At the 60th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS, held in Abuja on Sunday 12 December, 2021, leaders of West African countries **have agreed** to the reopening of all land borders in the region starting from January 1, 2022.

According to ECOWAS, between 2020 and 2021 member States have lost 6.7 per cent of the GDP (about 50 billion USD) due to border closures, with a negative impact on the economy of the region and intra-community trade.

The land border closure policies adopted by some West African States have been justified not only with the need to contain the COVID-19 spread, but in some cases also with the aim of reducing the smuggling of agricultural products, illegal drugs and arms. Such measures, in most cases, have been accompanied by a massive deployment of security agencies at checkpoints mounted at borders or along main trade routes connecting ECOWAS States.

This is the case of Nigeria for instance. In August 2019, the country shut down its land borders with neighbouring Benin, Cameroon, Chad and Niger within a protectionist import-substitution strategy aimed at stimulating the internal production of some food items that the country used to import from abroad, such as rice , and that passed in transit through these States. This strategy however has not produced the expected results, as the country is experiencing an increase in smuggling of food and a strong food inflation. Moreover, the adoption of such measures led to tensions with neighbouring States (ex. Benin), putting under threat the principle of free movement of persons and goods which is at the basis of the ECOWAS Treaties. In December 2020, only four border posts (Seme-Kraké, Illela, Maigatari and Mfun) were reopened, at the point that in June 2021, 11 members of Nigeria's House of Representatives **sponsored a motion** to ask the reopening of all the remaining ones.

Other countries in West Africa that shut their borders are Ghana, where key transit points for trade with neighboring countries have been closed, like Noe , at the border with Cote d'Ivoire. Guinea Conakry has also closed its land borders with Senegal and other neighbouring countries.