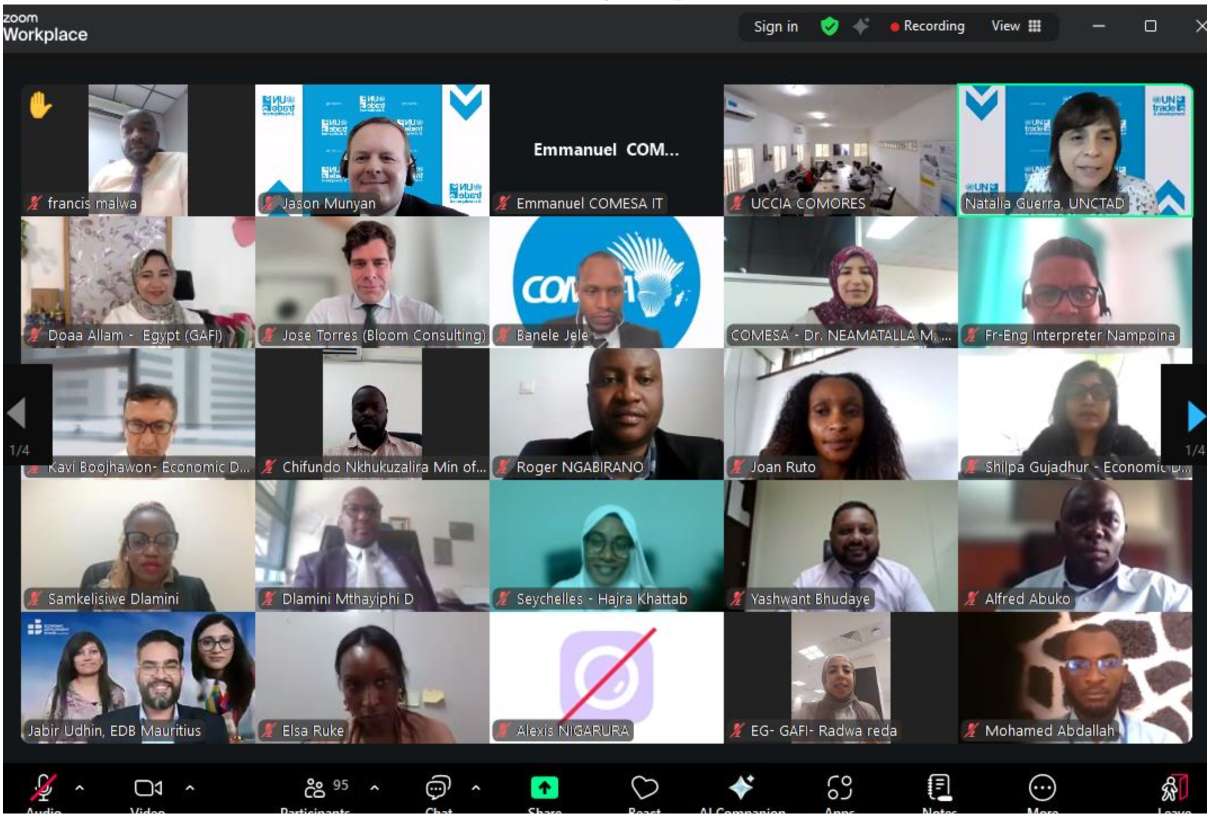
COMESA – UNCTAD Webinar
Training for Government Officials on Risk Perception, Risk Mitigation and Nation Branding for Sustainable Investment

11th November 2025

Summary Report



United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) organized a two-hours webinar on 11 November 2025. The webinar focused on three interconnected themes: risk perception, risk mitigation, and national branding as critical factors for attracting sustainable investment in the COMESA region.

The meeting was facilitated by Natalia Guerra, Officer-in-Charge, Investment Promotion Section, UNCTAD and Mr. Banele Jele, Investment Promotion Expert, COMESA.

