

Support to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Context

At the geographical crossroads between Europe and Africa, Tunisia faces a crucial task: diversifying its trade partnerships and deepening its economic ties within the African continent. Despite Africa's vast potential, Tunisia's trade with the region remains limited to 3% of its total, with 70% currently directed toward the European Union.

Nevertheless, Tunisia is actively working to address this disparity. Its entry into the COMESA free trade area in 2020 catalyzed the establishment of strong regional economic ties, fostering stronger South-South cooperation and access to a broader market landscape. Notably, COMESA already accounted for a substantial 31.4% of Tunisia's trade with the rest of Africa in 2023, demonstrating its rapid effectiveness and unlocking new market opportunities, such as Kenya and Madagascar, which had no trade relations with Tunisia until their joint participation in COMESA.

Furthermore, Tunisia's commitment to African integration was strengthened with the ratification of the AfCFTA agreement in August 2020. This historic agreement, envisioned as the largest free trade area in the world in terms of the number of member states and population, offers significant opportunities. Tunisia has positioned itself as a leader in the implementation of AfCFTA, participating in the guided trade initiative with seven other countries in the area and already completing over 140 trade operations under this agreement.

Moreover, the tariff reductions under AfCFTA, estimated at around 10%, provide a compelling incentive for Tunisian traders to explore the largely untapped Sub-Saharan African market.

As Tunisia continues its path toward economic diversification and regional cooperation, it seeks to play an active role in shaping an

"integrated, prosperous, and peaceful" Africa, in line with the African Union's Agenda 2063

Our approach

The AfCFTA Support Project consists of various funding lines to support trade agreements with Africa in Tunisia. The project is primarily mandated by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and provides advisory services on the negotiations and implementation of intra-African trade agreements.

Project name	Support to the AfCFTA
Commissioned by	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Component and other international partners	Tunisia component of the Programme Support to the African Continental Free Trade Area;
Main executing-agency	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Political partner in Tunisia	Tunisian Ministry of Trade and Export Development
Budget	1.8 Mio. EUR
Duration	08/2020 - 06/2026



Objective

The "AfCFTA Support Project" focuses on the AfCFTA trade agreements.

To achieve that, the project focuses its support on the following key areas:



Area of intervention 1: AfCFTA negotiations are supported and concluded.



Area of intervention 2: Necessary conditions for the utilization of AfCFTA are in place



Area of intervention 3: Ownership of the AfCFTA agreement and its tools by the private sector.

Partner structure in Tunisia

Alongside central cooperation with our political partner – the Ministry of Trade and Export Development – activities are implemented with other key institutions such as the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Tunisia and the Directorate General of Customs. The project also supports the private sector by promoting public-private dialogues on issues related to trade agreements.

Areas of GIZ support under the Tunisia component

The project implements a series of measures aimed at helping both public and private actors take advantage of the opportunities offered by these trade agreements.

At a policy level (area of intervention 1), public actors receive guidance on technical trade issues, while coordination between various ministries is facilitated to help finalize the negotiations for the AfCFTA agreement.

To improve the implementation of trade agreements (area of intervention 2), selected actors, such as Tunisian chambers, associations, or customs authorities, are informed about the agreements and advised on selected topics such as rules of origin.

To enable the private sector to benefit from the agreements (area of intervention 3), the project relies primarily on information formats. A special focus is on supporting women-led businesses and the involvement of Tunisian women in negotiations on and implementation of trade agreements with Africa.

An example from the field

The website www.africatradeagreements.tn, developed by the project and launched in November 2020, is becoming a key communications and information platform on the African trade agreements ratified by Tunisia, namely the AfCFTA and COMESA agreements, with users exceeding 15,000.

Since May 2023, the AfCFTA agreement has actively borne fruit, with over 140 AfCFTA certificates of origin issued for Tunisian exports to the African continent with reduced customs tariffs. This places Tunisia in second place among the nations successfully implementing the agreement. This notable achievement marks a significant step forward in strengthening trade within the AfCFTA framework, paving the way for increased opportunities for Tunisian businesses across Africa.

Another important step was the creation of a national AfCFTA committee. This committee represents a crucial structure for coordination and strategic decision-making, playing a key role in the implementation of the AfCFTA agreement at both the national and continental levels.

As part of a public-private dialogue, a coalition representing the private sector was established to address the lack of cohesion and the need for advocacy in the negotiations and implementation of trade agreements with Africa. The coalition is an integral part of the national AfCFTA committee, strengthening the inclusion of the private sector in Tunisia's integration process into the AfCFTA.

To enhance ownership of the AfCFTA, training sessions were held in February 2025 with the Ministry of Trade and Customs. Targeting CCI members and private sector representatives (UTICA, CONNECT, TABC, CNFCE), the sessions covered eight regions, engaging 217 companies, 40 CCI staff, and over 50% women. This initiative boosted Tunisian businesses' knowledge and engagement with the agreement.

Starting from mid-2025, Tunisian companies will be able to apply for an AfCFTA certificate of origin online.

As part of the bilateral portfolio, more than 700 Tunisian companies have received direct support to expand their activities in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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