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## **Africa-Europe relations beyond 2020: LOOKING THROUGH A GENDER LENS**

**GENDER**

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The year 2020 is a pivotal year for stepping up action on gender equality. It marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and the global community is celebrating the 20th anniversary of the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

A comprehensive partnership between Africa and Europe will be less effective if gender considerations are not an integral part of joint cooperation. Inclusion of the gender dimension is particularly key in COVID-19 recovery efforts in the short, medium and long term. This paper provides food for thought and points of entry to facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment in thematic areas of importance for the partnership.

Gender equality and women's empowerment have long been championed by the EU, the AU and their individual member states. Yet, nuances in their understandings of gender concepts and sensitivities around perceptions of the EU imposing its norms will be challenging to navigate. Indeed, the current geopolitical reality is one in which stronger pressures exist than in the past to oppose advancements for gender equality and women's empowerment. Nonetheless, there is still common ground for supporting specific gender agendas.

Putting enough resources behind the gender equality agenda and its objectives is one of the most fundamental tasks at hand. This paper outlines some of the challenges and opportunities for strengthening gender-inclusive budgets and financing agendas. But, incorporating gender sensitivity into the activities supported by the EU's international and development cooperation instruments, particularly the NDICI, and into the AU's reform process and budget will be insufficient alone. Gender considerations also need to influence policies on climate, trade, migration and food security, and other important thematic areas of the partnership.



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## Acronyms

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific countries
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
AGN	African Group of Negotiators
AU	African Union
AU-FAW	African Union Fund for African Women
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COP	Conference of Parties
CRF	Continental Results Framework
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEVE	European Parliament Development Committee
DFI	Development finance institution
EAC	East African Community
EC	European Commission
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIP	External Investment Plan
EP	European Parliament
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FSR	Florence School of Regulation
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GCM	Global Compact on safe, orderly and regular Migration
GEWE	Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPES-Food	International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems
ITC	International Trade Center
LDC	Least Developed Country
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
NAP	National action plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions

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NDICI	Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NTPO	Non-trade policy objective
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
REC	Regional Economic Community
SCR	Security Council Resolution
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIA	Sustainability impact assessment
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
TMEA	Trademark Ease Africa
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNOAU	United Nations Office to the African Union
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNSG	United Nations Secretary-General
US	United States
USD	United States dollar
WB	World Bank
WGDD	Women, Gender and Development Directorate at the African Union Commission
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace & Freedom
WPS	Women Peace Security
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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## 1. Introduction and background

Strong international alliances are needed for progress on gender equality. The African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) are now in the process of confirming the strategic value of their continent-to-continent relationship. While the AU-EU Summit originally planned for October 2020 has been postponed to 2021 due to COVID-19, the coming weeks and months still offer opportunities to set joint priorities and strengthen the gender dimensions of the renewed AU-EU partnership that is being formed.

Fuelled by fundamental geopolitical shifts, set against a backdrop of climate change, migration dilemmas, state fragility and the global pandemic, the EU is seeking to assert itself more strongly as a geopolitical actor. It is of course not alone in this. African nations, through the AU, have also become more assertive, speaking more with one voice in relations with external partners to increase their bargaining power. This positioning has brought more focus on defending 'hard' interests, sometimes pushing aside 'softer' values, such as gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

But, the effect that COVID-19 pandemic is having on women across the globe (see box 1) is showing clearly how the issue needs to remain high on the political agenda in both continents.

### Box 1: The pandemic's effects on gender equality and women's empowerment



The COVID-19 pandemic, and the response measures taken, have different effects on men and women. Globally, reports on domestic violence have shown that COVID-19 lockdowns led to an increase in violence and abuse against women at home (UN Women 2020 and Deligiorgis 2020).

The UN has warned of a fall back in progress against SDG 5 as result of interruptions in health and reproductive services, schooling, health and government services (UNFPA 2020). While more men have had serious complications and died from the virus, women make up the majority of the frontline healthcare workers who are more strongly exposed to the virus. Unpaid care responsibilities (for older relatives or children), which in many parts of the world continue to fall on women, increased as a result of the virus outbreak. With women being more often in temporary, part-time and precarious employment than men, there is a risk that women are harder hit by the unfolding economic crisis.

In already fragile and poorer contexts, including in Africa, the pandemic has also exacerbated structural, social, cultural and economic inequalities and injustices already faced by women and girls. Especially at risk are women in camps for internally displaced people and refugees, those working in the health sector as well as women in conflict settings (AU 2020b). The African Union (AU) noted *"in the period that the AU has declared the "Year of Silencing the Guns", the pandemic, if it spreads to conflict zones, has the potential to bring catastrophic consequences for women and girls."*(AU N.d.). At the same time, Africa has been hit less in terms of absolute infections and deaths, due to a variety of reasons, including a rapid first response, its younger population and good local health systems. But the long-term impact of COVID-19 on conflicts in Africa remains to be seen, but analysis has warned of a double burden on women and girls especially, with rising levels of gender based violence (UNFPA 2020), outside and inside the household, restrictions of access to sexual and reproductive health services and declining incomes. Specific attention for women, girls and gender-responsive recovery is one way to off-set the negative impacts of the Corona crisis on women and girls.