Opening

The meeting was first addressed by *Mr. Nsangwa Ngwira*, speaking on behalf of Assistant Secretary General of COMESA, *Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah* and *Ms. Nan Li*, Director of UNCTAD's Division on Investment and Enterprise. Mr. Ngwira expressed his appreciation to UNCTAD for providing its technical expertise to COMESA region and the extensive participation of member states in the webinar. In 2025, COMESA received 65 billion dollars of foreign direct investment (FDI), equivalent to 7% of the FDI flow to developing countries. Among the factors affecting investment flow to Africa are perceived political risks, including contract frustration and civil unrest. In this context, key action areas for COMESA must include developing robust policies and regulatory frameworks to mitigate risks; foster trust and reliability through proactive risk management; and build strong national brands emphasizing sustainability, innovation, and stability. He concluded by stressing the need to create an environment that is not only attractive to investors but also beneficial to local communities and future generations.

Ms. Nan Li thanked COMESA Secretariat for the collaboration in the area of investment and referred directly to the increasingly highlighted issue from investors, which is investment risks and the need to deal with them. This is important because we are living in a turbulent era, high debt, low growth, and trade policy uncertainty are creating a sluggish investment environment. During this challenging time, it is even more crucial to bolster investors' confidence and effectively manage risks. Secondly, we are committed to supporting COMESA.[1] This region has lots of potential, from natural resources to a young population, but there are many real and perceived risks to address. An interactive discussion was pertinent to identify and address key pressure points and harness existing opportunities.

Discussion

Following the opening substantive discussion was held with the presentation by Mr. Massimo Meloni, Chief, National Investment Policies Section, UNCTAD and Mr. José Torres, CEO, Nation and City Branding Global Director, Bloom Consulting.

Mr. Meloni presented the key trends in international investment and the results of UNCTAD's research on de-risking investment in SDGs. Overall FDI has increased by 75 per cent in Africa, significantly affected by a US$ 46 billion investment in Egypt largely channeled into a single urban development investment project. Excluding this mega project, FDI increased by 12% in Africa with uneven sub-regional performance. Yet the share of just five countries has increased from 80 per cent to 90 percent in 2024.

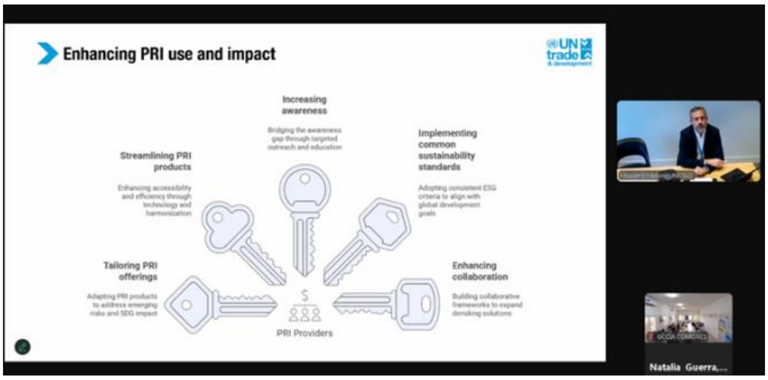
[1] UNCTAD has engaged with COMESA in capacity building on international investment agreements and on investment promotion and facilitation. In December 2025, UNCTAD published the first edition of the COMESA Investment Report

Policy wise, in 2024, 1) developing countries adopted 89% investor-friendly measures, mainly fiscal and financial incentives. The expansion of incentives contrasts with global tax reform efforts; 2) FDI promotion and facilitation increasingly co-exist with national security concerns in strategic sectors, such as sensitive technologies and critical minerals. The number of countries implementing FDI screening rose from 21 in 2015 to 46 in 2024; 3) The divergence between the old generation and new generation investment agreements continues to expand. Yet the reform of the old treaties has slowed down.

