



ECOWAS REGIONAL COMPETITION AUTHORITY  
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# INAUGURAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE ECOWAS REGIONAL COMPETITION AUTHORITY (ERCA)

## THEME

**Competition Policy and Market Integration in ECOWAS: Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities**

## CONCEPT NOTE

### I. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

#### Background

Regional economic integration remains one of the most important instruments for accelerating economic transformation, industrialization, and sustainable development in West Africa. In an increasingly interconnected global economy characterized by digitalization, cross-border trade, regional value chains, and rapid technological change, competitive markets are essential to ensuring efficient resource allocation, innovation, investment, consumer welfare, and inclusive growth. Effective competition regimes prevent anti-competitive conduct, control anti-competitive mergers, address abuses of market power, and create a level playing field for businesses. By fostering competitive markets, competition policy contributes to productivity growth, lower prices, enhanced consumer choice, and increased economic opportunities.

As a result of the benefits of competition policy, it is now recognized as a critical pillar of regional integration. Recognizing the importance of competition policy to regional integration, ECOWAS established a regional competition framework and operationalized the ECOWAS Regional Competition Authority (ERCA) in 2019. Since becoming operational, ERCA has undertaken significant efforts to strengthen competition enforcement and advocacy across the region, including:

- Operationalization of ECOWAS competition rules through regulations, procedural manuals, and enforcement frameworks;
- Review and assessment of mergers and acquisitions with regional implications;
- Technical assistance to Member States in developing and reforming national competition regimes;
- Promotion of cooperation and information-sharing among national competition authorities;
- Market studies and sector inquiries;
- Awareness-raising among public institutions, businesses, and consumers; and

- Collaboration with regional and international competition institutions and networks.

Despite these achievements, important challenges continue to affect the effectiveness of competition law enforcement and the realization of an integrated regional market. These include:

- Persistent market fragmentation caused by non-tariff barriers and infrastructure constraints;
- Divergent legal and regulatory frameworks across Member States;
- Limited institutional and technical capacity of national competition authorities;
- High levels of informality in regional markets;
- Market concentration in key sectors such as telecommunications, energy, transport, agribusiness, and digital services;
- Complexities associated with merger review and economic analysis;
- The need for stronger cooperation mechanisms between ERCA, national authorities, sector regulators, and regional institutions;
- Emerging competition concerns arising from digital markets, artificial intelligence, data governance, platform economies, and sustainability initiatives;
- New enforcement challenges associated with the implementation of the AfCFTA Competition Protocol and the interaction between continental and regional competition regimes.

Following the challenges that ERCA has faced in the enforcement of the ECOWAS competition law and policy, a central policy question emerges:

**How can competition policy be strengthened to promote market integration, investment, innovation, competitiveness, and inclusive development within ECOWAS?**

Against this background, the inaugural Annual Conference of ERCA is designed to address this question by providing a high-level platform for dialogue among policymakers, regulators, competition authorities, businesses, academics, legal practitioners, development partners, and international experts.

To enrich policy discussions and generate evidence-based recommendations, the Conference will include a Call for Papers that invites academics, researchers, regulators, legal practitioners, economists, policymakers, and other stakeholders to contribute original research and policy-oriented analyses on key competition law and policy issues relevant to the ECOWAS region. Selected papers will be presented during thematic sessions and breakout discussions and will contribute to the Conference outcomes and recommendations.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE**

### **General Objective**

To examine the institutional, legal, regulatory, and economic dimensions of competition policy in ECOWAS and identify practical strategies for strengthening competition enforcement and regional market integration.

### **Specific Objectives**

The Conference seeks to:

- Review developments in the ECOWAS competition regime and assess progress achieved by ERCA;
- Strengthen cooperation among national, regional, and international competition authorities;
- Promote harmonization of competition laws and enforcement practices;
- Examine competition challenges in strategic and emerging sectors;
- Discuss competition issues arising from digital markets and technological transformation;
- Explore reforms necessary to improve compliance and enforcement effectiveness;
- Share international experiences and best practices relevant to the ECOWAS context;
- Promote research, policy dialogue, and knowledge-sharing through a peer-reviewed Call for Papers process;
- Formulate recommendations to strengthen competition policy as a driver of regional integration and economic transformation.

## **III. TARGET PARTICIPANTS**

The Conference will bring together:

- Public authorities, ministries and government agencies;
- Competition authorities of ECOWAS Member States;
- Representatives of ECOWAS institutions;
- Sector regulatory authorities;
- Regional and international competition agencies;
- AfCFTA Secretariat;
- International organizations and development partners;
- Judges and legal practitioners;
- Academics and researchers;
- Universities, research institutions, and think tanks;
- Private sector representatives;
- Consumer protection organizations; and
- Professional associations and civil society organizations.

## **IV. CONFERENCE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK**

### **Day 1: Institutional Framework and Regional Cooperation**

#### **Competition Policy as a Pillar of Regional Economic Integration**

- Competition and economic integration;
- Regional competition governance; and
- International experiences and lessons for ECOWAS.

#### **Regional and Cross-Border Cooperation in Competition Enforcement**

- Cooperation between ERCA and national competition authorities;
- Information sharing and joint investigations;
- Cooperation with sector regulators; and
- Cross-border merger review and enforcement.

#### **Harmonization of National and Regional Competition Frameworks**

- Alignment of national laws with ECOWAS competition rules;
- Institutional convergence and legal certainty; and
- Lessons from other regional competition regimes.

#### **Governance and Capacity Building**

- Independence of competition authorities;
- Technical and operational capacity strengthening; and
- Institutional reforms and sustainable financing.

