RUSSIA-AFRICA

ROSCONGRESS
Building Trust

×

VEDOMOSTI

×

FINANCIAL UNIVERSITY
UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

RUSSIA–AFRICA
FLOWS OF CAPITAL, GOODS, INFORMATION AND TALENT

ANALYTICAL REPORT
BY THE INTERNATIONAL CLUB
OF YOUNG ECONOMISTS
"NEW GENERATION"

REPORT PARTNERS

ROSCONGRESS
Building Trust

FINANCIAL UNIVERSITY
1919
UNDER THE GOVERNMENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

RUSSIA-AFRICA

INTRODUCTION **4**
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY **5**
New Generation International Club of Young Economists 6

SECTION 1. MAPPING RUSSIA'S TRADE RELATIONS WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES: THE ROLE OF TRADE AND MONETARY UNIONS AND MECHANISMS FOR EXPANSION **7**
1. Current State of Trade Between Russia and Africa 8
1.1. Actual trade figures 8
1.2. Geographical concentration 8
1.3. Composition and imbalance 9
1.4. Settlement currencies and payment infrastructure 10
1.5. Nigeria as an illustrative example 12
2. The Role of Trade and Monetary Unions 13
2.1. The Eurasian Economic Union 13
2.2. The African Continental Free Trade Area and regional economic communities 14
2.3. Monetary unions 14
2.4. Conclusions 16
3. Recommendations for Expanding Trade 17
3.1. Medium-term scenarios 17
3.2. Trade policy instruments 17
3.3. Cross-border payment mechanisms 18
4. Conclusion 20

SECTION 2. RUSSIA AND AFRICA: FROM AD HOC TRADE TO SYSTEMIC PARTICIPATION IN VALUE CHAINS **21**
1. Africa as a Resource Macroregion 22
2. Russia's Current Participation: Strong Trade Positions 24
3. Russian Models: What Endures Is What Domestic Industry Needs 25
4. Global Models: Infrastructure Around the Asset Creates Resilience 26
4.1. The Chinese model: demand, capital and infrastructure 28
4.2. A third path: technology and services rather than control over mineral resources 28
5. Conclusion: Two Development Pathways and Instruments for Russia 29

SECTION 3. THE DIGITAL DIMENSION: ANALYZING AFRICA'S DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT AND IDENTIFYING CYBERSECURITY TOOLS **30**
1. Analyzing African Countries' Digital Maturity 31
2. An Entry Point: Russia as Africa's Digital Partner 35
Analyzing Digital Projects in African Countries 36
Digital Language Models for African Countries 37
Regulation of Data Storage and Transfer 38
Cybersecurity Is Not an Add-on to Digital Exports, but a Condition of Their Sustainability 39
Skills and Awareness as Elements of the Digital Economy 41
3. Three Scenarios for a Digital Presence 41
Scenario One. Limited Presence: One or Two Countries to Test Project Economics 41
Scenario Two. Scalable Partnership: The Main Risk Is Underinvesting in the Operating Environment 42
Scenario Three. Systemic Integration: Own Investment Requires a Long Demand Horizon 43

SECTION 4. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE: ANALYZING CONSTRAINTS AND IDENTIFYING GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES **46**
Exporting Russian Education to African Countries: Objectives, Challenges and Solutions 47
1.1. Education-system parameters and trend analysis 48
1.2. Unresolved issues in education for international students 48
1.3. Conclusions 49
Russia–Africa Communication Opportunities 50
The Communication Gap Between Graduates and Employers 50
Country Differences: The Communication Dimension 51
Tasks for a Workforce and Business Cooperation Platform 53
Conclusion: Communication and Professional Search Options 54

Russia–Africa economic cooperation has reached a stage at which the scale of engagement is inseparable from its quality. Trade growth needs to translate into lasting production links, joint technological solutions and professional communities capable of sustaining long-term operations in each other's markets.

This report by the New Generation International Club of Young Economists, established by the business publication Vedomosti and the Roscongress Foundation, examines the conditions for this transition. Its authors consider four interconnected areas: trade and payments, participation in value chains, digital technologies and cybersecurity, and business communication and professional exchange.

The study's overall conclusion is that no single instrument can replace an integrated model of cooperation. Payments in national currencies require reciprocal trade flows and accessible liquidity. Investment requires infrastructure, capital protection and reliable local partners. Digital products require adaptation to languages, data requirements and users' capabilities. Educational ties require clear career prospects.

Africa, however, cannot be treated as a homogeneous market. Its countries differ in their economic structures, infrastructure quality, regulation and business practices. The challenge is therefore not to find a universal formula, but to select appropriate partnerships: where participation in production and processing makes sense, where technologies and services are in demand, and where training professionals and testing demand should come first.

It is equally important to consider African countries' own priorities: developing local production, creating jobs, upgrading skills and increasing value added. Long-term partnerships emerge where these objectives align with the economic interests of Russian companies.

The report's value lies in the young researchers' effort to combine analysis of constraints with practical proposals. It is not a ready-made roadmap for every country and industry, but a basis for substantive dialogue among businesses, universities, financial institutions and public authorities. Its central question is how established ties and mutual interest can be converted into projects delivering sustainable results for both sides.

INTRODUCTION

RUSSIA AND AFRICA: FROM TRADE GROWTH TO A SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIP

The report's main conclusion is that Russia–Africa cooperation needs to move from individual deliveries to a systemic partnership combining trade, investment, infrastructure, technology and workforce development. Trade growth provides a foundation, but is no substitute for long-term economic ties.

Trade growth requires a change in its composition. Trade exceeded $27 billion in 2025, compared with approximately $17.5 billion in 2021, but remains geographically concentrated and unbalanced. The priority is to expand reciprocal supplies of African products and complement Russian exports with investment and local processing.

Ruble settlements require accessible payment infrastructure. Changing the currency does not eliminate multistage conversion, delays or liquidity shortages. Direct banking relationships, settlement facilities and interoperable payment instruments are needed. Increased African exports to Russia should generate a reciprocal flow of funds.

Regional integration offers opportunities to scale up. Engagement between the EAEU and African groupings, alignment of standards and use of tariff preferences can widen market access. The choice of country and operating model must nevertheless account for differences in trade, exchange-rate and regulatory regimes.

Industrial partnership has two pathways. Where Russian processors need the raw materials, investment and long-term procurement contracts offer opportunities. In other sectors, the opportunities lie in technology and equipment supplies, engineering and services. Financing, infrastructure and committed local partners underpin project sustainability.

Digital exports must include the conditions for secure operation. A promising offering is an applied product with localization, data compliance, cyber protection and ongoing support. Scaling is justified when the reuse of technology and expertise reduces the cost of subsequent deployments.

Educational ties must become professional ties. The number of African students at Russian universities exceeded 37,000 in 2026. The proposed inter-university platform should connect professionals with employers through vacancies, paid project assignments and business requests, maintaining alumni contacts after their return home.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The authors of the trade section estimate potential trade by 2030 at $35–38 billion in the baseline scenario and $45–50 billion in the optimistic scenario. These are indicative estimates: outcomes depend on payment infrastructure, reciprocal exports and a broader geographical scope of cooperation.

«NEW GENERATION» INTERNATIONAL CLUB OF YOUNG ECONOMISTS

The «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists was established as a forum for building professional trust, intellectual inquiry and collaboration for those who will shape the economic thinking of the future. The project rests on a simple but fundamentally important idea: bringing together young researchers, analysts and representatives of finance, business and public institutions who can look beyond conventional economic models and propose solutions suited to changing economic conditions.

The project was conceived and is being implemented by Vedomosti and the Roscongress Foundation. This partnership supports its development through media resources and international networks, as well as interaction among young economists, experts, businesses and public authorities. An expert network is also taking shape around the project, involving established economists and representatives of universities, government agencies, development institutions and corporations.

Community members come from diverse professional backgrounds: academic, corporate, financial and international. Their roles differ: some lead research and academic work, while others contribute experience from financial regulators, business, international institutions and applied economic analysis. The club's academic advisers are Pavel Seleznev, Dean of the Faculty of International Economic Relations at the Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation, and Alexander Shirov, Director of the Institute of Economic Forecasting of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

The club's first output was the joint analytical report Economic Growth Through the Eyes of Young Economists: A Reality Check. It launched the New Generation club's research series and defined the project's research framework rather than offering a set of ready-made answers: young authors seek to combine theory, practice, international experience and an interdisciplinary perspective. https://cdn.vedomosti.ru/application/2026/47/1dd6zd/original-1rz8.pdf

Scan the QR code to access additional materials and expert commentary.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAPPING RUSSIA'S TRADE RELATIONS WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES: THE ROLE OF TRADE AND MONETARY UNIONS AND MECHANISMS FOR EXPANSION

SECTION EXPERTS



DAVID MONASTYRSKY*

Founder of the International Community of Young Central Bankers

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists



KELECHUKWU GODFREY

former Central Bank of Nigeria employee

Financial Consultant and Analyst, MTWI Financial Services

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists

* The views expressed by the author in this report reflect the author's own position and are independent of their official status

1. CURRENT STATE OF TRADE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA

1.1 Trade trends

In mid-2026, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that trade with African countries had exceeded $27 billion in 2025 and was "growing rapidly." The corresponding figure for 2021 was approximately $17.5 billion, implying growth of more than 50% in four years despite the sanctions environment. Agriculture is the main driver: Russian agricultural exports to Africa grew by 19% in 2024 to more than $7 billion, primarily on the back of wheat[1,2,3].

1.2 Geographical concentration

Russia's main trading partners on the continent are concentrated in North Africa. According to Russian data for 2021, Egypt and Algeria accounted for approximately 44% of Russia–Africa trade, and the five largest partners for about two-thirds. Sub-Saharan Africa, home to most of the continent's population and its fastest-growing consumer markets, accounted for a comparatively small share[4].

Russia has restricted the publication of detailed customs statistics since 2022. Trends can nevertheless be assessed using African partners' data in UN Comtrade, the world's largest database of international merchandise trade, maintained by the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD). Table 1 compares the 12 reporting partners included in the sample over 2021–2024. Their combined trade with Russia increased by approximately 16% between 2021 and 2024, from $12.2 billion to $14.1 billion, but growth was uneven. Trade with Egypt rose by approximately 50% to $6.6 billion and now represents almost half of the reported total. Trade with Tunisia almost tripled; trade with Burkina Faso increased more than tenfold from a very low base; and trade with Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique each rose by more than 50%. Trade with Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Nigeria, by contrast, was lower in 2024 than in 2021 (Nigeria's trade fell sharply after peaking in 2023).