Mr. Meloni further presented trends on the use of derisking instruments for foreign investment in developing countries. Among investment derisking instruments, political risk insurance (PRI) has a critical, and potentially growing role to play in fostering investment towards developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs). PRI protects foreign investors and lenders from losses caused by political events, currency inconvertibility, and breach of contract by public sector partners of investments. Export credit agencies (ECAs) are the primary providers of PRI, followed by multilateral institutions, led by the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and private insurers. .

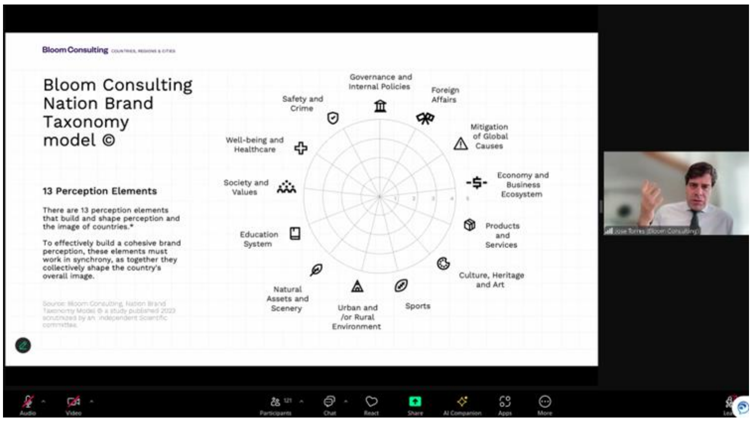
What can be done to enhance the use of PRI and improve its impact?

First, there is a need to tailor PRI products to emerging challenges, such as climate change. Second, streamlining processes. Third, raise awareness of the available PRIs. Fourth, advance common sustainability standards, and fifth, enhance the collaboration between multilateral institutions, ECAs, and private insurers. IPAs also need to incorporate available PRI in their investment promotion material. UNCTAD publication on political risk insurance can be downloaded here.



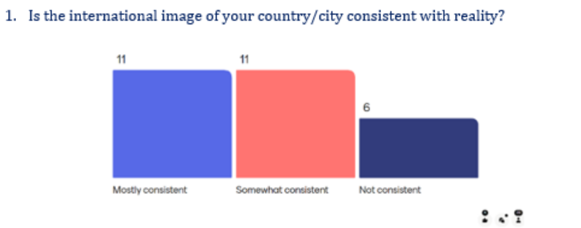
Mr. Torres from Bloom Consulting presented the impact of nation and place brands on the local and global economy. A nation or city brand is the perception, emotion, or feeling that comes to a person's mind when the name of a country or city is mentioned. Nation branding is about managing perceptions. When people visit a country, their perception of the country improves in almost 90 per cent of the cases. Hence, influence is critical. You can always improve the investment environment, but the aspect of intangible cultural assets plays a very important role in changing perceptions.

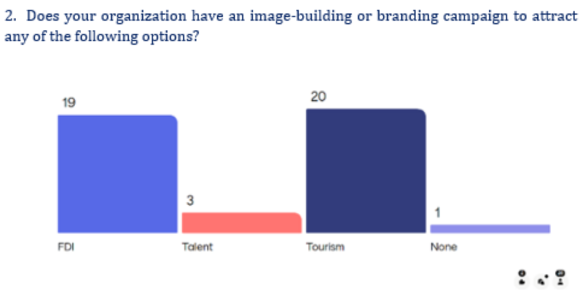
According to their research, *perception is not random but systemic: it's influenced by measurable elements such as governance, foreign affairs, mitigation of global causes, business eco-system, product and services, culture, heritage and art, sports, urban and rural environment, natural assets and scenery, education, health, safety, and crime*. By applying the perception elements, governments can identify the perception gaps most strongly correlated with investor hesitation - such as environmental commitment, legal reliability, or innovation readiness. On a global scale, the estimate is that perception impacts US$ 934 billion worth of the global economy per year. This data indicates that there is an important area of work for investment promotion agencies, among other government institutions and the domestic private sector.



