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New York Office



United Nations
Office for South-South Cooperation

Solidarity in Action: Accelerating Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals through South-South and Triangular Cooperation

Cross-regional dialogue on regional integration and cooperation trends

23 October 2025 | 9-10:30 AM EDT

Contribution to the Celebration of United Nations Day

Hybrid: Conference Room 1521, UN Secretariat Building | [Online](#)

To register: <https://forms.office.com/e/NBR0u2kvGB>

Event page: <https://southsouth-galaxy.org/events/solidarity-in-action-accelerating-progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-through-south-south-and-triangular-cooperation/>
or <https://www.un.org/regionalcommissionsnyoffice/news/cross-regional-dialogue-regional-integration-and-cooperation-trends>

Concept Note

Hosts/Conveners:

- UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)
- UN Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO)

In collaboration with:

- UN Regional Economic Commissions: ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA and UNECE
- Emerging Development Partners (EDP) Network

Background

The imperatives

Global uncertainties and economic fragmentation are putting development progress at risk - straining multilateral institutions and relations crucial to collective action, disrupting trade and investment flows fundamental to growth, and deepening financial distress at a time of declining development financing. Stronger international cooperation is increasingly vital to protect development gains. By reinforcing institutions for collective action, expanding trade and investment linkages that drive growth, and mobilizing financing for sustainable development, countries can better navigate today's uncertainties and build resilience for the future.

The path forward is uneven: global growth is forecast at just 2.8% in 2025, while rising fragmentation could shrink global GDP by up to 7%. Trade and investment trends, on an upward trajectory since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, are expected to reverse in light of trade policy shocks (such as uptick

of tariffs) and increasing trade tensions. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with just 35 percent of its targets on track for achievement by 2030 and 18 percent regressing, are at further risk.¹ Persistent development challenges, combined with geopolitical and economic fragmentation, financial distress, and instability, are hitting regions in distinct ways — shaping national SDG progress and regional prospects alike. In this context, regional integration and cooperation are vital, not only for the growth of countries and regions, but also for addressing cross-border challenges and securing a peaceful, sustainable global future.

While the spirit of shared values and enhanced cooperation to collectively address global challenges is weakening, regional and subregional cooperation are holding steady as building blocks of multilateralism bringing countries together to take on common cross-border challenges.

This dialogue comes at a critical juncture, providing one of the few dedicated spaces for regional commissions and South-South actors to jointly reflect on integration trends and identify practical pathways to accelerate SDG progress.

Opportunities

Amidst the landscape of turbulence, certain trends offer opportunities for the global South that, when leveraged strategically, can both cushion shocks and drive progress.

- **South-South economic cooperation and integration are shifting the socio-economic profiles of countries and whole regions.**² South-South trade (trade among developing countries) has been “expanding at a faster pace” than other trade flows, surpassing North-South trade in 2023 (accounting for about one third of global trade) and contributing up to 42% of global GDP.³
- **The landscape of the Global South continues to shift dramatically.** Among the countries viewed traditionally as the global South are some of the world’s most dynamic economies today. Once known as “aid recipients,” these countries have gained new capacities and are taking on greater roles at the regional and global level befitting their new aspirations and self-defined growth trajectories.
- **Relations among the global South countries have been transforming in significant ways, with implications for development cooperation itself.** The increased trade relations among the global South not only broadened developing countries’ access to each other’s markets, but also embedded or deepened development cooperation based on the principles of solidarity and mutual benefit.

Snapshots of regional integration trends across regions

- **Africa:** Regional integration in Africa is advancing, with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) representing a major milestone in Africa’s regional integration journey towards establishing the African Economic Community. Full implementation of the AfCFTA is expected

¹ See <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/global-growth-remain-subdued-2025-amid-uncertainty-un-report-warns>; <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2025/04/22/world-economic-outlook-april-2025>; and <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-goals>

² See <https://unctad.org/news/un-trade-and-development-chief-urges-stronger-collective-action-transform-global-souths>, <https://www.rolandberger.com/en/Insights/Publications/Global-South-Beyond-BRICS.html>

³ <https://unctad.org/publication/trade-and-development-foresights-2025-under-pressure-uncertainty-reshapes-global>; https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/gdsinf2025d1_en.pdf

to increase the value of intra-Africa trade by an estimated 33.5% (\$196.4 billion) by 2045.⁴ The Africa Regional Integration Index shows an upward trend; however, regional trade integration has lagged with only 14% of Africa’s exports and imports taking place within the continent in 2022.⁵

- **Arab Region:** The 2024 Arab Sustainable Development Report notes that “regional economic integration reemerged as critical in the context of trade, digital connectivity, health services, and food security among others”, but broader regional integration remains weak with great impact on trade (intraregional trade represents around 13% of total trade), conflict management and state of the economy.⁶ The Pan-Arab Free Trade Area agreement is one of the efforts towards market integration in the region.
- **Asia-Pacific:** The region has made significant strides in regional integration over the past two decades, especially in investment, movement of people and trade, with intraregional trade accounting for over 56% the region’s total imports and 53% of its total exports in 2024.⁷ The number of intra-Asian Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) surged from 4 in 1990 to 77 by 2023, now making up 45% of all global PTAs. However, overlapping trade agreements create complexity and compliance costs, especially for SMEs, and utilization rates are low due to complex rules of origin and administrative burdens. Regional integration has driven progress in poverty reduction, health, and infrastructure (Goals 1, 3, 9), but has yet to translate into gains in decent work, climate action, or reduced inequalities.⁸
- **Latin America and the Caribbean:** Regional integration is recognized in this region as vital for accelerating SDG progress, but only 16% of Latin American trade currently is intraregional.⁹ Regional integration is uneven, with significant subregional differences requiring differentiated strategies and cooperation mechanisms. The region faces three persistent “development traps”: low growth capacity, high inequality, and weak institutional/governance capacity.¹⁰
- **Pan-European (Europe and Central Asia) and Mediterranean Regions:** Regional integration trends are multifaceted in these regions, with Western Europe’s integration (via the EU) being among the deepest in the world while Central Asia remains among the least connected regions globally.¹¹ The Mediterranean, a long-standing channel and hub for trade as well as cultural exchanges, has maintained relevance in intra-regional and global markets but trade has been largely in its Northern shores. About 70% of cargo trade in the Mediterranean is between European ports, with only 15% between Europe and North Africa and 5% between countries in Middle East and North Africa.¹²