1. https://tass.ru/ekonomika/27871019

2. https://tass.ru/info/18376297

3. https://поле.рф/journal/publication/rossiya-uvelichila-eksport-agroprodukcii-v-afriku-na-19-v-2024-godu

4. https://tass.ru/info/18376297

RUSSIA'S MAIN AFRICAN TRADING PARTNERS, 2021–2024: MIRROR DATA (TRADE TURNOVER*, $ BILLION)

Country	2021	2023	2024	Change, 2021–2024,%
Egypt	4.42	5.51	6.61	+50
Tunisia	0.62	2.13	1.77	+188
Senegal	1.34	0.83	0.95	-29
South Africa	1.26	0.81	0.86	-32
Burkina Faso	0.07	0.52	0.75	+947
Morocco	2.40	0.99	0.72	-70
Nigeria	0.92	1.52	0.67	-27
Kenya	0.39	0.62	0.64	+65
Côte d'Ivoire	0.38	0.56	0.47	+21
Tanzania	0.20	0.39	0.30	+54
Uganda	0.15	0.22	0.23	+57
Mozambique	0.11	0.14	0.16	+54
Total, 12 main partners	**12.24**	**14.25**	**14.14**	**+16**

* Trade turnover is the partner's imports from Russia plus its exports to Russia.
Source: CEPII BACI database via the Observatory of Economic Complexity, based on UN Comtrade; authors' calculations. Algeria, Libya and Sudan did not report data for 2024 and are excluded from the table (for reference: Algeria's trade was $1.5 billion in 2021)[5].

1.3 Composition and imbalance

The composition of trade explains its imbalance. Russia supplies goods that many African economies lack: grain (primarily wheat), fertilizers, fuel (and refined petroleum products) and machinery. African exports to Russia are more limited, consisting mainly of citrus fruit, cocoa, coffee, tobacco and other agricultural products, as well as some minerals. In 2020, Russia exported approximately $7.75 worth of goods to Africa for every dollar of imports[6].

5. https://oec.world/en/profile/country/rus

6. https://www.ecofinagency.com/public-management/0903-43450-africa-imports-seven-times-more-russian-products-than-it-exports-to-moscow

This imbalance matters for both currency and trade policy. When goods mostly move in one direction, African importers must continually purchase foreign currency to pay Russian suppliers, while the natural inflow of rubles to the African side remains small. National-currency settlements cannot become self-sustaining unless African exports to Russia increase.

1.4 Settlement currencies and payment infrastructure

The currency composition of Russia–Africa settlements has changed radically in recent years. As recently as 2021, 83.1% of Russian exports and 95.7% of imports were settled in the currencies of unfriendly countries; by the end of 2025, the ruble accounted for 88.4% and 76.4%, respectively. In the first seven months of 2026, the ruble's share exceeded 90% in four months for exports and two months for imports.

CURRENCY COMPOSITION OF PAYMENTS FOR EXPORTS AND IMPORTS OF GOODS AND SERVICES BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA, %

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Exports							
Currencies of unfriendly countries	75.0	85.4	83.1	71.9	13.9	23.0	6.4
Ruble	2.7	1.9	1.7	14.5	37.8	53.6	88.4
Other currencies	22.3	12.7	15.2	13.6	48.3	23.4	5.2
Imports							
Currencies of unfriendly countries	96.1	95.6	95.7	73.7	48.0	33.2	11.0
Ruble	3.6	3.9	3.5	21.8	32.3	53.7	76.4
Other currencies	0.3	0.5	0.8	4.5	19.7	13.1	12.6

Source: Bank of Russia[7]

These changes conceal an asymmetry: receiving rubles reduces the Russian exporter's exposure to currency-conversion risks but does not eliminate sanctions-related risks. The African importer, however, first has to obtain rubles—usually by converting local currency into dollars, euros or yuan and then into rubles, often through banks in third countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye or China.

7. https://cbr.ru/vfs/statistics/credit_statistics/cur_str_new.xlsx

Each stage adds costs, delays and compliance risks, and stable channels linking the ruble to African currencies have yet to emerge.

Nevertheless, both sides have built substantial infrastructure. On the African side, the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS), launched by Afreximbank and the African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat, allows businesses to pay one another in local currencies, with final settlement through central banks. It currently operates in more than 30 countries and connects 24 central banks, over 200 commercial banks and payment systems, and 16 national payment-system operators. Between 2025 and 2026, transaction volumes increased by approximately 1,000% and values by about 120%, while reported transaction-cost savings reached 92–95%. Most major African economies also use instant payment systems; mobile banking is the principal financial tool for tens of millions of people; and stablecoins are widely used for savings and remittances in Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Ghana. On the Russian side, officials have repeatedly stated that further growth requires connecting African banks to the Bank of Russia's Financial Messaging System and shifting settlements into national currencies; public information on the number of connected African institutions remains limited[8,9,10].

THE MAIN PROBLEMS IN RUSSIA'S SETTLEMENTS WITH AFRICAN COUNTRIES CAN BE GROUPED AS FOLLOWS:

- exposure to secondary sanctions, which makes African banks with Western correspondent banking relationships cautious;
- a lack of direct correspondent relationships and ruble accounts;
- the cost and delays of converting multiple currencies;
- a lack of hedging instruments for ruble–African currency pairs;
- the trade imbalance itself, which deprives the African side of a natural source of rubles;
- the almost complete absence of accessible direct conversion channels for small businesses, traders, students and professionals moving between the two regions.

8. https://techtrendske.co.ke/2026/09/17/papss-targets-faster-adoption-as-transaction-volumes-jump-1000pc/

9. https://papss.com/

10. https://tass.ru/ekonomika/18384553

1.5 Nigeria as an illustrative example

In 2025, Nigeria imported $458.2 million worth of goods from Russia, with cereals (mainly wheat) accounting for 62% and fertilizers for a further 9%. Exports in the opposite direction are small despite the competitiveness of Nigerian products such as cocoa, sesame, cashews, shea butter and hibiscus, which already reach European and Asian markets.

NIGERIA'S IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA BY PRODUCT GROUP, 2025

Product group	Value, $	Share, %
Cereals (mainly wheat)	285.0 million	62
Fossil fuels and petroleum products	99.4 million	22
Fertilizers	42.3 million	9
Fish and seafood	24.1 million	5
Ships and boats	5.1 million	1
Total (including other goods)	**458.2 million**	**100**

Source: UN Comtrade via Trading Economics[11]

Since the unification of foreign-exchange markets in 2023–2024, Nigeria's currency, the naira, has traded at a market-determined rate, improving transparency but exposing importers to exchange-rate volatility and the cost of dollar liquidity. At the same time, Nigeria has one of Africa's most advanced domestic payment systems, launched one of the world's first retail central bank digital currencies, is among PAPSS's fastest-growing markets and has one of the world's largest retail cryptoasset user bases. This combination of genuine import needs, an underused export base and advanced digital infrastructure makes Nigeria a natural pilot market for new settlement instruments in sub-Saharan Africa.

11. https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/imports/russia

2. THE ROLE OF TRADE AND MONETARY UNIONS

The Russian Federation's trade policy operates within a framework of customs duties and trade agreements established at the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) level. On the African side, trade is increasingly organized through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and eight regional economic communities, while 14 countries belong to two monetary unions.

2.1 The EAEU

The EAEU, comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, applies a common external tariff, and trade agreements with third countries are concluded by the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) on behalf of all members. A preferential trade agreement with an African country is therefore an EAEU agreement, also opening access to a market of more than 180 million people. Approximately 93% of mutual settlements within the union are currently conducted in national currencies, providing a functioning settlement model that can be offered to African partners[12].

The EAEU has free trade agreements in force with Vietnam, Serbia and, since May 2025, Iran; an interim agreement with Mongolia entered into force in July 2026; agreements have also been signed with the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Singapore. No agreements with African countries are currently in force. Negotiations with Egypt, Russia's largest trading partner on the continent, began in 2019 and were suspended by the end of 2024 after six rounds; in September 2025, Russia proposed resuming them. The EAEU's unified system of tariff preferences also deserves mention: it grants developing countries reduced import duties and duty-free treatment for many goods from least developed countries, most of which are in Africa, although African exporters appear to make little use of these preferences.

12. Данные Министерства экономического развития России

2.2 The African Continental Free Trade Area and regional economic communities

The agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area aims to bring almost all African countries together in a single market for goods and services, gradually eliminating tariffs on most goods under common rules of origin. Goods produced or processed in one member state may qualify for preferential access to other participating markets, subject to applicable rules of origin and implementation arrangements. Regional economic communities—ECOWAS in West Africa, COMESA in Eastern and Southern Africa, SADC in Southern Africa, the EAC in East Africa and ECCAS in Central Africa—continue to operate their own customs systems, and some use regional payment systems that are now being integrated into PAPSS.

Membership of these groupings can change. Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger left ECOWAS in January 2025 to form the Alliance of Sahel States, but remain members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union and continue to use the CFA franc. Trade and monetary boundaries in West Africa therefore no longer coincide. For Russia, the AfCFTA changes the logic of market entry: a company processing or assembling goods in one African country—for example through fertilizer blending, grain milling or machinery assembly—can serve the continental market under AfCFTA rules of origin rather than exporting separately to every country.

2.3 Monetary unions

Fourteen African countries use one of two CFA francs, each issued by a regional central bank and pegged to the euro: the West African CFA franc (XOF), issued by the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) for the eight members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), and the Central African CFA franc (XAF), issued by the Bank of Central African States (BEAC) for the six members of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC). In Southern Africa, the South African rand anchors the Common Monetary Area. ECOWAS has reaffirmed its intention to launch a single currency, the ECO, in 2027.[13]

13. https://www.financialafrik.com/en/2026/07/21/ecowas-confirms-the-launch-of-its-single-currency-eco-for-2027/

MONETARY UNIONS IN AFRICA

Organization	Member countries	Currency	Implications for trade with Russia
West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU)	Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo	West African CFA franc (XOF); fixed rate of 655.957 per euro	Ruble payments pass through the euro; one agreement covers eight countries
Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC)	Gabon, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea	Central African CFA franc (XAF); pegged to the euro	Ruble payments pass through the euro; one agreement covers six countries
Common Monetary Area	South Africa, Lesotho, Eswatini, Namibia	The rand circulates in all member countries	A developed rand foreign-exchange market enables rand–ruble pricing
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	Benin, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Côte d'Ivoire, Cabo Verde, Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo	ECO; launch confirmed for 2027	A single partner for West Africa without a peg to the currency of unfriendly countries

The CFA franc arrangement has two implications for trade with Russia. First, because both francs are pegged to the euro, there is no independent CFA–ruble market: every payment effectively entails euro conversion, bringing European banking and sanctions rules into play. Second, because monetary policy is set regionally, any settlement or currency-swap agreements must be negotiated with the BCEAO or BEAC rather than individual governments. This complicates negotiations, but a single agreement then covers six to eight countries. The 2019 reform of the West African CFA franc removed the requirement to deposit half of reserves with the French Treasury, and the Sahel countries have discussed abandoning the CFA franc altogether; any such change would directly affect the currency used for trade with Russia.

