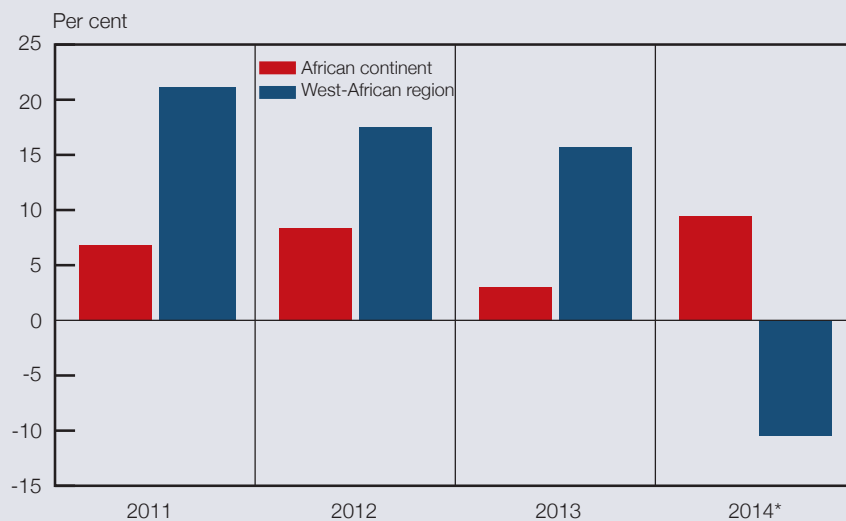


Box 3: The impact of disease outbreaks on tourism

The outbreak of the highly contagious Ebola hemorrhagic fever (Ebola) in three West-African countries, namely Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the opening months of 2014 is of serious concern as more than a thousand people have already died after having contracted this disease. The disease has since spread to Nigeria. The current outbreak is perceived to be the deadliest since the Ebola virus first emerged in 1976. In an effort to contain the spread of the deadly disease, far-reaching measures have been put in place. These measures include, *inter alia*, the closing of schools and borders, the banning of public meetings and quarantining certain labourers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has subsequently also declared the situation a global health emergency. These measures have already had a severe knock-on effect on various economic fronts. For instance, marked increases of as much as 40 per cent have already occurred in the prices of certain food products, aggravated by a shortage of food supplies. In some instances, mainly driven by sentiment and perceptions, local agricultural produce such as bananas originating from these countries was rejected on international markets, leading to severe strains being placed on West-African economies. This has also led to the disruption of markets and a further loss of confidence in the region.

The precautionary measures that have already been taken will inevitably restrict the movement of people and goods across borders as some airlines have already discontinued flights to certain West-African countries, also affecting tourism to and from these countries. South Africa may also be affected by the decline in tourism as roughly 72 per cent of non-residents who visited the country between 2010 and 2013 originated from Africa. Even though tourists from the West-African region represent, on average, only about 2 per cent of tourists from Africa (the SADC region accounts for almost 97 per cent), firm growth was recorded from this region between 2011 and 2013 (see accompanying graph). Preliminary indications of a contraction in tourism from the West-African region may already be evident from lower growth in tourism numbers when comparing the first couple of months of 2014 with the corresponding period in 2013. This development accentuates the seriousness of the situation and its possible wider repercussions.

Growth in the number of tourists from the African continent and from the West-African region



* First quarter