COMESA member states should start measuring how their country is perceived in the minds of global audiences, specifically for FDI, tourism, and talent. At the country level, it is essential to engage all relevant stakeholders across all perception elements and agree on roles and responsibilities to manage perception and monitor reputational risk.

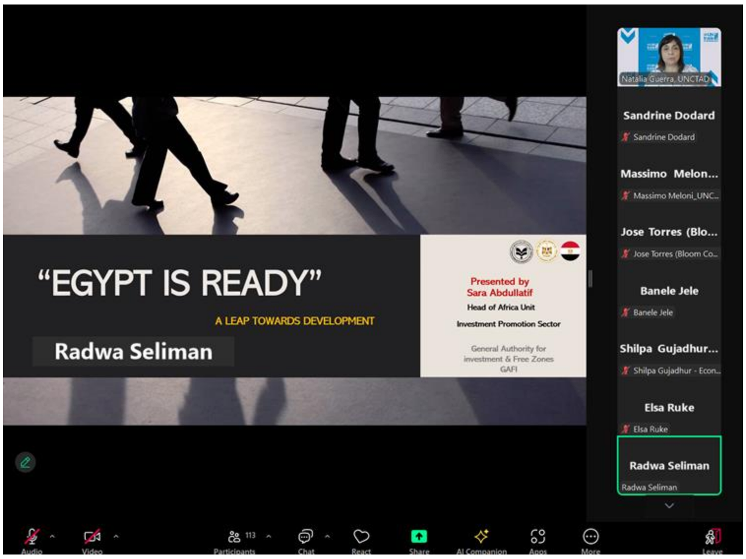
In an exercise to consult the participants about their own experience with risk perception and nation branding, a few questions were displayed online using the platform Mentimeter (right).





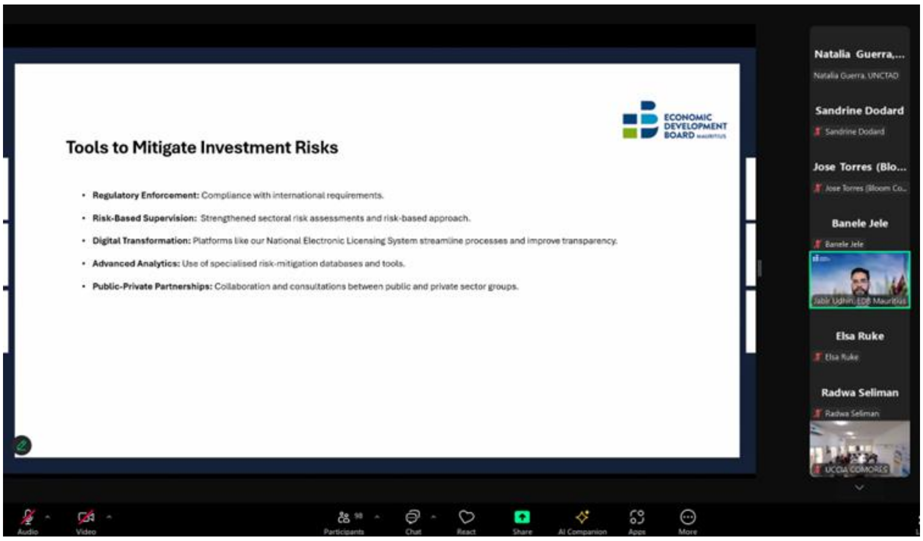
Country exchanges

Following the presentations, the discussion continued with the sharing of experience by Egypt's General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI) and Mauritius' Economic Development Board (EDB).



GAFI has adopted two main strategies to support derisking investment and improving perception: 1. GAFI adopted the slogan "Egypt is ready" to reach out to domestic and international investors, with its shift from crisis to modernization; 2. Egypt has also adopted the Golden License – a single, comprehensive approval from the Council of Ministers that grants a company the right to establish, operate, and manage a project, including securing building permits and allocating the necessary real estate.