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In this paper, we apply a gender lens to ongoing policy processes and thematic areas of relevance to Africa-Europe relations. We do this for two main reasons. First, in the current global context, a joint push is needed through partnerships and cooperation to avoid reversal of progress made on gender equality in the past decades. Second, gender equality is a mainstreaming issue, meaning that it needs to be woven throughout all AU and EU portfolios to be adequately addressed.

At the same time, we must recognise that African and European positions and initiatives on gender issues reflect the imbalances emblematic of the broader AU-EU relationship. That is, the EU supports, financially and otherwise, specific agendas and values which are implemented on the ground in Africa. Though parts of this paper adopt this framing, we acknowledge that a foremost ambition of both the AU and the EU is to overcome this framing and talk in more equal terms, with both the AU and the EU as agents and as objects of change.

This paper begins by looking at the gender agendas of the AU and EU. It then uses a gender lens to explore key thematic areas of the AU-EU partnership: peace and security, climate change, regional integration and trade, and migration. On these, we assess why and how gender matters, where the AU and EU stand with their policies, and opportunities to better integrate gender equality into the ongoing work of the AU, the EU and the two continental unions jointly. The final section turns to financing the support for gender equality as part of the AU-EU partnership. While not exhaustive, we hope that the issues and opportunities raised will contribute to a stronger commitment to gender equality in AU-EU relations.

## 2. Implementing and linking the current gender agendas of the AU and EU

The understanding of and policies around gender equality have been shaped differently in the EU and AU. For the EU, gender equality is a core value, enshrined in the founding treaties and implemented both internally and in external relations, usually following a human rights-oriented normative logic (Van der Vleuten and Eerdewijk, 2020). Norms of gender equality are also central in AU treaties and policy documents, often reflecting a “state-led developmental logic of community-building” and the goal of a peoples-oriented regional integration (Van der Vleuten and Eerdewijk 2020). While both the AU and the EU have adopted policy frameworks for advancing gender equality, the topic has made only fragmented appearances in joint AU-EU strategies and inter-regional documents (ibid.). For a renewed strategic approach to gender in the AU-EU partnership, the two sides will need to start from the concerns and policy frameworks already in place in Africa and Europe.

### 2.1. Gender equality in EU external action: from Gender Action Plan II to Gender Action Plan III

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen named gender equality a priority for the current term. The communication released in March 2020, ‘A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025’ sets out key policy objectives for the coming five years.<sup>1</sup> While directed mainly at gender equality within the EU, the strategy includes the objective of addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment around the world through EU

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<sup>1</sup> The new Gender Equality Strategy was largely welcomed due to its increased ‘calibre’ (a communication instead of a staff working document as the previous) and the integration of intersectionality as a horizontal principle. It is seen as a way to step up efforts to end gender-based violence in Europe including a renewed push for the six remaining member states to ratify the Istanbul Convention, which came into force in 2014 and is the first legally binding instrument on preventing and combating violence against women. Further ratification has been blocked for years in the Council in part due to criticism of the definition of the word “gender” in the convention.

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external action. In her mission letter to the Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jutta Urpilainen, Von der Leyen stated that “gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls continue to be a top priority in our international cooperation and development policies” (EC 2019). Regarding Africa specifically, in the communication ‘Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa’ the Commission identified gender equality as a key aspect to be integrated into EU external action and cooperation (alongside good governance, democracy and human rights).



Photo courtesy of [EU 2020, Etienne Ansotte via EC - Audiovisual Service](#).

The Commission has tasked the EU delegations to champion youth and gender in partner countries, but how this works in practice is another matter. The EU’s third action plan on gender equality and women’s empowerment in external relations (GAP III), is expected to be adopted at the end of November 2020. GAP III will provide the EU an opportunity to step up its gender commitments and create effective incentives and working environments conducive to gender equality.

The EU has made progress in integrating gender equality into its external action in recent years. Nonetheless, several lessons can be distilled from experiences from the EU’s previous two gender action plans (GAP I and GAP II) to help the new plan live up to expectations.<sup>2</sup> First, the gender action plan’s implementation has to be broadly based. GAP II, while comprehensive on paper and applicable to all EU external action, was in practice implemented mainly through development cooperation – with much less application in other thematic areas of EU external action, such as trade, climate change and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The current Commission seems poised to carry on this approach. For instance, gender equality was emphasised far less in the mission letters for these other external action-related portfolios, compared to that for Commissioner Urpilainen.<sup>3</sup> With GAP III, the EU could provide stronger incentives for mainstreaming more comprehensively gender equality into all external action areas and for building gender expertise in a wider range of sectors. This could also help overcome the unidirectional approach in promoting gender equality in Africa. Instead, the AU-EU partnership could be used for sharing experiences in advancing gender equality on specific themes that connect Europe and Africa and where actions are required on both sides. Examples are fighting gender-based violence, integrating gender concerns into national COVID-19 recovery responses, gender aspects in trade relations, and migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

The second lesson from previous EU gender action plans is that the gender equality approach is too often translated into a focus on women and girls only, despite its more comprehensive outlook on paper. GAP III needs to include a clearer common understanding of what ‘gender mainstreaming’ entails. It is much more than just specifying women as targeted beneficiaries or identifying challenges that women face. This means identifying and addressing broader

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<sup>2</sup> An external evaluation of GAP II implementation has been planned for publication in the last quarter of 2020 revealing detailed lessons learned and recommendations for the future EU GAP.