RELATIONS WITH SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Country	Currency and exchange-rate regime	Participation in international groupings	Main obstacle to expanding trade with Russia
Egypt	Egyptian pound; floating exchange rate since March 2024	BRICS; COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa)	Foreign-currency liquidity shortage; high wheat-import expenditure
Algeria	Algerian dinar; managed exchange rate, capital controls	Arab Maghreb Union	Limited convertibility; state-controlled banking system
Morocco	Moroccan dirham; pegged to a euro/U.S. dollar basket	African Continental Free Trade Area	Close financial ties with the EU; caution over secondary sanctions
Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire	West African CFA franc; pegged to the euro	WAEMU; ECOWAS	Ruble payments require conversion through the euro
Nigeria	Nigerian naira; floating exchange rate since 2023–2024	ECOWAS; PAPSS	Exchange-rate volatility; no direct naira–ruble currency pair
South Africa	South African rand; freely floating	BRICS; SADC	Banks integrated with the Western financial system
Ethiopia	Ethiopian birr; floating exchange rate since July 2024	BRICS; COMESA	Nascent foreign-exchange market; limited banking capacity
Kenya	Kenyan shilling; floating exchange rate	EAC; PAPSS	Limited demand for rubles

Source: open data and the authors' conclusions

2.4 Conclusions

The following conclusions emerge. First, economic and monetary unions provide scale: one EAEU agreement covers five markets, one AfCFTA-compliant investment can serve more than 50 countries, and one agreement with the BCEAO or BEAC covers six to eight countries. Second, CFA zones offer stability, but their euro peg complicates direct ruble settlements, whereas the rand zone and economies with floating national currencies, such as Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia and Kenya, offer greater scope for direct bilateral arrangements. Third, the following priorities stand out: Egypt is the first candidate for an EAEU–Africa free trade agreement; Nigeria and ECOWAS are key to West Africa; and the BCEAO and BEAC are gateways to the CFA franc zones.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXPANDING TRADE

3.1 Medium-term scenarios

Starting from approximately $27 billion in trade in 2025, Table 6 presents three indicative scenarios through 2030. The ranges are the authors' own estimates. The difference between the baseline and optimistic scenarios depends in part on whether the proposed instruments are implemented—above all, direct access to currency liquidity, an interbank payment network and export financing for African producers.

INDICATIVE SCENARIOS FOR RUSSIA–AFRICA TRADE THROUGH 2030

	Pessimistic	**Baseline**	**Optimistic**
Trade by 2030	$27–30 billion (0–2% annually)	$35–38 billion (5–7% annually)	$45–50 billion (11–13% annually)
Sanctions regime	Tighter secondary sanctions; subsequent de-risking by African banks	Sanctions remain, but the situation stabilizes	Clearer multilateral dispute-resolution mechanisms emerge
Settlement infrastructure	Payments routed through third countries; high costs	More bilateral currency transactions; access remains indirect	Direct ruble–African currency exchange facilities; new cross-border settlement mechanisms
Trade composition	Imbalance widens	Moderate growth in African exports	Rapid growth in African exports
Sub-Saharan Africa coverage	Partners concentrated in North Africa	Gradual expansion into Nigeria, Ethiopia and Kenya	Broad sub-Saharan African participation through PAPSS

3.2 Trade policy instruments

First: conclude an EAEU–Egypt free trade agreement, giving the EAEU its first agreement in Africa and Egypt preferential access to five markets, and use it as a template for other partners.

Second: launch a structured dialogue between the EEC and the AfCFTA Secretariat on rules of origin, customs procedures and standards so that Russian investment in African processing qualifies for access to continental markets.

Third: promote existing EAEU tariff preferences among African exporters through information campaigns, support for certificates of origin and buyer matching, ensuring that preferences already available on paper are actually used.

3.3 Cross-border payment mechanisms

The greatest practical benefits lie in developing payment infrastructure. Potential mechanisms are presented in Table 7. Currency swaps and settlement facilities between the Bank of Russia and African central banks—prioritizing Egypt, Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa—and with the BCEAO and BEAC for the CFA zone could give importers direct access to ruble liquidity, reducing reliance on conversion through a third currency. Central bank digital currencies used through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, as well as other digital currencies, could become new cross-border settlement tools (an experimental legal regime will be in operation in 2027).

Since national-currency settlements require two-way trade, export financing for African producers—credit facilities and insurance to expand exports of cocoa, coffee, fruit, sesame, textiles and processed foods—is itself a measure generating a natural inflow of rubles to African countries. Mutually recognized anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing standards and know-your-customer platforms (AML/CFT and KYC), together with shared sanctions-screening tools, would reduce risks for African banks, while interoperable cards, QR codes and mobile payments would open low-cost channels for travelers, students and entrepreneurs. Nigerian fintech experience could be useful here—for example BitSave, which facilitates cross-border retail payments through blockchain platforms. Its relevance is twofold. First, African users and developers are already familiar with blockchain-based financial systems, making the barrier to adopting regulated digital settlement instruments lower than is often assumed. Second, the architecture is transferable: the same non-custodial, programmable, multilayer architecture can be applied to regulated instruments such as tokenized bank deposits, tokenized settlement tokens in local currencies or rubles, or future central bank digital currencies, supporting SME trade, diaspora and student remittances, and small cross-border investments[14].

14. BitSave is a decentralized finance protocol founded by Nigerian entrepreneur Carla Obakpolor.

POTENTIAL MECHANISMS FOR EXPANDING TRADE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA

Recommendation	**Mechanism**	**Key institutions and stakeholders**
Conclude an EAEU–Egypt free trade agreement	Complete negotiations launched in 2019; use as a template for new African partners	EEC; Egypt's Ministry of Trade
EAEU–AfCFTA dialogue	Cooperation on rules of origin, customs procedures and standards	EEC; AfCFTA Secretariat
Use EAEU tariff preferences	Information, origin certification, buyer matching	EEC; Russian Export Center
Develop correspondent relationships and alternative financial-information exchange channels	Bilateral communication channels	Central banks
New cross-border settlement mechanisms	Use CBDCs and other digital currencies	Central banks
Export financing for African producers	Lending and insurance to rebalance trade	Russian Export Center; Afreximbank
Common compliance standards	Mutual recognition of AML/CFT and KYC; screening tools	Financial-monitoring authorities
Payment instruments for businesses, including SMEs	Interoperability of cards, QR codes and mobile payments	Payment operators; fintech companies

4. CONCLUSION

Trade between Russia and Africa is growing rapidly, but remains narrow, unbalanced and dependent on indirect payment channels. The shift to national-currency settlements has changed the currency of trade, but not yet its structure. Unions on both sides—the EAEU, the AfCFTA, the CFA franc zones and the planned ECO—provide levers for change at scale, because inter-union agreements and arrangements with regional central banks cover many markets at once. Combined with an interbank payment system, export financing that rebalances trade, and carefully supervised use of the digital-asset infrastructure already being developed by African innovators, these measures could bring the relationship closer to the optimistic scenario of $45–50 billion in trade by 2030.

RUSSIA AND AFRICA: FROM AD HOC TRADE TO SYSTEMIC PARTICIPATION IN VALUE CHAINS

SECTION EXPERTS



ANTON YURKIN
Vice President for International Relations, Association of Coal Industry Enterprises

postgraduate researcher, Institute for African Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences; Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists



DMITRY ITIN
Analyst, Institute for the Study of Global Markets

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists

1. AFRICA AS A RESOURCE MACROREGION

Africa is becoming one of the few major markets where the structure of the future economy is not yet fully determined and a low base supports high growth. According to the IMF, sub-Saharan Africa's economy grew by 4.5% in 2025—the fastest rate in a decade—with growth of around 4.3% expected in 2026. Ten economies in the region grew by more than 6%, and Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda ranked among the world's fastest-growing economies.

However, the IMF projects per capita incomes in African countries to grow by only 2.3% annually, compared with 3.6% in other developing countries, and by 1.8% in resource-based economies. Stronger performance requires large-scale investment in infrastructure, energy, logistics, technology and skills[15].

External players' positions in extractive industries are already largely entrenched. Companies from Western countries and China operate most gold-mining, offshore oil and LNG, copper, cobalt, lithium, bauxite, uranium and iron-ore projects. African countries themselves still mainly sell raw materials to the world: UNCTAD estimates that manufactured goods accounted for only around 20% of Africa's exports outside the continent in 2015–2017[16].

Competition over Africa is shifting from access to individual resources to participation in the value chains of the next phase of growth: who finances projects, builds infrastructure, supplies technology and establishes a foothold in new sectors before the market matures. Russia's presence should also be viewed through this lens.