Mauritius' EDB has been implementing multi-level measures, starting from legal and regulatory enforcement, for example, to ensure compliance with anti-money laundering; risk-based and data-driven supervision to foster investment, technological interventions, such as the digital transformation of national e-licensing system, and finally, public-private partnership to solve problems and risks in a collaborative atmosphere.



Participants were asked through the platform Mentimeter for proposals to deal with risk perception and risk-mitigation:

What do you suggest your organization should do to (further) improve the image reputation of your country/city?

- Focus on systemic campaigns in international media
- More things to do in the country: attractions, activities, and experiences. Lower price of living, as it is also expensive for the locals
- Conduct PR Audit and Assessment
- Provide counter perception promotions.
- Have ambassadors
- Prioritize including nation branding in education
- Work closely with public institutions (MOFA, Ministry of Tourism, National Office of Tourism, and others) and private institutions (Professional associations) to have the SAME MESSAGE
- Value for money
- Focus on talent acquisition, authenticity, and storytelling
- Promote eco-tourism, wellness tourism, green projects
- Engaging in the relevant international events
- Prioritising skilled and motivated professionals, and sustainably leveraging our own resources
- Launch a country branding exercise aimed at developing an overarching brand for Mauritius, aligned with the government's agenda to enter high income nations league. Do a brand audit & dispel negative
- Hire a professional image manager for the specific industry so that it is easier to target the right audience.
- More public engagement and more sensitisation about what is at stake
- Efficient foreign policy to improve perception and attract foreign investments
- Build a brand that speaks for itself. Products and services should be of high quality. Stakeholders ought to project the brand confidently

UNCTAD and the COMESA Secretariat will continue to coordinate their efforts to support member states to build capacity to implement robust risk mitigation strategies and national branding measures and manage the challenges of attracting investment during the current geopolitical tensions.

The training was attended at its highest moment by 120 participants out of the 150 registered (33% Female), representing government agencies of COMESA member states for investment promotion, tourism, economic development, finance, and commerce. The recording of the webinar was distributed to all registered. 35 of the online survey respondents (88%) evaluated the webinar very useful, and useful and 12% somewhat useful.

Programme

COMESA – UNCTAD Webinar
Training for Government Officials on Risk Perception, Risk Mitigation and Nation Branding for Sustainable Investment

11th November 2025
09:30 – 11:30 (GMT+2)

Time is GMT +2	Session Overview	Presenter
09:30 – 09:40 am	Opening and welcome remarks	Amb. Dr. Mohamed Kadah Assistant Secretary General Programmes, COMESA Secretariat Ms. Nan Li Collins, Director, Division on Investment and Enterprise, UNCTAD
09:40 – 10:00 am	Presentation of UNCTAD research on de-risking investment in SDGs and the main findings of WIR2025	Mr. Massimo Meloni, Chief, National Investment Policies Section, UNCTAD
10:00 – 10:05 am	Participant Q&A & Guided discussion	All participants
10:05 –10:30 am	The Impact of Nation and Place Brands on the Local and Global Economy – The direct effect on Foreign Direct Investment	Mr. José Torres, CEO, Nation and City Branding Global Director Bloom Consulting
10:30 – 10:50 am	Participant Q&A & Guided discussion and online survey	All participants
10:50 – 11:20 am	Country peer-to-peer experience sharing	Ms. Sara A. Latif, Head of Africa region, Investment Promotion Sector, General Authority for Investment and Free Zones (GAFI), Egypt. Mr Jabir Udhin, Head of Risk and Compliance, Mauritius Economic Development Board
11:20 – 11:30 am	Closing remarks	Providence Mavubi, Director of Industry and Agriculture Ms. Natalia Guerra, Officer in Charge, Investment Promotion Session, UNCTAD