<sup>3</sup> While the mission letter for the Commissioner of International Partnerships clearly notes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority, none of the other mission letters to Commissioners overseeing a portfolio with an external dimension (e.g. External Action; Trade; Agriculture; Home Affairs; Neighbourhood/Enlargement and Environment, oceans and fisheries) include such an explicit objective. All mission letters can be accessed here following each of the portfolios: [The Commissioners - The European Commission's political leadership](#).



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issues of power relations, with all genders as target groups, and also considering how gender inequalities intersect with other aspects of identity, such as race and age. This is a blind spot in GAP II.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, GAP III needs to make substantive advances on institutional capacity, including culture and frameworks for tracking progress. Gender focal points at headquarters in Brussels but also in EU delegations and in EU member state embassies are still poorly recognised and wield little power, and institutional cultures are not fully geared to recognise everyone's responsibility to contribute to gender mainstreaming. Transforming institutional cultures is an ongoing effort and requires a fresh look at EU's incentive structures. It may mean shifting focus from the technical level, where GAP II seems to have largely been implemented, to the higher political level of EU external action.

EU member states have different views on topics linked to gender equality and women's empowerment. A number of EU member states have experienced backlash on gender equality in recent years, especially in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), violence against women and access to education (EP 2018). At the international level, the EU has so far managed to speak with one voice, most visibly on development of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. However, conflicting views have influenced discussions on the EU's negotiation mandate concerning African partnerships. For instance, Poland and Hungary voiced reservations on proposed provisions regarding abortion in the negotiation mandate for a post-Cotonou EU agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states (Thijssen, Bossuyt and Desmidt 2019).

## 2.2. The AU's strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment

The AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, 2018-2028, (GEWE) was launched at the AU Summit in February 2019. With the strategy, the AU aims to realise Aspiration 6 of its Agenda 2063: "An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children". Promotion of gender equality is enshrined in Article 4(l) of the AU Constitutive Act, as well as in other continental and global commitments – including the United Nations (UN) Security Council's landmark Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted precisely two decades ago in October 2000.

The AU does not have an explicit strategy for promoting gender equality in external relations and as part of partnerships, but focuses exclusively on progress on the African continent. The AU GEWE builds on the AU's 2009 gender policy (AU 2009), which makes reference to gender mainstreaming in all sectors, from legislation and legal protection to economic empowerment and peace and security.

As specific target groups, the AU GEWE lists youths, women living in rural areas, women living with disabilities and migrant women. However, it also recognises that men and boys can and do contribute to achieve gender equality. The strategy has four pillars:

- Maximising (economic) outcomes, opportunities and tech e-dividends
- Dignity, security and resilience
- Effective laws, policies and institutions
- Leadership, voice and visibility

Initiatives under these pillars have included advancement of gender equality in education and care work; economic empowerment and e-inclusion; health and SRHR services; gender-focused humanitarian efforts; and programmes to end harmful traditional practices affecting girls and women, and to counter violence against women and girls.

In another milestone, October 2021 will mark the end of the first African Women's Decade, which saw promotion and accelerated implementation of grassroots approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment on the

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African continent. In June 2020, African leaders recommitted to a new African Women's Decade, this time on the theme of women's financial and economic inclusion.

In the AU, however, latent disagreement remains on gender equality policies and commitments, particularly on language around sexual and reproductive health and rights and sexual orientation. For instance, launch of a regional programme for Africa under the UN Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls was planned at the AU Summit in January 2019. Yet, in a statement released on 31 January, the AU Commission expressed reservations about the initiative, possibly under pressure from its member states. It noted that the language in the regional programme document was "not consistent" with language on SRHR and sexual orientation that had been negotiated in key AU policy documents (Thijssen, Bossuyt and Desmidt 2019). The programme was eventually signed by the EU and the AU Commission in May 2020 (UNOAU 2020), but it was not signed by African Heads of States at the AU Summit as originally envisaged. Indeed, some AU member states have not ratified the Maputo Protocol due to concerns about its provisions on SRHR, especially access to safe abortion procedures and (child) marriage.<sup>4</sup>

Reasons given by the AU for the slow progress in implementing the Maputo Protocol and provisions on gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa are "lack of accountability, absence of or limited access to verifiable data and limited capacity for data and information processing" (AU n.d.).<sup>5</sup> In response, the AU Commission introduced the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and Index in June 2020. This tool for monitoring implementation progress at the member state level is also being used to support gender equitable responses to the COVID-19 pandemic (AU 2020a). The idea is to enhance accountability of AU member states in meeting their commitments.<sup>6</sup>

### 2.3. The politics of a focus on gender equality in AU-EU relations

The global context and world order have seen important shifts in recent years. Populism and nationalism are on the rise, accompanied by xenophobic and misogynist movements which are propelling many states toward isolationism and regressive policies on women's rights (Taylor and Baldwin 2019). There is a risk that progress made so far – in the EU, in the AU and jointly – will be undermined (Taylor and Baldwin 2019, Goetz 2020). The ability of the AU and EU to jointly address gender issues is curbed by the current global politics on gender and opposition being voiced to existing agendas, agreed norms and policies on gender equality and women's empowerment. Nuances in the two continents' approaches also influence how gender can be integrated into the AU-EU partnership.