15. IMF, Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, April 2026

16. UNCTAD, Economic Development in Africa Report, 2019

WHO CONTROLS EXTRACTION OF KEY RESOURCES IN AFRICA'S LARGEST ECONOMIES, 2025

Country	Resource	West, %	China, %	Russia, %	Key operators
Mali	gold	~70	<5	0	B2Gold, Allied Gold, Barrick, Resolute
Burkina Faso	gold	~60	~0	~10	IAMGold, Endeavour, West African Resources, Nordgold
Ghana	gold (industrial mining)	~50	~5	0	Newmont, AngloGold, Galiano
Tanzania	gold	~45–50	n/a	0	AngloGold (Geita), Barrick
Angola	oil	~75	~5	0	BP, Eni, TotalEnergies, Chevron, ExxonMobil
Nigeria	LNG (NLNG)	~51	0	0	Shell, TotalEnergies, Eni
Zambia	copper	~50	~15–20	0	First Quantum, Barrick, IRH (UAE)
Democratic Republic of the Congo	copper	~10–15	~65–75	0	CMOC, Zijin, Glencore
Democratic Republic of the Congo	cobalt	~15	~70–80	0	CMOC, Glencore
Guinea	bauxite	~5	~65	~5	Chalco, SMB, CBG (Halco), Rusal
Guinea	iron ore (Simandou)	~20–25	~60–65	0	WCS, Rio Tinto
Namibia	uranium	~10–15	~70–75	0	CGN (Husab), CNNC (Rössing), Paladin
Zimbabwe	lithium	<5	~90	0	Huayou, Sinomine, Yahua
South Africa	manganese	~15–25	n/a	~2–4 indirectly	South32, Jupiter; UMK (Renova)

Source: authors' estimates based on operator-company data and national statistics, 2025
The structure of buyers mirrors the structure of extraction: of the $328 billion in exports of the five main commodities from Africa's 20 largest economies, Western countries purchase approximately 48% and China approximately 16%.
Source: authors' calculations based on UN Comtrade data, 2024

2. RUSSIA'S CURRENT PARTICIPATION: A STRONG TRADE POSITION

Russia already occupies a prominent place in African trade. It supplies approximately 40% of wheat imports by Africa's 20 largest economies—four times the share of the next-largest supplier, France—and about 17% of mineral fertilizer imports, ranking second after Morocco overall and first in nitrogen fertilizers. Basis of supplies consisted of grain ($5.9 billion), petroleum products ($3.2 billion), as well as food and fertilizers ($1.8 billion).

RUSSIAN EXPORTS TO AFRICA'S LARGEST ECONOMIES, 2024

Country	Russian exports, $ million	Russia's share of country imports, %	Russia's share of wheat imports, %	Other key item (Russia's share of country imports), %
Egypt	6007	6.3	69	sunflower oil – 64; steel billets – 60
Algeria	2025	4.3	23	soybean oil – 31
Tunisia	1753	6.7	43	diesel and petroleum products – 56
Senegal	952	8.4	29	petroleum products – 34
Nigeria	676	1.7	15	potash fertilizers – 94
Morocco	632	0.6	17	nitrogen fertilizers – 48; beet pulp and starch-manufacturing residues – 46
Kenya	590	2.9	79	compound fertilizers – 32
South Africa	559	0.6	32	compound fertilizers – 69
Côte d'Ivoire	442	2.6	0 (4 in 2023)	nitrogen fertilizers – 54; potash fertilizers – 20
Ghana	436	2.5	0 (23 in 2021)	nitrogen fertilizers – 36; compound fertilizers – 29
Tanzania	295	1.9	64	nitrogen fertilizers – 19
Uganda	191	1.4	83	compound fertilizers – 7
Democratic Republic of the Congo	122	0.9	13	nitrogen fertilizers – 61
Cameroon (2023)	56	0.7	11	compound fertilizers – 25
Zimbabwe	40	0.4	7	potash fertilizers – 23

Source: authors' calculations based on UN Comtrade (mirror statistics of partner-country imports), 2024 or the latest available year; reverse flows based on exports reported by the same countries and ITC Trade Map. No data are available for Libya or Sudan.

Russia accounts for 0.14% of these countries' commodity exports. The reason is structural: Russia produces its own gold, oil, gas, diamonds, copper and nickel, making it a competitor rather than a buyer in global markets for these products. It does have domestic demand for other raw materials that are absent or in short supply at home: bauxite for aluminum production, manganese and chromium ore for metallurgy, and uranium for nuclear energy.

Trade makes Russia an important food-security partner for African governments, but this partnership has not translated into a comparable investment presence: according to Delphi (2026), Russia accounts for less than 1% of Africa's inward FDI stock. Specific projects show where Russian capital has nevertheless established a foothold[17].

3. RUSSIAN MODELS: WHAT ENDURES IS WHAT DOMESTIC INDUSTRY NEEDS

Two projects have proved resilient, and in both cases African raw materials are needed for the investors' own processing operations.

Rusal in Guinea. The company operates three assets: CBK (2.9 million tonnes of bauxite), Dian-Dian (3.1 million tonnes) and Friguia (1.4 million tonnes), totaling approximately 7.4 million tonnes in 2024. Bauxite is supplied to the group's own alumina refineries.

Renova in South Africa. The group participates in United Manganese of Kalahari (UMK; Nami owns 49%, while a South African consortium holds 51% under BEE rules). UMK was established in 2005, launched a new $200 million mine in 2011 and became South Africa's fourth-largest manganese exporter. Russia depends on manganese-ore imports (1.39 million tonnes in 2021): it has domestic reserves, but only one deposit in Bashkiria is commercially exploited, and pilot mining at the Usinskoye deposit in Kuzbass began only in 2025. South Africa provided approximately 20% of direct supplies, while the main consumer, the Chelyabinsk Electrometallurgical Plant, produces around 80% of Russian ferroalloys. Direct flows of UMK ore to Russia are not publicly disclosed, but the asset gives Russian capital a position in a raw material the country lacks[18–19].

17. Delphi Global Research Center, Geo-Economics of Russia and China in Africa, 2026

18. SteelOrbis, Russia's Renova launches new manganese mine in South Africa, 2011

19. Daily Maverick, ANC's manganese «gold» mine joint venture with sanctioned Russian oligarch, 2022

4. GLOBAL MODELS: INFRASTRUCTURE AROUND THE ASSET CREATES RESILIENCE

International investors' experience shows that a lasting presence comes not simply from ownership of an asset, but from the infrastructure surrounding it. Six broad components can serve as criteria for assessing the effectiveness of any project in Africa.

ЛУЧШИЕ ПРАКТИКИ

Element	Western companies	China	Russia: current practices and potential improvements
Financing	Project financing backed by future project cash flow	State banks Exim Bank of China and CDB; oil- and metals-backed loans (Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo); $180.9 billion in 2000–2024	Existing: $25 billion state loan for El Dabaa nuclear power plant, Roseximbank export credits and EXIAR insurance for individual deliveries. Needed: syndicated project financing backed by project cash flow; commodity-backed lending where Russia has its own offtake (bauxite, manganese, chromium)
Legal protection	Stabilization clauses, bilateral investment treaties (BITs), arbitration in London and Paris, the World Bank's International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes	Intergovernmental agreements, periodic renegotiation of terms (Sicomines, 2024)	Existing: investment-protection agreements with some countries (Egypt, South Africa and others). Needed: investment-protection agreements with extraction countries (Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and others), stabilization clauses in project agreements, arbitration in Russian or neutral centers (HKIAC, SIAC, DIAC)
Sales market	LBMA, LME, own oil refineries; purchase approximately 48% of exports of the main commodities from Africa's 20 largest economies	Domestic metallurgy and battery production; approximately 16% of all commodity exports, but more than 60% of the DRC's copper and cobalt and around half of Angola's oil and South Africa's iron ore	Existing: primarily food purchases (citrus fruit, tea, coffee); selective mineral imports for domestic plants, such as Guinean bauxite for Rusal. Needed: extend the Rusal model to manganese, chromium and uranium for Russian processing; long-term procurement contracts for raw materials and agricultural products as security for project financing

Продолжение таблицы на следующей странице

Local partnership	Joint ventures with state-owned companies (NLNG, Namdeb), acceptance of higher state ownership	Joint ventures with state-owned companies (Sicomines, 68/32), processing in the extraction country (cobalt in the DRC, lithium in Zimbabwe, copper and cobalt in Zambia)	Existing: UMK in South Africa (49% Russian ownership, 51% local consortium); refinery in Mali (state 62%, Yadran 38%). Needed: make a 30–49% minority stake alongside a state-owned company a standard format; move processing to the extraction country (alumina, ferroalloys, refining) to hedge against raw-material export bans; local workforce-training programs linked to projects
Infrastructure and logistics	Twelve strategic Global Gateway corridors, including Lobito (DFC–$553 million) and the Logone Bridge (EU–€40 million); green hydrogen in Namibia (EU–€1.3 billion)	Simandou (650 km of railway and a port), TAZARA; according to Chinese data, almost 100,000 km of roads, more than 10,000 km of railways and almost 100 ports built or upgraded since 2000; more than $400 billion of contracting work over ten years	Existing: individual projects–El Dabaa nuclear power plant in Egypt, nuclear power agreements with Nigeria and Uganda, Rosatom's solar power plant under construction in Mali (200 MW), TMH supplies of more than 1,000 passenger railcars to Egypt. Needed: link infrastructure to resource projects–power generation for processing, railways and ports for commodity exports; bundle construction, financing and offtake, as in the Chinese model
Capital horizon	Long-term, private and institutional	Long-term, state-backed	Existing: short horizon; portfolio stakes in commodities Russia itself exports are vulnerable to sanctions and litigation risks. Needed: long-term capital from state institutions (VEB.RF, RDIF) alongside private operators; joint funds with Gulf and African sovereign wealth funds to reduce sanctions and country risks

Source: authors' analysis of public sources; Green Building Africa, EU mobilises N$25bn for Namibia's green hydrogen drive, 2025; Financial Afrik, DFC commits $553 million to Lobito Corridor, 2025; ICSID, Database of Member States; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, Wang Yi's press conference following the FOCAC summit, 2024; Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, data on contracted projects in Africa, 2024; Ecofin Agency, Mali to hold 62% stake in first national gold refinery, 2025; Ecofin Agency, Mali begins construction of West Africa's largest solar plant, 2024

4.1 The Chinese model: demand, capital and infrastructure

Chinese companies arrived in Africa later than Western firms, but within 20 years secured leading positions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's copper and cobalt, Guinea's bauxite and iron ore, Namibia's uranium and Zimbabwe's lithium. The model follows the same logic as successful Russian projects, but at the scale of the whole economy: China buys what it extracts for subsequent processing, providing investment not only in mining but also in infrastructure[20].

China was also the first to adapt to requirements for localizing processing within the country where raw materials are extracted. When Zimbabwe restricted exports of raw lithium, Chinese companies built sulfate plants there. When the Democratic Republic of the Congo introduced a cobalt export quota, CMOC received the largest allocation. The ban on copper and cobalt concentrate exports introduced in June 2026 barely affected the main Chinese operators: CMOC and Sicomines already produce cathodes locally. The model nevertheless relies on Chinese contractors and equipment, limiting localization, while new lending has declined: according to Boston University, from more than $10 billion annually in 2012–2018 to $2.1 billion in 2024.

