement these with financial literacy programmes organized by RECs, through which successful experiences can be shared among member states to channel remittances towards productive uses, and integrate diaspora financing into national development planning and macroeconomic frameworks as a structural resource.
- **Reform debt management and strengthen financing frameworks:** Accelerate Common Framework reforms to streamline procedures, include private creditors, extend eligibility and prioritize debt forgiveness, where multilateral frameworks such as the G20, MDBs and DFIs can play a key advocacy role in advancing this process. (1) Establish an African credit rating agency and reform rating methodologies to reduce risk premiums which can be led by the AU. (2) Enhance domestic debt market infrastructure with analytical tools beyond traditional Direct Selling Agents. (3) Improve transparency through robust public debt governance. (4) Mobilize regional MDBs to provide long-term, affordable financing. (5) Strengthen Africa's voice and representation in global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group.
- **Strengthen investment promotion frameworks:** Expand digital infrastructure to underserved regions, harmonize regulatory frameworks regionally, develop specialized investment promotion agencies among states and RECs, leverage the AfCFTA to create integrated markets, strengthen domestic capital markets, and prioritize investment that generates employment, fosters technology transfer and upgrades industrial capabilities.
- **Accelerate digital transformation and the development of science, technology and innovation:** Promote regional connectivity through infrastructure projects and cross-border initiatives, address digital skill gaps in software, data science and AI, and leverage PPPs to ensure affordable, equitable access across urban, rural and regional divides, enabling Africa to fully participate in the global digital economy. The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) led by the AU can further prioritize and promote cross-border projects.

- **Diversify financing sources:** Strengthen domestic revenue mobilization, expand private sector engagement, and engage philanthropic groups and corporate social responsibility initiatives, to reduce dependence on declining ODA.
- **Leverage diaspora resources for development:** Engage the African diaspora more effectively, in order to mobilize financial resources for national development by promoting structured investment channels such as diaspora bonds, encouraging remittances to support productive purposes rather than only consumption, and reducing remittance costs to increase efficiency and impact. Support the integration of diaspora funds into national development planning, including through targeted projects in infrastructure, education and climate resilience, while strengthening transparency and trust in digital platforms, to facilitate remittance-based investments.
- **Optimize public revenue and fiscal management:** (1) Broaden the tax base, reduce inefficient tax expenditures and digitalize tax administration, to improve transparency and efficiency. (2) Implement progressive taxation to ensure the burden does not disproportionately fall on the poorest segments. (3) Enhance non-tax revenue streams and integrate revenue collection with national development planning.
- **Reform international financial architecture:** (1) Reduce the cost of sovereign borrowing and expand access to long-term concessional finance. (2) Harmonize climate finance with development finance for efficiency. (3) Establish an African credit rating agency to strengthen debt sustainability and regional financial autonomy.
- **Promote sustainable investment and trade integration:** (1) Deepen regional integration and maximize AfCFTA benefits through collaboration among regulatory bodies and policymakers; the AfCFTA Secretary can act as the coordinator to bridge diversified stakeholders. (2) Address trade barriers and infrastructure deficits, while strengthening national productive capabilities and regional value chains. (3) Encourage sustainable FDI in diversified sectors and lower remittance costs to mobilize diaspora resources for development.
- **Strengthen capacity and data systems:** (1) Invest in trade and financial literacy capacity-building. (2) Enhance the capacity of national statistical offices through staff training and upgrading data collection infrastructure and technologies, and promote data-sharing to improve accountability, transparency and timely SDG reporting. ECA and the African Centre for Statistics can play a leading role to support member states. (3) Bridge digital connectivity gaps, especially in rural areas, to support financial inclusion and service delivery.
- **Link SDG 17 to national and regional implementation frameworks:** Align domestic reforms with integrated national financing frameworks, public financial management programmes and continental initiatives such as Agenda 2063, to ensure coherent planning, monitoring and implementation of SDG 17 actions. The Integrated Planning and Reporting Toolkit (IPRT) developed by the ECA can serve as a practical tool to support national governments in achieving this alignment.
- **Build tangible action points for SDG 17:** Develop clear, sequenced and measurable action points for SDG 17 implementation, including timelines, responsible institutions, indicative resources and risk mitigation measures. This approach ensures that high-level recommendations translate into concrete, short- and medium-term actions that can be tracked, monitored and adjusted for effective delivery across countries.

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