Differences in views on gender influenced negotiation of past partnership agreements as well, and will inevitably remain contentious in the future. Theoretically, both sides agree that gender equality and women's and girls' rights is an important transversal aspect of the AU-EU partnership. Nonetheless, African and European states differ in their interpretation and understanding of gender equality and LGBT rights. This is seen in the negotiations under way towards a post-Cotonou agreement with the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) as well as in preparations for the 2021 AU-EU Summit. In a debate with the European Parliament Committee on Development (DEVE), former Development Commissioner Neven Mimica pointed out that on the issue of the "fight against discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and for upholding sexual and reproductive

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<sup>4</sup> The Maputo Protocol, is a legally binding supplement to the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* on the Rights of Women in Africa. Adopted in 2003, it entered into force in 2005. The Maputo Protocol outlines a range of human rights to which women are entitled and states' obligation to uphold, promote and protect these. See UN 2003, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

<sup>5</sup> This is also similar with regards to the WPS agenda. Despite the integration of WPS in the new AU Strategy Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and the establishment of the AU Continental Results Framework for monitoring progress towards WPS, the AU does not have an implementation plan at continental level. Together with the inconsistencies in reporting and the haphazard occurrence of public debate at the highest political levels, this leaves room for missed opportunities to push for effective implementation.

<sup>6</sup> Only few of the AU Member States that have ratified the Maputo Protocol have to date submitted reports on its implementation.

health and rights”, EU proposals had not been positively received by the ACP Group and had to be bracketed (EP 2019b). Some ACP states objected to a text that would oblige them to promote and respect sexual orientation and gender identity, given that in some of them homosexuality is a crime under the law.

The AU does include ‘women and gender’ as a cross-cutting theme of the AU-EU partnership. In a proposed text for the renewed partnership, the AU mentions gender inclusion and responsiveness to gender issues in relation to infrastructure, value chains and the multilateral trading system. It further highlights the WPS agenda and names women and girls as vulnerable groups warranting special consideration, for example, in COVID-19 recovery efforts. However, the terms ‘gender equality’ and ‘sexual and reproductive health and rights’ are not used. This contrasts with the EU vision for the partnership which explicitly and multiple times mentions gender equality and gender-based discrimination – including on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity – as a fundamental principle to be incorporated into all actions and cooperation throughout the partnership (EC 2020b). This points to a risk that cross-cutting gender aspects on which no agreement can be reached may be dropped or minimised, weakening the foundation for transforming gender relations.

Political differences also affect the operational level and implementation of support programmes. The EU’s ambition to mainstream gender in its external action at the partner country level in Africa has often led to one-sided initiatives with little buy-in and low priority in African partner countries. This has reduced the profile of gender as a key theme in the EU’s geographic programmes.

Despite these challenges, AU and EU member states have found common ground on specific gender-related aspects, such as the WPS agenda, which they have jointly championed at the global level. Advocates such as South Africa (Carvalho and Kumalo 2020)<sup>7</sup> can function as a connector, at least for global-level efforts (Box 2).

### Box 2: AU-EU alignment on the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda in the UN Security Council



Next to chairing the AU in 2020, South Africa sits on the UN Security Council and can thus operate as a crucial link between the two bodies. It is interesting to observe how it is making use of this unique position. South Africa announced gender equality and women’s empowerment as one of the six strategic objectives of its AU Presidency. The country has a track record of speaking out to protect agreed language and existing norms, for example, on the rights of survivors of sexual violence. In April 2019, it played a role in the UN Security Council’s adoption of Resolution 2467 on sexual violence. However, the final text was watered down after difficult negotiations (including with the United States), and ultimately stripped of all language on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Disagreements about the scope of the Security Council’s mandate and whether the resolution overstepped its competencies may have not been surprising. However, the difficult negotiations about existing norms and language were striking. South Africa stated that the resolution essentially told “survivors of sexual violence in conflict that consensus is more important than their needs [by denying them essential services when they need them the most]” (Carvalho 2019). Several EU member states, including Germany, which presided over the Security Council that month and initiated Resolution 2467, aligned with this view. Together, South Africa, Germany, France, Belgium and the United Kingdom reiterated the importance of SRHR for survivors, following the adoption of the resolution (Hamid and Werner 2019). When South Africa held the monthly presidency, in October 2019, it tabled the 10th UN Security Council resolution on implementation of the WPS agenda (Resolution 2493). This was widely seen as an attempt to restore consensus around the WPS agenda and shift the focus to accountability. However, civil society observers noted that the text lacked ambition. It was adopted unanimously, suggesting that a level of cross-regional support remains for the WPS framework and agenda (Hamid 2019). But it took concerted effort and action by like-minded Security Council members in the face of growing opposition from some permanent members to key elements of the WPS agenda.

<sup>7</sup> South Africa is seen as a global champion on WPS, yet has not lived up to expectations domestically yet.