Source: Ecofin Agency, CMOC, Glencore clash over future of DRC cobalt export ban, 2025

Source: StoneX, DRC bans copper and cobalt exports, 2026

Source: Boston University Global Development Policy Center, Chinese Loans to Africa Database, 2026

4.2 A third path: technology and services rather than control over mineral resources

Demand is growing in Africa for partnerships that differ from the two established models: governments are diversifying their partners to set rules more independently and increase export margins. India and Türkiye neither finance megaprojects on China's scale nor replicate the Western model. They implement small and medium-sized projects involving technology transfer, contracting, equipment supplies, training and engineering. This approach does not provide control over mineral resources, but establishes technological standards and generates licensing and service income.

The Export-Import Bank of India lends to governments and banks for purchases of Indian goods, equipment and services: as of March 31, 2025, India had extended 192 credit lines to 41 African countries totaling $10.7 billion, including railways in Ghana, rural electrification in Burkina Faso and IT parks in Mozambique. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) implemented 1,884 projects in Africa in 2017–2022 alone, while Turkish contractors, according to Trade Minister Ömer Bolat in October 2025, had built 2,043 facilities worth approximately $100 billion across the continent, including airports, roads, hospitals, energy and water infrastructure.

Source: India Exim Bank, India Exim Bank in Africa, 2025, p. 65

Source: TİKA, TİKA Carried Out 1884 Projects in the Last 5 Years in Africa, 2022

Source: Yeni Şafak, Türkiye-Africa trade hits $37b with $100b in construction projects, 2025

20. Mining Weekly, Congo's $7bn infrastructure deal with China will depend on copper prices, 2024

Nornickel provides a Russian example of this approach. In 2025 and 2026, its Palladium Technology Center presented a strategy in South Africa for jointly developing palladium-based products. Russia does not need to import platinum-group metals, so collaboration centers on jointly developing higher-margin products.

Source: Vedomosti, Nornickel Presents Palladium Innovation Strategy in South Africa, 2025

Source: Kolsky Sever, Nornickel Presents Assessment of Non-Automotive Palladium Demand in South Africa, 2026

5. CONCLUSION: TWO DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR RUSSIA

Russian experience, global models and scenarios suggest two pathways, with the choice determined by one criterion: whether Russia needs the resource itself. Where domestic processing requires the raw material, the Rusal and Renova model offers a potential approach: an equity stake in extraction or processing and long-term offtake. Where domestic demand is absent, technology and service partnerships are likely to offer opportunities. Competition in segments where external players are already established will require greater ingenuity.

- **Raw materials for domestic processing.** The greatest potential lies in resources Russia lacks: bauxite, manganese, chromium and uranium. Here, the Russian side has its own offtake, as China does, and sanctions do not remove the buyer from the chain.
- **Minority positions in state-led projects.** A 30–49% processing stake alongside the host country's state-owned company may be more resilient than a standalone concession: this is how Renova operates in UMK and how the refinery in Mali is being built, with the state holding 62% and Russia's Yadran 38%.
- **Technology partnerships in resource industries.** Technology transfer, staff training, services and engineering in resource sectors where there is no domestic demand for the raw material.
- **Food partnerships as an entry point.** Long-term wheat and fertilizer supplies can be bundled with commodity offtake, converting an established reputation into participation in resource projects.

Experience in resource industries shows that a lasting presence emerges where exports are complemented by capital, infrastructure, local partnership and integration into value chains. In Africa's traditional industries, the positions of the largest external players are already largely entrenched; in new technology segments—artificial intelligence (AI), digital services, data and cybersecurity—the market architecture is still taking shape. This offers Russia a window in which competition concerns not only existing demand but also participation in creating new digital value chains.

THE DIGITAL DIMENSION: ANALYZING AFRICA'S DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT AND IDENTIFYING CYBERSECURITY TOOLS

SECTION EXPERTS



EKATERINA KRUCHINSKAYA
PhD in Education

Associate Professor, Department of Politics and Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences, HSE University

Director for Support of the Academic Supervisor's Activities, HSE University

Senior Lecturer, Department of Higher Mathematics, HSE University

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists



NGETOBAYE MASSENGAR RONGAR
Senior Lecturer

Department of International Business, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation

Ambassador of the International Financial Security Movement under Rosfinmonitoring, Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists

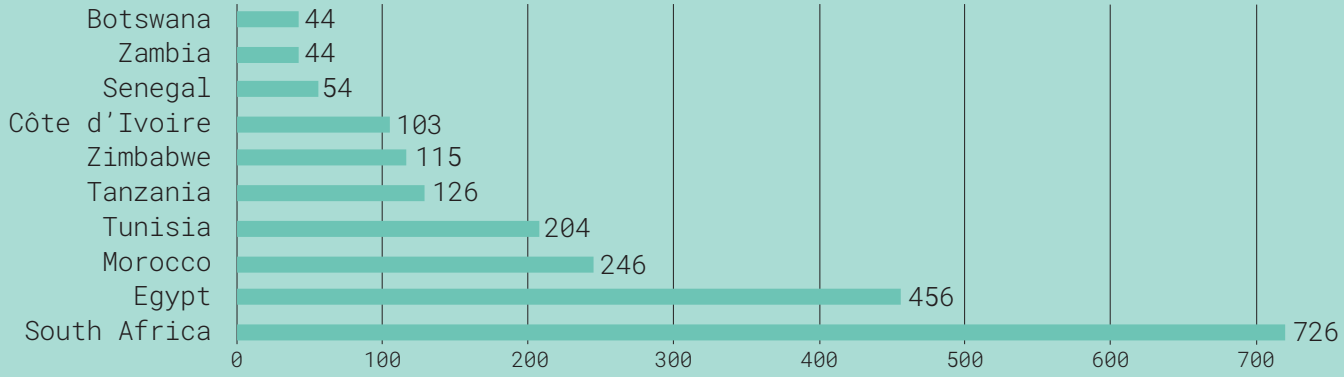
1. 1. ANALYZING AFRICAN COUNTRIES' DIGITAL MATURITY

Most African countries are entering a new cycle of digital development. In this context, the potential for a Russian technological presence should be assessed across three dimensions simultaneously: the size and structure of demand, the project's technological feasibility and the security of its operation. The last factor is particularly important for digital solutions: once integrated, a product becomes part of the customer's infrastructure, data and business processes and assumes the associated local cyber risks, data-regulation constraints and risks linked to user and partner training.

On the one hand, the continent already has a substantial AI ecosystem: more than 2,400 organizations work on AI innovation, 41% of them startups. On the other, computing infrastructure remains scarce: Africa, with approximately 15% of the world's population, accounted for only 1.8% of large data centers in 2023, while existing capacity met approximately 10% of demand for such infrastructure, according to the African Union (African Union, 2024).

This relationship captures the market's current stage: entrepreneurial activity and demand for applied solutions are emerging faster than the infrastructure required for mass deployment. Development is also concentrated in a limited number of countries. South Africa has 726 organizations working on AI innovation, Egypt 456, Morocco 246, Tunisia 204, Tanzania 126, Zimbabwe 115 and Côte d'Ivoire 103. The scale falls substantially after the top four (African Union, 2024).

NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON AI INNOVATION IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES



Source: African Union, Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, 2024

The digital user base is much larger than the existing AI ecosystem. In 2024, mobile technologies and services generated approximately $220 billion in value added, equivalent to 7.7% of Africa's GDP. Mobile internet had 416 million users, but a further 960 million people, or 64% of the population, lived within mobile-network coverage without using the internet (GSMA, 2025). A substantial share of the potential audience is therefore already technically reachable but remains outside digital consumption because of device and service costs, skills shortages and other barriers.

Source: GSMA, The Mobile Economy Africa 2025

The gap is especially pronounced between urban and rural areas. In 2024, 57% of Africa's urban population used the internet, compared with only 23% of its rural population; the regional average was approximately 38% (ITU, 2025). This difference has direct business implications: the same solution may have different deployment costs, architectural requirements and technical-support arrangements in a capital-city agglomeration and beyond it. Country analysis must therefore consider not only average digitalization but also geographical disparities in access.

Source: ITU, State of Digital Development and Trends in the Africa Region, 2025

The institutional environment is developing faster than physical infrastructure. By April 2026, Mauritius, Egypt, Rwanda, Tunisia, Ghana, Benin, Senegal, Algeria, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Zambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Libya and Nigeria had adopted dedicated national AI strategies. The OECD notes that the main challenge is gradually shifting from adopting strategies to implementing them: constraints persist in computing capacity, connectivity, data quality, long-term financing, staffing and regulators' ability to assess AI-specific risks (OECD, 2026).

NATIONAL AI STRATEGIES IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES AND YEARS OF ADOPTION

Group	Country and year of adoption
Early adopters	Mauritius (2018; update planned for 2026), Egypt (2020; updated in 2025), Rwanda (2022), Tunisia (2022)
Recent adopters	Ghana (2023), Benin (2023), Senegal (2023), Zimbabwe (2023), Algeria (2024), Ethiopia (2024), Mauritania (2024), Zambia (2024), Côte d'Ivoire (2025), Kenya (2025), Lesotho (2025), Libya (2025), Nigeria (2025), Zimbabwe (2026)
Policy framework; strategy under development	South Africa (2024), Lesotho (2025), Togo, Uganda

Source: OECD, AI Governance in Africa: Insights from a Policy Dialogue with 12 Countries, 2026

Country-level readiness indicators confirm this unevenness. In the Government AI Readiness Index 2023, Africa's top ten were Mauritius, Egypt, South Africa, Tunisia, Rwanda, Morocco, Senegal, Benin, Kenya and Nigeria. Their global positions differed substantially: Mauritius ranked 61st, Egypt 62nd, South Africa 77th, Kenya 101st and Nigeria 103rd. This assessment should be treated as a baseline rather than a current ranking: since 2023, several countries have adopted new strategies and launched new infrastructure projects (Oxford Insights, 2023; Policy Center for the New South, 2024).

СТРАНЫ АФРИКИ, НАИБОЛЕЕ ПОДГОТОВЛЕННЫЕ К ВНЕДРЕНИЮ ИИ, 2023 Г.