Rationale: Consolidating action through South-South & triangular cooperation at the regional level

The Trade and Development Foresight 2025 calls for leveraging multilateral frameworks and regional arrangements as well as South-South economic integration to navigate uncertainties and propel growth.¹³ The future of regional integration however lies in ensuring its benefits are equitably

⁴ <https://www.uneca.org/stories/the-afcfcta%2C-boosting-regional-integration-through-trade#:~:text=The%20focus%20of%20the%20AfCFTA,Africa's%20hesitancy%20in%20this%20area>

⁵ <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/news/2025/regional-integration-africa-2024-iiag-overview>

⁶ <https://www.unescwa.org/publications/arab-sustainable-development-report-2024>

⁷ <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/2500093E.pdf>

⁸ [Asian Economic Integration Report 2025; Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025: Engaging communities to close the evidence gap](#)

⁹ <https://unctad.org/news/latin-america-regional-integration-enhance-green-industry-and-economic-resilience>

¹⁰ <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/860a2fee-2aa0-4dac-b371-9d852b8e74a2/content>

¹¹ [Critical Connections: Promoting Economic Growth and Resilience in Europe and Central Asia](#)

¹² <https://ufmsecretariat.org/regionalintegration/#:~:text=Regional%20integration%20can%20enable%20countries,and%20growth%20in%20the%20region>

¹³ <https://unctad.org/publication/trade-and-development-foresights-2025-under-pressure-uncertainty-reshapes-global>

distributed. When rooted in the principles of South-South and triangular cooperation, integration delivers tangible impact.

South-South and triangular cooperation (SS&TrC), long viewed as complement to traditional North-South development cooperation, are increasingly seen as crucial pillar in the kind of action (and support) countries of the global South require to grow, build resilience, and achieve development priorities. These cooperation modalities channel development solutions anchored in the experience of the global South; enable collaborations where partners accompany each one's development journey; and deliver support that ensures context specificities and mutual benefit with no burden.

Objectives and Expected Outcomes

This dialogue takes place at a pivotal moment, offering a dedicated platform for regional commissions and South-South actors to come together, better understand anticipate emerging integration trends, and chart innovative pathways to accelerate sustainable development — advancing the SDGs and shaping a more resilient, inclusive future overall.

This cross-regional dialogue is designed therefore to:

- **Facilitate cross-regional exchanges** on emerging trends and regional responses to evolving pressures and uncertainties
- **Highlight effective practices and approaches** enabled by or through SS & TrC that would be potentially replicable in other regions
- **Explore pathways to broaden partnerships** (particularly with and among entities with regional focus) to enhance support for SDG acceleration over the next five years
- **Identify potential areas of joint action** planned by UNOSSC and RCNYO to support SDG acceleration across regions
- **Provide opportunities for Member States to gain insights into regional opportunities** and challenges, learn about replicable practices, and explore partnerships that can directly support their national SDG implementation

Programme Summary

(Please see Programme Details in separate document)

Time	Segment	Name
09:00- 09:05	Opening Segment (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Thilmeeza Hussain, Director, Regional Commissions NY Office (RCNYO) • Ms. Dima Al Khatib, Director, UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)
09:05- 09:20	Regional Integration and Cooperation: Trends Across Regions (15 minutes)	<i>Regional Commissions to share key trends, raising what they are seeing as top priorities for action where SS&TrC will be crucial</i>
09:20-10:25	Reflections and Dialogue: Across Sectors and Regions (50 minutes)	<i>Representatives of regional bodies and groupings across regions and across sectors reflecting on trends and priorities; sharing practices, and exploring recommendations for potential action</i>

<i>advancing regional SS&TrC for regional integration and cooperation</i>		
10:25-10:30	Next Steps and Closing Remarks (5 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Thilmeeza Hussain, Director, Regional Commissions NY Office (RCNYO) • Ms. Dima Al Khatib, Director, UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

About the UN Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC)

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to promote, facilitate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system. UNOSSC, hosted by UNDP since 1974, receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation.

About the UN Regional Commission NY Office (UNRCNYO)

The Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO) is a joint office for coordination, representation, and policy advice at the global level for the five United Nations Regional Commissions, namely the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Europe and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

About the Emerging Development Partners (EDP) Network

The EDP Network is a group of countries that have made important economic, social, and environmental advances and are taking on new roles at regional and global levels to help address development challenges. Once viewed as developing countries, they have become some of the world’s most dynamic economies today and represent increasing share of global GDP. Inspired by the spirit of solidarity, they seek to strengthen South-South and triangular partnerships and collaborations in support of developing countries, leveraging their own experience for context-adapted solutions. The Network includes Azerbaijan, Colombia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Philippines, Thailand and Turkiye.