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### 3. Gender equality in the thematic areas of the partnership

#### 3.1. Peace and security

The AU and EU share several security and counter-terrorism challenges. For the AU, conflict prevention and management will remain a priority for 2021, especially in relation to the ambitions of its ‘Silencing the Guns’ initiative and the continent’s persistently high number of violent conflicts and resulting fatalities. Furthermore, COVID-19 is amplifying existing fragilities in many conflict zones. Early analysis suggests that violence by communal militias and state repression have increased since the start of the pandemic, though the long-term impacts on conflict dynamics remain to be seen.<sup>8</sup> A focus on gender equality in peace and security efforts will be especially important in the post-pandemic recovery period, as women and girls risk bearing the brunt of the economic and social fallout from the global health crisis (UNFPA 2020; Oxfam 220) (see Box1). October 2020 has also marked the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, reminding us that women have historically been most affected by the effects of war and conflicts, while they play a key role in ensuring the success of peace processes.



Photo courtesy of [UN Women via Flickr](#).

The EU has long prioritised peace and security as a key area of external action and its new Africa Strategy of March 2020 highlights it as a key cooperation element. Peace and security is an important theme of cooperation and a key item of Summit preparations for the AU as well, especially in regard to the financing of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and agreement on the financial mechanism for EU support to peace and security. Peace and security is thus set to be high on the agenda of the upcoming AU-EU Summit. Ahead of that summit, there are several things that the AU and EU can do to

maintain the position of gender equality and women’s empowerment in their cooperation on peace and security.

First, the AU, the EU and their respective member states will need to make every effort to uphold existing commitments to gender equality and the WPS agenda, despite an increasingly adverse global context. Tensions on gender issues are growing at the UN, particularly within the Security Council. The contentious political climate hinders progress on, or even maintenance of, the current WPS agenda.<sup>9</sup> Political manoeuvring around Security Council [resolutions 2467](#) and [2493](#), both on women and peace and security and adopted in 2019, demonstrates how fraught politics within the Security Council can be, as well as the very real risk that the WPS agenda might be rolled back. These resolutions were initiated by Germany and South Africa respectively (Security Council Report 2020a) and indicate a significant level of alignment between EU and AU member states on WPS (see also Box 2).

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<sup>8</sup> ACLED, [A Great and Sudden Change: The global political violence landscape before and after the COVID-19 pandemic](#), 4 August 2020, accessed October 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Security Council Report. 2020c. Women, Peace and Security: The Agenda at 20. Research Report. 19 June 2020.

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With its clear prioritisation of gender issues, South Africa, now at the end of its third term on the UN Security Council, was positioned to play a key role. However, COVID-19 has turned the Security Council's agenda upside down. Moreover, much of the Council's energy has been expended in managing the growing tensions between the US and China. Negotiation of Resolution 2532, on COVID-19, dragged on for several months, pitting the US against China after the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire to open space to fight the pandemic (UNSG 2020). US criticism and rhetoric about China's role in the pandemic, amid a major US outbreak, has also exacerbated tensions between the countries (Security Council Report 2020b). On 29 October 2020 Russia, a critic of the WPS agenda presided over the annual open debate on WPS in its role as rotating Security Council presidency. It put forth a draft resolution to commemorate the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325. Given Russia's conservative track record on WPS, it was up to other Council members to spark renewed action to advance full implementation of the WPS agenda. Eyes were particularly on South Africa and Germany (who currently chairs the UN Security Council's Informal Experts Group on Women, Peace and Security, IEG<sup>10</sup>) to do so. The resolution was not adopted after receiving 10 abstentions from a cross-regional group of Security Council members aiming to protect the normative framework and progress achieved on WPS during the past two decades. Alongside Russia, China, Vietnam and Indonesia, South Africa voted for the resolution, which was seen by the UN, some Member States and civil society as watering down previously agreed standards. Other European and African countries, including Germany, France, Belgium, Estonia, Niger and Tunisia were among the abstentions.<sup>11</sup>

Postponement of the AU-EU Summit has deprived stakeholders of an opportunity during the WPS anniversary month to gather additional support and financial commitments towards WPS implementation post-2020. Nonetheless, there is much work to be done, both regionally and globally. For example, research shows that WPS language is disappearing from UN Security Council resolutions, though these are deemed key documents for implementing WPS in global peace and security actions (WILPF 2020). The AU, for its part, acknowledges the long road ahead, noting that "while several commitments towards the WPS Agenda have been adopted at the continental, regional and national levels in Africa, the continent has not established measures to ensure effective assessment of and reporting on the delivery of those commitments" (AU 2019). Finally, though the EU and AU are key players in advancing the WPS agenda, implementation ultimately rests with their member states. High-level support does send an important signal, but concrete laws and policies are needed at the national level to ensure that the WPS agenda survives political ebbs and flows. Formal accountability remains a crucial weakness, and there is no legally enforced framework to hold states to account.

Given the many political obstacles, both globally and regionally, a politically smart approach is needed to advance key elements of the WPS agenda. On the EU side, there is a risk of addressing gender equality and women's empowerment predominantly from a governance and peace or security angle. For the AU, stronger integration between gender equality and the WPS agenda is key, along with beefed up reporting and accountability mechanisms to monitor progress towards the AU's ambitious objectives.