African rank	Country	Global rank
1	Mauritius	61
2	Egypt	62
3	South Africa	77
4	Tunisia	81
5	Rwanda	84
6	Morocco	88
7	Senegal	91
8	Benin	97
9	Kenya	101
10	Nigeria	103
11	Botswana	110
12	Seychelles	112
13	Cabo Verde	119
14	Algeria	120
15	Namibia	125
16	Uganda	132
17	Gabon	135
18	Tanzania	137
19	Côte d'Ivoire	138
20	Ethiopia	140

Source: Policy Center for the New South, Artificial Intelligence in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities, 2024

Investment is also concentrated: in the first quarter of 2025, more than 83% of funding for African AI startups went to just four countries – Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt. Meanwhile, the entire continent accounts for approximately 3% of the global AI talent pool. These figures show that Africa is already developing its own technology hubs, but capital and expertise remain extremely unevenly distributed.

Source: African Union, Africa Declares AI a Strategic Priority, 2025

The potential of individual sectors depends not only on technological maturity but also on economic structure. Agriculture accounts for 45–60% of employment and 15–20% of the continent's GDP, so solutions for yield forecasting, plant-disease diagnosis, irrigation management, weather analytics and credit scoring could affect a substantial share of economic activity. Successful deployment, however, depends less on using the most sophisticated model than on local data quality, service costs, user trust and the ability to deliver recommendations through familiar channels.

Source: OECD, AI Governance in Africa: Insights from a Policy Dialogue with 12 Countries, 2026

Demand is gradually being confirmed by investment and actual projects. Private investment in agrifood technologies in sub-Saharan Africa increased from less than $10 million in 2014 to approximately $600 million in 2022. In Kenya, Apollo Agriculture uses farm characteristics, satellite imagery and field-agent data to assess the creditworthiness of farmers lacking conventional collateral; according to GSMA, platform clients achieved yields approximately 2.5 times the national average.

Source: CIPIT, The State of AI in Africa Report, 2025
Source: GSMA, AI-driven smallholder farmer lending in Africa: Insights from Apollo Agriculture, 2025

In healthcare, demand for technology is emerging against a backdrop of staff shortages. Sub-Saharan Africa's shortage of doctors and nurses is estimated at approximately 2.4 million professionals; the region has around 1.3% of the global health workforce but 25% of the global disease burden. In these conditions, remote diagnosis, image analysis, automated medical documentation and decision-support systems can not only reduce operating costs but also expand access to healthcare itself.

Source: CIPIT, The State of AI in Africa Report, 2025
Source: Naicker et al., Shortage of healthcare workers in developing countries—Africa, 2009

The expanding digital market also raises security requirements: growth in digital payments, cloud services and AI increases the cost of vulnerabilities, making cyber and regulatory risk profiles a criterion for country selection. The scale of these risks and protective requirements are examined in Section 2.

2. 2. AN ENTRY POINT: RUSSIA AS AFRICA'S DIGITAL PARTNER

Energy, construction and extractive industries still dominate Africa's new investment projects, while the digital economy is at an earlier stage of scaling, while digital infrastructure remains notably underinvested. Over the past five years, the value of new digital-economy investment projects in Africa increased by approximately three-quarters and their number by almost one-third, but UNCTAD still describes the continent's role in international digital-sector investment as limited. In other words, the sector is already showing rapid growth, but it has not yet reached the stage where key infrastructure and technological positions have been definitively distributed among the major players.

Source: UNCTAD, World Investment Report 2025

For comparison, total FDI inflows into Africa reached $97 billion in 2024, or 6% of the global total. However, Africa accounted for only about 3% of global investment in data centers, despite rapidly growing demand for computing infrastructure.

Source: UNCTAD, Africa: foreign investment hit record high in 2024

For Russia, this very gap creates a window of opportunity: while the positions of international players in traditional sectors—such as raw materials, energy, and large-scale infrastructure—are largely established, the distribution of roles in digital infrastructure, AI, local data, and cyber defense is still unfolding. Opportunities therefore remain not merely to redistribute existing demand but to create new technological value chains.

The initial pool of partner countries should be selected not from a single AI ranking but at the intersection of four factors: digital maturity, applied demand, cyber and regulatory risk profiles, and a clear Russian institutional or business presence. On this basis, Egypt, South Africa and Nigeria warrant deeper examination; Kenya and Rwanda matter as technology hubs; Ethiopia and Tunisia are markets where digital policy is developing alongside stronger institutional channels of engagement.

Technological attractiveness does not always mean low entry costs. Kenya, for example, remains one of the region's key digital hubs, but as of June 19, 2026, it was under increased monitoring by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). For projects involving payments, identification, scoring and cross-border financial operations, this means allowing for additional compliance and transaction costs. At that time, five other African jurisdictions were also under FATF increased monitoring: Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan. Increased-monitoring status does not automatically require enhanced due diligence for every transaction: FATF recommends considering it within a risk-based approach.

Source: FATF, Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring, 19 June 2026

Analyzing Digital Projects in African Countries

Russia's economic interest in Africa's digital market extends beyond direct software revenue. Once integrated, a digital product becomes part of the customer's ongoing processes, handling data, customer interactions, financial transactions, production decisions or public services. Unlike a one-off goods delivery, such integration can generate sustained demand for support, updates and additional modules.

This effect is stronger in markets where digital architecture is still taking shape. In a mature digital environment, a supplier usually joins an established set of platforms, standards and partners. Across much of Africa, the platforms, data centers, information-exchange systems, national datasets and regulatory mechanisms themselves are being built simultaneously. An external company can therefore participate not only in selling a product but also in shaping the environment for its subsequent use.

For Russian companies, this aligns with the objective of expanding non-commodity exports. The state program to promote Russian products abroad through 2030 envisages increasing non-resource, non-energy exports by at least two-thirds from their 2023 level and establishing sustainable partnerships in foreign markets (Government of the Russian Federation, 2025).

Source: Russian Government Order No. 450-r of February 26, 2025

The most viable export offering for African markets, however, appears to be an integrated, application-specific solution rather than a general-purpose large language model. The OECD notes that, for most African countries, the choice between "building a proprietary model" and "buying entirely from abroad" is an oversimplification. A more rational path lies between these extremes: using locally relevant data, developing specialized models and building the application layer where AI becomes a concrete economic service (OECD, 2026).

Source: OECD, AI Governance in Africa: Insights from a Policy Dialogue with 12 Countries, 2026

For a Russian offering, this means combining software, industry-specific AI, data work, integration, a secure environment and ongoing support in one product. In agriculture, this may involve forecasting and diagnostics; in finance, scoring and fraud prevention; in the public sector, document processing and citizen services; and in industry, predictive analytics and equipment monitoring.

Language Models for African Markets

When scaling across Africa, localization quickly ceases to be merely a matter of translating interfaces. Many African languages are poorly represented in the datasets used to train commercial models. The African Union explicitly identifies data shortages as an obstacle to language-understanding and speech-recognition systems; a lack of locally relevant data also reduces the quality of solutions developed outside the continent (African Union, 2024).

Kencorpus illustrates the scale of the task: this specialized corpus for Swahili, Dholuo and Luhya comprises 4,442 text documents, more than 5.6 million words and 1,152 speech files totaling approximately 177 hours (Wanjawa et al., 2023; as reported by CIPIT, 2025). This is a small dataset by global language-model standards, yet even creating it requires dedicated work on text, speech and annotation.

At the pilot stage, translation, local knowledge bases and fine-tuning existing models may therefore suffice. As operations expand to multiple markets, recurring costs emerge for collecting and cleaning language data, recognizing local speech and dialects, handling industry terminology and quality assurance. The language layer becomes part of the cost of scaling.

This increases the value of small language models and specialized industry models, which require less computing capacity and adapt more readily to local data. Building a proprietary large language model makes economic sense only where the number of users and reusable tasks justifies higher development and operating costs.

Source: African Union, Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy, 2024

Source: Wanjawa et al., Kencorpus: A Kenyan Language Corpus of Swahili, Dholuo and Luhya, 2023

Source: CIPIT, The State of AI in Africa Report, 2025

Localization concerns more than language: the deeper a digital solution is embedded in a customer's operations, the more important data location, cross-border transfer procedures and national regulatory requirements become. Personal-data regulation in Africa can no longer be considered embryonic: by early 2026, data-protection legislation was in force in at least 44 countries, or approximately 80% of African Union member states; fully functioning data-protection authorities had been established in at least 38 countries.

The continental regulatory framework is also evolving. The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (the Malabo Convention) provides a common reference for national regimes, while requirements increasingly differ across jurisdictions. Kenya, for example, has adopted a dedicated cloud policy incorporating data residency and sovereignty into government-cloud architecture; in Egypt, cross-border processing and transfer of personal data are governed by legislation and executive regulations, with procedures overseen by the national Personal Data Protection Center.

The practical implication for exporters is that, wherever possible, solution architecture should allow data and computing capacity to be hosted in the customer's jurisdiction and storage or transfer arrangements to change without rebuilding the technological core. Otherwise, regulatory localization becomes as persistent a cost item as linguistic localization.

Regulation of Data Storage and Transfer

Source: Digital Policy Alert, Data Protection in Africa Roundup, 2025; Projections for 2026

Source: African Union, African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection

Source: Ministry of Information, Communications and the Digital Economy of Kenya, Kenya Cloud Policy 2024

Source: Egypt Personal Data Protection Center

The scale of digitalization simultaneously increases the cost of inadequate protection. In 2025, two-thirds of African states surveyed by Interpol reported that digitally enabled crimes already represented a medium-to-high share of all crime; in West and East Africa, they accounted for more than 30% of reported crime. Meanwhile, 90% of countries identified a need for substantial strengthening of law-enforcement and prosecutorial capabilities, and 95% of respondents cited inadequate training, resources and specialized tools.

Cybersecurity Is Not an Add-on to Digital Exports, but a Condition of Their Sustainability

AI is also changing the nature of the threat. In Interpol's 2026 assessment, based on a survey of 36 African states, AI was linked to 55% of reported cybercrime. Automation now affects the entire attack cycle—from reconnaissance and phishing to extortion and bypassing security mechanisms.

Source: Interpol, Africa Cyberthreat Assessment Report 2025

Source: Interpol, African Cyberthreat Assessment Report 2026

A distinctive feature of Africa's digital market is the widespread use of mobile money for everyday payments. Approximately $1.4 trillion passed through mobile-money systems in sub-Saharan Africa in 2025, while there were 2.3 billion registered mobile-money accounts worldwide. This makes the end user an important part of the security perimeter: many fraud schemes rely on social engineering, persuading people to authorize payments, disclose credentials or act in the attacker's interests. Generative AI scales up personalized messages, voice synthesis and fabricated images.

