

Malawi has [ratified](#) the Tripartite Free Trade Agreement (TFTA), bringing the total number of states that have done so to 12. The pace of ratification of the TFTA has been slow so far, but the agreement is close now to enter into force. To this end, a minimum threshold of 14 ratifications is needed. Countries that have ratified the Tripartite are Egypt, Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Eswatini, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi. The next country that is expected to ratify the agreement is Tanzania, since government authorities have [reported](#) one year ago to have initiated the ratification process.

The Tripartite FTA is an inter-regional co-operation and integration arrangement amongst countries of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The Tripartite FTA was launched in June 2015 in Sharm-el-Sheik, Egypt to enhance integration among the Tripartite Member/Partner States in view of the establishment of a Free Trade Area amongst COMESA, EAC and SADC. In addition, the Tripartite aims at harmonising trade and investment regimes and infrastructure programmes focusing on developing joint inter-regional infrastructure, and co-operation on transport and communications and financing of regional infrastructure projects.

In [March 2023](#), the Tripartite Council of Ministers also concluded an Agreement on the movement of businesspersons in the Tripartite region to facilitate the movement of traders and other professional service providers within the territories of the 3 Regional Economic Communities (RECs) by relaxing visa requirements for such categories. In addition, specific regulations were approved to facilitate cross-border road transport in the 3 RECs, namely: a Vehicle Load Management Agreement (VLMA), and a Multilateral Cross Border Road Transport Agreement (MCBRTA).

The Tripartite is an important achievement not only for the 3 RECs, but for the entire continent and a key step in the establishment of the African Economic Community (AEC) under the Treaty of Abuja and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA drew a lot of lessons from the Tripartite process in terms of general architecture of the agreement (including its protocols and annexes), and modalities and instruments for negotiating the trade in goods arrangements. Also, the [AfCFTA Non-tariff Barriers reporting and monitoring system](#) has been modeled upon the Tripartite [one](#)

At its 18th Ordinary Session of January 2012, the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the Decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.394\(XVIII\), Doc. EX.CL/700\(XX\)](#) , with which the Assembly mandated the establishment of an FTA at a continental level within the indicative deadline of 2017. Such a decision also encouraged the existing RECs to complete their processes of establishment of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) within their territories as stipulated by article 6 of the Abuja Treaty, and the conclusion of inter-REC arrangements similar to the Tripartite. Even before this decision was adopted, the [Minimum Integration Programme \(MIP\)](#), a strategic continental framework for the African integration process elaborated by the AU Commission in close cooperation with the RECs and adopted in 2009, encouraged the coordination, convergence and collaboration among the RECs on the example of the Tripartite so to achieve the ultimate objective of the establishment of the AEC.