The second task to be performed is to ensure dedicated financing, deeper implementation and more integrated action for the WPS agenda in the future during this 20th anniversary year of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. Many AU and EU member states have expressed their strong commitment to the WPS agenda, of which Resolution 1325 is the foundation.<sup>12</sup> UN Women launched a call to action on WPS in response to the 2019 UN Security Council Open Debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Both the AU and the EU pledged additional commitments to support

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<sup>10</sup> The IEG is chaired by two countries, currently the Dominican Republic (during its second year on the Council in 2020) and Germany (2019-2020).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/blog-UNSC-protect-wps-agenda-20th-anniversary/>

<sup>12</sup> Twenty-four out of 55 AU member states (43.6% of all AU member states) have UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs), which is slightly higher than the global ratio. # In the European Union (EU), 17 out of 28 EU member states (60.7% of all EU member states) have adopted 1325 NAPs.



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increased implementation by 2020.<sup>13</sup> The EU committed to adopt a regional action plan on WPS; to launch a regional acceleration resolution for faster adoption of national action plans among its member states; and to adopt an EU-wide policy on sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment. In December 2018, the EU adopted a new strategic approach on WPS, followed by the EU Action Plan on WPS, 2019-2024.<sup>14</sup> In Africa, the AU created a continental results framework (CRF) on WPS in 2019. In response to the 2019 call to action, the AU promised to achieve that half of its member states adopt national action plans (NAPs), and committed to roll out the CFR in all member states that had adopted national action plans. It also promised to release an annual report on the WPS agenda in Africa and to share this with the UN Security Council.

However, neither regional body has attached concrete financial targets to these commitments or pledged additional financial resources. This is concerning, as lack of resources is one of the biggest impediments to effective advancement of the WPS agenda, according to a 2015 UN Women study.<sup>15</sup> That study cited “failure to allocate sufficient resources and funds” as “perhaps the most serious and unrelenting obstacle to implementation of women, peace and security commitments over the past 15 years”.<sup>16</sup> In October 2019, UN Secretary-General António Guterres, together with the AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, reiterated that progress was too slow.<sup>17</sup>

Better integration and alignment of actions for gender equality and the WPS agenda is also important. Though both the AU and EU have extensive agendas and policies on gender equality and WPS, these have not always been effectively linked, or fully implemented. The EU has tried to connect the implementation of its gender action plan with its efforts on WPS, and similar initiatives are starting to take shape in the AU. With its strategic framework on WPS and action plan, the EU is seeking to push gender mainstreaming and implementation of elements such as women’s participation in leadership roles, and in activities focusing on conflict prevention, relief recovery and protection. These areas are aligned with the current Gender Action Plan II and thus offer opportunities for synergies between the WPS agenda and the EU’s future Gender Action Plans.

Though EU high-level political commitment is important, the WPS and gender agendas are driven mainly from within institutions in which processes have been set in motion in the past years. Here, too, more work needs to be done to strengthen and consolidate gains. Most of the EU’s efforts on the WPS agenda are led by the European External Action Service (EEAS), particularly, the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and on WPS. Funding for this office has been limited, however, and it is not yet clear whether it will be continued, strengthened or otherwise altered. The current EU action plan on WPS runs until 2024. In 2019, the EU established a joint Gender, Age and Diversity Facility as part of both the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the Partnership Instrument (PI).<sup>18</sup> By building staff capacity, this has strengthened the connection between gender equality and women’s empowerment and the WPS agenda through supporting the application of a gender, age and diversity lens to IcSP/PI interventions. Such initiatives are important to keep up momentum and effectively apply a gender, age and diversity perspective to the EU’s approach to peace and security. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Commission Vice-President, Josep Borrell, will also play a role in advancing the WPS agenda as part of EU foreign policy. Gender has not been an outright priority in his first six months in office. How strongly it features during the coming years remains to be seen. With the launch of the EU’s Gender Equality Strategy, 2020-2025, in March 2020, a new equality task force was established to oversee gender mainstreaming, bringing together all the directorate-

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.peacewomen.org/node/103695>

<sup>14</sup> Council to the European Union (EU). 2019. [EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security \(WPS\) 2019-2024](#). 5 July 2019. EEAS(2019)747.

<sup>15</sup> See the UN’s 2015 ‘Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325’.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> United Nations (UN). 2019.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission (EC). N.d. [Partnership instrument for cooperation with third countries \(PI\)](#). DB2021.

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generals and the EEAS. Given that the EEAS and Commission are the file-holders, respectively, for WPS and gender equality this bodes well for increased coherence.