Source: GSMA, The State of the Industry Report on Mobile Money 2026

The practical conclusion is that end-user training should be treated not as marketing support but as part of the cost of operating a digital solution securely. A technically sound system does not protect the customer and supplier if users cannot recognize pressure, verify requests through an independent channel or understand the consequences of sharing access.

For products involving payments, identification, scoring or transaction-data processing, AML/CFT requirements add to the technical framework. Customer identification, transaction monitoring and engagement with national financial intelligence units must be addressed during design: adding them to a finished product can substantially increase localization costs and timelines. A country's FATF status should be used not as an automatic prohibition on doing business but as one factor in assessing compliance and transaction burdens.

Source: FATF, Jurisdictions under Increased Monitoring, 19 June 2026

Deeper technological integration also increases the supplier's dependence on the security of both customer and local partner. A Russian system may be correctly designed, but a compromised contractor, administrator account, application programming interface or storage infrastructure can cause service interruption, data loss and damage to the supplier itself. The security perimeter should therefore be defined not only by the product's boundaries but also by the boundaries of access to it.

When replicating a solution, baseline measures should include least-privilege access for the local partner, separation of development, testing and production environments, a predefined incident-response process and security checks of partner infrastructure. In sensitive applications, critical model or development components may remain with the supplier if local regulation permits.

Given the threat structure, cybersecurity should be designed alongside the product itself. Before integration, the customer's digital maturity is assessed and minimum access-management and backup requirements are defined; anomaly monitoring and a pre-agreed incident-response process are then introduced.

Insurance sits above preventive protection in this structure, not in place of it. Residual risk is insured after baseline security requirements have been met; coverage conditions may depend on audit results, backups, access controls and response readiness. Insurance therefore creates an economic incentive to maintain a specified level of protection, rather than merely compensating for an attack's consequences.

A potential Russian offering can thus combine an applied digital solution, localization, compliance with data regulations, preventive cybersecurity, monitoring, user training and an insurance mechanism. Its advantage lies not in selling the largest possible number of separate technologies but in reducing the customer's total cost and aggregate risk of digital transformation.

Skills constraints affect not only end users but also those operating digital systems. A shortage of information- and financial-security professionals can constrain the very ability to operate an imported solution. Training local personnel should therefore be viewed not as a social add-on to technology exports but as a tool for reducing the costs and risks of an ongoing presence.

Skills and Awareness as Elements of the Digital Economy

Russia already has institutional mechanisms for such work. The International Olympiad on Financial Security has been held since 2021 and brings together participants from dozens of countries; the African track can use these educational channels to train users, compliance specialists and information-security professionals before a permanent commercial presence emerges. This simultaneously reduces operating risks, builds a local talent pool and creates professional contacts with relevant organizations.

Source: International Olympiad on Financial Security, official website

3. 3. THREE SCENARIOS FOR A DIGITAL PRESENCE

The three possible scenarios should not be understood as successive stages through which a company must move from the first to the third. Each corresponds to a different level of market uncertainty, direct investment and risk tolerance. A deeper presence can potentially increase long-term returns, but also raises the cost of mistakes.

The first scenario involves entering one or two markets with a relatively developed digital environment, clear industry demand and a reliable local partner. A largely ready-made product is used with only the necessary adaptation, while proprietary infrastructure investment is limited.

Scenario One.

Limited Presence: One or Two Countries to Test Project Economics

The main outcome of such a pilot is less the initial export revenue than information about the actual cost of operating in the market: the state of the customer's information systems, integration time, linguistic and regulatory adaptation costs, technical-support requirements, the partner's actual cybersecurity maturity and user readiness.

Distinguishing technical from economic results is critical. The 2025 MIT NANDA study cited in the reference report by Roscongress and Vedomosti found that up to 95% of organizations fail to obtain the required financial return from generative-AI pilots; one reason is their inability to embed the technology in established processes (MIT NANDA, 2025; Roscongress–Vedomosti, 2026).

Source: MIT Project NANDA, The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025

Source: Roscongress–Vedomosti, Economic Growth Through the Eyes of Young Economists: A Reality Check, 2026

In African markets, ordinary integration costs can be compounded by unstable infrastructure, additional data work, linguistic and regulatory adaptation, user training and the establishment of a minimum security framework. A limited presence is therefore justified where a company cannot yet reliably assess these parameters and the cost of a major investment mistake exceeds the benefits of rapid scaling.

The weakness of this scenario is limited returns: one or two pilots can validate a hypothesis and build partnership experience, but rarely create enough volume on their own to generate a significant export impact.

Scenario Two.

Scalable Partnership: The Main Risk Is Underinvesting in the Operating Environment

Once demand has been validated, the central question changes: can a successful project be repeated across several countries or customers without a proportional increase in costs?

It is at this stage that shortages of infrastructure, data and skills become most apparent. Even with a finished product, computing resources, reliable connectivity, data preparation, localization, user training, information security and technical support must be provided. If these elements have to be rebuilt for every customer, commercial economies of scale do not arise.

Linguistic and technical differences are compounded by differences in data regulation. If entering each new jurisdiction requires separate reworking of storage, cross-border transfer, user identification or interaction with local regulators, each deployment effectively becomes a separate technical project. In marginal-cost terms, the cost of the next project does not decline, and the model loses its principal source of economies of scale.

The key risk in the second scenario is therefore underinvesting not in the model, but in the reusable environment needed for sustainable operation. This must include not only computing capacity and integration modules but also standard mechanisms for localization, cybersecurity, access management, data hosting, training and support—in other words, infrastructure for economies of scale.

Success should therefore be measured not only by growth in the number of contracts but also by a decline in the cost of each subsequent deployment. The latest project should use more pre-existing components than the first: common cybersecurity tools, reusable integration modules, language components, regulatory templates, trained professionals and standardized support procedures.

The second scenario becomes economically justified when demand has been validated across several customers or markets and fixed costs begin to be distributed across a growing number of projects. Local partnerships and joint infrastructure financing are especially important here: a Russian company should not automatically bear the entire cost of the existing digital deficit.

Scenario Three.

Systemic Integration: Infrastructure Investment Requires Sustained Demand

The third scenario involves moving from supplying ready-made technology to participating in a local digital ecosystem. It can include shared computing capacity, industry platforms, competence centers, data-storage and protection infrastructure, specialist training and permanent technical support.

International projects illustrate how rapidly the scale of investment changes under this model. In 2024, Microsoft and G42 announced a $1 billion investment initiative in Kenya, including digital infrastructure and a data center. This project is not a benchmark for the Russian budget required: Russian companies may use a more modular, partnership-based model. It does show, however, that deep integration turns computing and energy infrastructure into investment assets rather than free external conditions for a project (Reuters, 2024).

Source: Reuters, Microsoft and G42 to invest $1 billion in Kenya, 2024

For Russian technology companies, this infrastructure can serve not only export operations but also a backup function. Part of Russian companies' computing capacity, backup environments and copies of critical services could be hosted in selected African jurisdictions. In that case, an African site becomes not only a base for serving the local market but also part of geographically distributed business infrastructure: if the primary site is damaged or unavailable, some workloads can be switched to an external backup environment.

Locating such capacity in protected underground sites, including repurposed industrial facilities and former mine workings, offers particular potential. International examples show that such facilities can combine greater physical protection with lower cooling costs. Iron Mountain's Pennsylvania data center, for example, is approximately 60 meters underground in a former limestone mine and uses an underground water reservoir for geothermal cooling; according to the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Buildings program, the system improved power usage effectiveness (PUE) by approximately 34%.

Source: U.S. Department of Energy, Better Buildings

Geographical redundancy requires a predesigned protocol for migrating and switching digital workloads. It must specify which data and services may be hosted outside Russia, which systems permit continuous replication, encryption and key-management procedures, acceptable recovery times, data-synchronization frequency, failover conditions and subsequent failback. The host country's requirements for data localization and cross-border transfer must also be considered. In other words, this is not a physical "relocation of a Russian data center," but the creation of a pre-compatible backup computing environment to which critical services can be transferred without rebuilding the entire architecture.

This model makes economic sense only if the assets created can be reused repeatedly. A local team, computing site or competence center should not depend on a single contract: either a sufficiently large domestic market or the ability to use the selected country as a regional hub is necessary.

As sunk investment increases, partner quality, data regulation, intellectual-property protection and predictable operating conditions become more important. The risks of the second scenario do not disappear—they become more expensive.

At this stage, staffing may become the tightest constraint. A pilot can still be supported largely from Russia; permanent operations across several jurisdictions require specialists who understand foreign trade, the local business environment, contractual and regulatory requirements, the digital product, financing and cyber risks—and, for financial solutions, AML/CFT requirements as well.

Workforce development should therefore begin before a company reaches the third scenario. Educational and awareness-building formats can develop local pools of users, technical specialists and security professionals before a permanent commercial presence emerges. In this sense, human capital is a prerequisite for scaling rather than its consequence.

The three scenarios ultimately follow fundamentally different logics. The first is justified when a company gains market knowledge while limiting the cost of mistakes. The second is justified when validated demand allows fixed costs to be spread across multiple projects. The third is justified when the duration and scale of demand justify investment in dedicated infrastructure and a permanent local presence.

The task for Russian businesses is therefore not to choose the most ambitious entry model, but to determine the maximum economically justified depth of presence that a particular market and project can sustain. Security, data regulation and workforce development are not additional conditions considered after an investment decision, but parameters that directly determine its economics. At this level, the technological question becomes one of human capital: the deeper the presence, the less the outcome depends solely on technology quality and the more it depends on professionals capable of turning it into a sustainable international economic project.

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL EXCHANGE: ANALYZING CONSTRAINTS AND IDENTIFYING GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

SECTION EXPERTS



ALEXANDRA FILINA
PhD in Economics

Lecturer, Department of World Economy and World Finance, Faculty of International Economic Relations, Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation,
Project Manager, Information Support Department, Mostransproekt Research Institute;

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists



KHOLIK ABDUZHALILOV
PhD in Economics

CEO, Intellect Group LLC;

President, Center for International Diplomacy autonomous nonprofit organization;

Member of the «New Generation» International Club of Young Economists

The development of economic cooperation between Russia and African countries increases the importance of professionals capable of working across different markets, languages and business practices. To implement joint projects, companies need employees who combine professional skills with knowledge of local conditions and can support engagement with foreign partners.