### **Day 2: Competition, Market Transformation, and Strategic Sectors**

#### **Competition Policy and Regional Value Chain Integration**

- Competition and industrial development;
- Regional value chains;
- Trade facilitation and investment promotion; and
- Market integration and competitiveness.

#### **Competition in Digital Markets**

- Digital platforms and market power;
- Data governance and competition;
- Fintech, e-commerce, and digital ecosystems;
- Artificial intelligence and competition policy; and
- Lessons from global regulatory approaches.

#### **Competition Enforcement in Strategic Sectors**

- Telecommunications;
- Energy markets;
- Transport and logistics;
- Agribusiness and food systems; and

- Health and pharmaceutical markets.

### **Emerging and Cross-Cutting Issues**

- Sustainability and competition law;
- Public interest considerations;
- State-owned enterprises and state aid;
- Innovation and industrial policy; and
- Consumer welfare and economic inclusion.

## **Day 3: Reforms, Compliance, and Effective Implementation**

### **Effective Control of Market Power**

- Merger review and economic assessment;
- Abuse of dominance;
- Competition remedies; and
- Platform dominance and emerging enforcement challenges.

### **Compliance and Legal Certainty**

- Competition compliance programs;
- Corporate governance and competition law;
- Rights of defense and procedural fairness; and
- Leniency and settlement mechanisms.

### **Judicial Enforcement and Regulatory Perspectives**

- Role of courts in competition enforcement;
- Economic evidence in competition cases;
- Judicial review and legal certainty; and
- Cooperation between regulators and judicial institutions.

### **Future Priorities for Competition Policy in ECOWAS**

- Institutional strengthening of ERCA;
- Regional cooperation and enforcement coordination;
- Digital economy regulation;
- Capacity building and technical assistance; and
- Long-term roadmap for ECOWAS competition policy.

Thematic breakout sessions will be supported by papers selected through the Conference Call for Papers. These sessions will provide an opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to present innovative research and practical experiences on emerging competition law and policy issues and contribute directly to the formulation of Conference recommendations.

## **V. CALL FOR PAPERS**

As part of the Conference, ERCA invites scholars, economists, regulators, legal practitioners, judges, policymakers, researchers, development partners and competition professionals to submit abstracts and papers related to the Conference theme.

Priority areas include:

### **A. Institutional Strengthening and Governance**

- Operationalization and modernization of ECOWAS competition law;
- Institutional strengthening of ERCA and NCAs;
- Independence and autonomy of competition authorities;
- Legislative reforms and enforcement effectiveness;
- Capacity building and technical assistance.

### **B. Harmonization and Cooperation**

- Alignment of national laws with ECOWAS competition rules;
- Cross-border cooperation and information sharing;
- Relations between ERCA, UEMOA, COMESA, EAC and AfCFTA;
- Jurisdictional conflicts and conflict of laws;
- Comparative experiences from other regional competition regimes.

### **C. Strategic Sectors and Market Regulation**

- Competition in telecommunications, energy, transport and agribusiness;
- Industrial policy, sustainability and state-owned enterprises;
- Market concentration and barriers to entry;
- Competition and investment promotion.

### **D. Competition and Economic Transformation**

- Regional value chains and intra-ECOWAS trade;
- Innovation and productivity;
- Economic inclusion and consumer welfare.

### **E. Digital Markets and Emerging Competition Issues**

- Regulation of digital platforms and gatekeepers;
- AI and competition law;
- Digital market investigations;
- Data governance and market power;
- Algorithmic collusion;
- Lessons from international practice.

### **F. Informal Markets and Market Dynamism**

- Competition policy and informality;
- SME development and formalization;

- Market transparency and data collection.

## **Submission Guidelines**

### **Abstracts**

- Maximum 500 words;
- English, French or Portuguese.

### **Full Papers**

- Between 6,000 and 10,000 words.

### **Timeline**

- Call for Abstracts Opens: 25 June
- Abstract Submission Deadline: 15 July
- Notification of Abstract Acceptance: 17 July
- Full Paper Submission Deadline: 14 August
- Submission through Email: [annualconf@erca-arcc.org](mailto:annualconf@erca-arcc.org)

### **Author Information**

- Name(s);
- Institutional affiliation;
- Contact details;
- Short biography (maximum 200 words).

Selected papers may be presented during plenary sessions, thematic panels, policy roundtables, and breakout sessions and may be considered for publication in Conference proceedings or ERCA knowledge products.

## **VI. EXPECTED OUTPUTS**

The Conference is expected to produce:

- A Conference Declaration on Competition Policy and Market Integration in ECOWAS;
- Policy recommendations for strengthening competition enforcement;
- Strategic guidance for cooperation between ERCA and national competition authorities;
- Recommendations on digital markets and emerging competition issues;
- Proposals for institutional and legal reforms;
- A collection of peer-reviewed conference papers;
- Policy briefs and technical recommendations derived from conference discussions;
- Strengthened collaboration between researchers, regulators, and competition authorities;
- A regional knowledge-sharing network on competition law and policy.

## **VII. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The Conference will take place from 15–17 September 2026 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Center, Bijilo, The Gambia.



The Conference will be organized through:

- High-level opening and closing ceremonies;
- Plenary sessions;
- Expert panel discussions;
- Thematic breakout sessions;
- Presentation of selected papers;
- Policy roundtables and networking events.

**Enquiries:** Please submit any enquiries to the Conference Chair: Dr. Simeon KOFFI, by email at [annualconf@erca-arcc.org](mailto:annualconf@erca-arcc.org)