Similar efforts by the AU to follow a comprehensive and linked-up agenda are starting to emerge, but issues remain, including political leadership and reporting. The AU's WPS commitments reside with the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, Smaïl Chergui, and the AU Special Envoy for Women, Peace and Security, Bineta Diop. Commissioner Chergui has lent vocal support to a range of initiatives, particularly the establishment of FemWise-Africa, a network of African mediators, in 2017.<sup>19</sup> Special Envoy Diop has leveraged her office to gather high-level support for women in key conflicts, through so-called 'solidarity missions' in DR Congo, Nigeria/the Sahel and South Sudan, among others.<sup>20</sup> Within the AU gender equality is housed in the Women, Gender and Development Directorate (WGDD), in the Chairperson's Office. The WGDD's proximity to the AU Chairperson has given it a heightened level of attention. However, gender equality has not been granted a Special Envoy, unlike WPS. There have been efforts to integrate gender equality and the WPS agenda within the AU Commission. Special Envoy Diop was one of the key convenors of the AU High-Level Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in February 2020. The WPS agenda has been integrated into the AU GEWE Strategy as well. Finally, the AU has issued guidelines for gender-responsive responses to COVID-19, including assessment of the pandemic's impact on women's peace and security and a number of recommended actions.<sup>21</sup>

There is thus no lack of initiatives aimed at reinforcing and strengthening the AU's commitment to gender equality or WPS.<sup>22</sup> But reporting on the AU's ambitious objectives has remained inconsistent and lacking in clarity. The AU's last report on implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa was released in 2016,<sup>23</sup> though the AU launched its continental results framework (CFR) in February 2019, and promised to release an annual report. The absence of publicly available reports on WPS has made public debate difficult, and undermines collective accountability and progress towards WPS objectives in Africa.<sup>24</sup>

The third task for the EU and AU is to ensure that gender equality and WPS are designed into a new and more effective peace and security partnership, with due attention to gender-responsive conflict prevention and peacebuilding. There is otherwise a risk that gender equality will slide down the priority list, particularly in the wake of COVID-19. Beyond protection of agreed language and commitments on WPS, greater attention is needed for emerging issues, such as gender-sensitive post-pandemic recovery measures, the role of women in and against radicalisation, and gender issues in relation to climate-change induced conflicts.

Beyond the commitments in declarations and partnership agreements, jointly improving accountability mechanisms is a good way forward to boost WPS implementation, including progress on securing adequate funding. Both Africa and Europe are improving their monitoring – the AU through its CFR and the EU through its gender action plans. Sharing of results and lessons learned can make EU-funded WPS actions in Africa more effective and thorough. The AU and EU could, for instance, hold working meetings focused on gender and WPS as part of their regular joint consultative meetings on peace and security, or as part of the Commission-to-Commission gatherings. These could be complemented by regular exchanges hosted by the AU Special Envoy on WPS and EU High Representative, possibly with the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and on UNSCR1325, to identify gaps, obstacles and opportunities.

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<sup>19</sup> African Union 2018b.

<sup>20</sup> African Union 2017.

<sup>21</sup> African Union N.d.

<sup>22</sup> In the past two year alone, the AU launched a new Continental Results Framework (CFR), a new AU Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (AU 2018), the Maputo Protocol Scorecard and index a commemorative book on WPS and twenty African female 'trailblazers' (AU 2020a), all the while not forgetting that 2010-2020 was coined the Women's Decade by the AU.

<sup>23</sup> African Union Commission 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

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### 3.2. Climate change

Women face higher risks and carry greater burdens from climate change, especially in developing countries. Gender disparities in decision-making and labour market inequalities can block women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policymaking and implementation. Also, climate catastrophes can lead to gender-based violence (UNFPA 2019). Women play a critical role in climate change responses because of their local knowledge and leadership in sustainable practices, among other things.<sup>25</sup> Despite strong evidence that climate change impacts women disproportionately, gender is not yet adequately recognised in climate-related policies and practices in Africa or in Europe. At the global level, too, more ambition is needed in applying a gender lens to climate change responses. The landmark agreement reached by the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in 2015 – the Paris Agreement – provided an opportunity for explicit incorporation of gender. However, as pointed out by the African Working Group on Gender and Climate Change, the Paris Agreement does not mention gender anywhere except in the preamble and articles on adaptation and capacity building (AWGGCC 2017). How can Europe and Africa jointly advance their cooperation on gender-sensitive climate action, and what progress has already been made?

#### Gender perspectives in key EU and AU climate change policies

Europe launched its ‘Green Deal’ in December 2019 at the UN Climate Change Conference. It is the world’s most progressive, regional climate strategy to date. The Green Deal sets Europe on a course to become climate-neutral by 2050, a commitment which has been translated in the European Climate Law proposed by the Commission (Simon 2020).<sup>26</sup> The strategy also seeks to decouple economic growth from resource use. Implementation of the Green Deal will include engagement with Africa in the areas of trade in clean energy, the circular economy and sustainable food systems. Yet, gender is not mentioned at all in the Green Deal, despite a call by the European Women’s Lobby to include gender mainstreaming in all EU policies (European Women’s Lobby 2019b). The European Parliament has picked up on this, stating “the Green Deal must emphasise the need for a gender perspective on actions and goals in the Green Deal, including gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive actions” (EP 2020a). Much more effort is needed to integrate gender perspectives into the Green Deal. For instance, the German EU Council Presidency, which is currently leading the discussions on the EU budget and the EU pandemic recovery fund, can push to ensure that all EU programmes and actions on climate change work for women (Kappert 2020). The EU Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, has indicated that the envisaged clean energy transition could create 60 million new jobs globally in the next two decades, so not including gender equality in the effort would be a major missed opportunity (FSR 2020).