African students and graduates of Russian universities have particular potential. Their education, Russian-language skills and familiarity with the Russian environment can provide a basis for participation in trade, investment and technology projects. Realizing this potential, however, depends on career opportunities and direct engagement with employers both in Russia and in African countries.

The practical task is to connect companies' staffing needs with professionals' capabilities, and interested entrepreneurs with suitable business partners. Clear mechanisms are needed to find and select participants and support cooperation. Developing them will broaden graduates' professional opportunities, reduce businesses' contact-building costs and create conditions for joint projects.

EXPORTING RUSSIAN EDUCATION TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES: OBJECTIVES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Over the past six years, the Russia–Africa educational partnership has become one of the fastest-growing areas of Russian higher-education exports: the number of African students at Russian universities rose from 17,500 in 2020 to more than 37,000 in 2026—more than doubling.

It is important to recognize that growth in student numbers is the main, but not the only, indicator of education exports. Education exports also include preparatory courses, Russian-language programs, joint degree programs, continuing professional education, academic mobility, research projects, professional development and the development of a lasting alumni community.

1.1 Key trends in educational cooperation

Expanding government support

Increasing quotas has been the most visible instrument. The 2026 federal budget allocates more than RUB 10 billion to foreign-student quotas, with Africa designated a priority area.

Demand for practice-oriented skills

The most sought-after disciplines are directly linked to African countries' socio-economic development priorities:

- medicine and public health;
- engineering and energy;
- oil and gas engineering and geological exploration;
- information technology;
- agriculture, food security and biotechnology;
- education and the training of Russian-language teachers;
- management, economics and public administration.

Russia's competitive advantage lies in its combination of rigorous foundational education, an applied engineering tradition, experience in training personnel for developing economies and relatively affordable tuition compared with many Western education systems.

Transition to a network model

In August 2021, the Russian-African Network University (RAFU) was established at the initiative of Russia's Ministry of Science and Higher Education. It initially included 12 Russian universities and research organizations. According to the project coordinator's current data, the network brings together more than 100 Russian universities, five research institutes, five organizations and more than 68 African universities from 11 countries; over 150 students from more than 20 countries participate in projects each year.

This is an important qualitative shift: cooperation is developing not through a "student arrives–student leaves" model, but through long-term academic ties, joint programs and research.

1.2 Unresolved issues in education for international students

Growth in enrollment must be matched by lasting improvements in quality. The main constraints are:

– too few programs in English, French and Arabic, particularly at master's level and in continuing professional education;

– uneven awareness among applicants from different African countries of Russian universities, admission procedures and career opportunities;
– a need for stronger pre-university language and subject preparation, including Russian-language development within partner countries;
– visa, transport, payment and day-to-day practical barriers that affect applicants' actual choices;
– an underdeveloped university–employer–graduate connection, particularly when young professionals return home;
– a need for systematic engagement with graduates of Russian and Soviet universities as professional and civic ambassadors of cooperation.

1.3 Conclusions

Russian education exports to African countries are growing steadily and becoming an important dimension of Russia–Africa cooperation. The increase in African students at Russian universities from 17,500 in 2020 to more than 37,000 in 2026 demonstrates expanding educational ties and demand for Russia's system of professional training.

Government support, expanded quotas and developing inter-university cooperation are important drivers of this trend.

Prospects for cooperation center on training personnel for priority sectors of African economies. Further development of education exports should be considered not in isolation but in connection with industrial, technological and socioeconomic cooperation.

At the same time, progress in education exports requires moving from quantitative enrollment growth to improving the quality and sustainability of partnerships. Priorities should include pre-university preparation, language support, long-term joint programs, research projects and more accessible information services for applicants. Post-graduation support and maintaining graduates' professional ties with Russian universities are particularly important.

Russian education exports to Africa should therefore be assessed not only by admissions numbers but also by training outcomes, graduates' employability in their countries of origin and their participation in joint projects. The strategic objective is a mutually beneficial educational partnership in which Russian universities help develop African countries' human capital and educational ties underpin long-term scientific and economic engagement.

RUSSIA–AFRICA COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

An inter-university platform for workforce and business cooperation could create additional opportunities to attract professionals to Russia. It would allow Russian employers to find suitable specialists regardless of where they studied, while students and graduates could identify companies interested in particular African markets. Entrepreneurs on both sides could post proposals and find potential partners.

Such a platform's value lies in bringing fragmented professional contacts together around specific tasks. Universities, alumni associations and business organizations can recruit participants, while companies access them through a single service. This is particularly significant for small and medium-sized businesses that may lack a dedicated Africa-development team.

The Communication Gap Between Graduates and Employers

For an African student interested in professional employment, the first challenge is finding relevant opportunities: which Russian companies work with their country, where are vacancies published and whom can they approach with their skills? On a conventional job website, the relevant role may be called "export manager," "analyst" or "international projects specialist," without mentioning a particular market. Students find it difficult to identify where their language skills and knowledge of the business environment are genuinely needed.

Research confirms the importance of career prospects and professional networks. The summary of Mohammed Yassir Ali Osman's dissertation, published by HSE University in 2026 and based on a 2022–2023 survey, demonstrates the role of interpersonal networks in job searches and the relationship between employment and intentions to remain in Russia. The author also notes that difficulties finding work in one's field may influence the decision to leave. These findings apply to the surveyed group and do not imply that all African students have identical intentions.

Source: Mohammed Yassir Ali Osman, Migration Intention of African Students in Russia, dissertation, 2026

Employers face the reverse problem. Companies may need a specialist in the Nigerian or Francophone West African market, but recruitment is organized around individual universities and communities. Employers should not have to contact every university separately, identify relevant candidates within its international student body and collect CVs through lecturers. This approach is too fragmented for regular recruitment.

A candidate's origin alone does not establish language proficiency, industry knowledge or business connections. Companies need to see education, practical experience and professional interests. African graduates, in turn, need to understand the work, compensation and development opportunities rather than receiving offers solely as interpreters.

The third participant is an entrepreneur seeking a supplier, buyer or partner. Meeting at a conference may provide initial contact, but does not ensure continued communication. Follow-up requires an accessible description of the request, a suitable counterpart and a way to return to the discussion after the event.

The central issue is therefore the information gap between participants. Two distinct needs are apparent from the outset: finding qualified employees and establishing business relationships. They share the need to make participants accessible to targeted professional searches.

COUNTRY DIFFERENCES: THE COMMUNICATION DIMENSION

Entering an African market from Russia means moving into a different linguistic and institutional environment. Africa is not a single market with uniform business customs. Even within one country, the practices of an international company, a public-sector buyer and a small local enterprise can differ substantially.

For a company accustomed primarily to operating in Russia, Russian is the common foundation of business interaction. Entering African markets requires reassessing the language of negotiations, buyer-search methods and communication channels. Registration procedures and product and payment requirements must also be checked separately for each country. Extrapolating experience with one African partner to the entire continent can lead to mistakes.

COUNTRY CHARACTERISTICS AND THE SPECIALIST'S TASKS

Market	Language and business interaction	Implications for the company
Russia	Russian; recruitment, sales and document-workflow channels familiar to the company	International expansion requires adapting materials and contact-search methods
Nigeria	English; significant role of face-to-face meetings and follow-up, including messaging apps	A specialist is needed to prepare contacts and negotiations and maintain communication
Senegal	French is important in business communication; English alone may be insufficient	French-language materials and a specialist who understands the target segment's context are needed
South Africa	English is widely used in business; in-person and online meetings are common; advance arrangements and punctuality matter	Professional presentation of the offer and preparation for scheduled meetings are important

Source: the Russia entry provides a baseline analytical framework for a domestically focused company. Country characteristics are summarized from International Trade Administration guides; they do not describe every market participant's behavior.

A specialist's practical value lies in explaining whom to approach with a proposal, how to present it and what to clarify before negotiations. Country knowledge complements industry qualifications. An economist, for example, can research buyers and sales channels; an engineer can join technical discussions; and a communications specialist can adapt materials. Legal and financial expertise is provided by the relevant specialists.

Tasks for a Workforce and Business Cooperation Platform

The proposed platform can link employment and business cooperation through several interconnected services. Employers would gain access to specialists from different universities, and candidates to companies that have declared an interest in a particular country or project.

The first service is an inter-university directory of professionals. Searches should cover occupation, industry, languages, country knowledge and employment format. Profiles should record not only education but also completed projects, internships and interest in working in Russia or at home. Candidates indicate their availability and decide who may access their contact details.

The second service is vacancies and paid project assignments. A company can seek a permanent employee or offer a limited assignment: research a market segment, prepare negotiation materials or assess sales channels. For a student, this provides a clear entry into professional work; for an employer, it offers an opportunity to assess a potential employee's capabilities through a real task.

The third service is a directory of companies and business requests. A Russian organization specifies its target market and the counterpart it seeks: buyer, distributor, supplier or joint-project participant. An African company can post a reciprocal request. Searches focus on country, industry and the subject of cooperation, turning general expressions of interest in Africa into proposals open to substantive discussion.

The fourth service is concise country information and career guidance. Participants need information on business languages, industry associations, relevant events and forms of professional involvement. General employment guidance should lead to current information and expert advice, since conditions depend on an individual's status and place of work.

Existing university career services and business events can serve as partner recruitment channels. A dedicated section on an existing platform is another option. The key issue is a shared, accessible search service for employers and candidates, not creating a new website for its own sake.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL SEARCH OPTIONS

A stronger educational partnership, with systems that keep international professionals connected to the Russian economy, will expand opportunities for Russian companies.

A unified search service will help employers find the professionals they need.

The platform should also provide tools for direct communication. These will allow participants to clarify requests, meet employers and assess prospects before making commitments.

Such tools could include:

- online meetings with companies focused on specific markets and projects. Employers present their projects, required skills and vacancies. Students from different universities can ask questions and submit CVs through a common form;
- targeted meetings with entrepreneurs;
- newsletters with curated opportunities;
- project teams and mentoring;
- an alumni social network. After returning home, graduates can maintain their profiles, receive offers and participate in projects involving Russian and local companies. This supports cooperation across different career paths, including work in Russia, an African country or an international team.

ROSCONGRESS
Building Trust

×

VEDOMOSTI

2026