The Commission did include the need to work jointly with Africa towards gender equality in climate action in its March 2020 communication, ‘Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa’ (EC 2020b). This objective, however, will require links with African policies framing gender equality and climate justice. The AU’s Agenda 2063 contains more than forty references to ‘gender equality’ or ‘parity’ and mentions ‘climate’ or ‘climate change’ more than eighty times. It aspires for Africa to be a continent where gender equality is the norm in participation and access to social and economic opportunity. Achieving this ambition will require the full participation of all peoples, regardless of gender, in climate-related processes. Clearly, promoting gender-sensitive climate action could be a long-running exercise. As the AU’s own gender strategy points out, African states do not yet fully empower and engage women in climate justice initiatives, due to persistent patriarchal social norms that allow men to continue to enjoy the benefits of male privilege. Efforts to overcome culturally embedded gender inequalities are often contested and criticised in African societies, resulting in resistance to change (Babugura 2019).

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<sup>25</sup> [Introduction to Gender and Climate Change](#).

<sup>26</sup> The EU Commission proposed 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, while the European Parliament would like to see a 60% reduction (see Simon 2020 and 2020b). The text of the law will need to be approved by the EU Council of Ministers.



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## Gender-sensitive climate action on the ground in Africa



Photo courtesy of [Callum Shaw via Unsplash](#).

The past decade has seen countries such as Mozambique and Tanzania create national climate change and gender action plans, known as 'ccGAPs'. These are aimed at overcoming the implementation gaps that have persisted between gender-equitable climate policies and action on the ground.<sup>27</sup> Though climate policies have been criticised as lacking horizontal and vertical linkages across sectors and institutions (Murray 2019), there are success stories at the national and local levels. Morocco, for instance, is promoting gender equality in actions towards a clean energy transition. The country has built a large solar facility to help achieve the goal of 52%

renewables in its energy mix by 2030. In addition to providing clean energy for some 2 million Moroccans, it provides entrepreneurial training for women and recruits women to decision-making roles in project activities (AfDB 2014). Promising initiatives are also found at the city level. In the Sagnarigu District of Ghana's Northern Region, the Mayor, Mariam Iddrisu (female and the country's youngest mayor to date), was recognised for her work to raise climate awareness among citizens, especially women. She is also leading a drive to install solar panels on all residential buildings in the city (Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy 2019). In another example, it is remarkable that so many of the youth activists in the 'Fridays for Future' movement are African girls and women, raising their voices especially to highlight the lack of priority that (often male) politicians in Africa have given to climate topics (BBC 2020).

## Towards AU-EU cooperation on gender-sensitive climate action

The green transition will likely be a main agenda topic at the AU-EU Summit next year, along with the European Green Deal. Like the AU-EU Summit, the 26<sup>th</sup> UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) was postponed (it is now scheduled for November 2021). Both these meetings should – and almost certainly will – underline the importance of gender equality in climate action, including in the AU-EU partnership. In the intervening months, there are several steps that stakeholders on both continents can take to help ensure that gender-sensitive climate action becomes the norm.

First, while a meaningful AU-EU partnership on climate and gender issues is key to provide the guiding policy framework, the partnership needs to address climate and gender issues at the appropriate governance levels; that is, where interests intersect and with involvement of the right institutions and nonstate actors. For instance, success stories at the community and city levels, such as those referred to above, can be scaled up. Furthermore, as parties to the UNFCCC, countries in Africa and Europe are currently reviewing their nationally determined contributions (NDCs). These set out long-term goals for emissions reduction and climate change adaptation and actions countries will take to achieve these. They therefore represent an opportunity to integrate gender into climate plans.<sup>28</sup> To promote this, the UNFCCC Gender Desk could set up a dialogue on gender inclusion in the NDCs, involving country representatives, the EU, the AU and the African Group of Negotiators.

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<sup>27</sup> See: UNFCC [Climate Change Gender Action Plans \(CCGAP'S\)](#).

<sup>28</sup> See: UNDP. 2019. [Mainstreaming Gender in NDCs: Gender Data and Indicators \(Webinar\)](#). 18 January 2019.

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Second, there are opportunities to promote the gender-climate link in other policy circles, and these opportunities should be grasped. Researchers from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020) examined the WPS national action plans (NAPs) of 80 countries and found wide variation in responses to climate change and security issues. For instance, Namibia's WPS NAP acknowledges climate change as an 'emerging issue' that needs to be addressed, alongside radicalisation and human trafficking, and describes climate change as undermining women's human security and thus "national social cohesion" (Smith 2020). Both European and African partners have an important role to play in focusing attention on the climate-gender angle across a wider spectrum of policy domains. The prioritisation of 'security and conflict' as a key theme of the AU-EU partnership, for example, provides opportunities to stress that conflicts are often climate-induced or exacerbated by climate stress – due to water scarcity, for example – and that peacebuilding – including, for example, adequate water management practices – can only be effective when informed by a gender lens.

Lastly, climate financing has always been a contentious area in dialogues between Africa and Europe, and in global climate negotiations. In reaction to the postponement of COP26, the African Group of Negotiators has urged the developed countries to close the climate finance gap in 2020, as no new climate funds were allocated at COP25 in Madrid (OECD 2019, AGN 2020). Although the EU and its member states are collectively the largest provider of climate funds, this remains a tricky issue, as the amount of funding available does not meet developing countries' needs. As part of the efforts to raise climate finance within the COVID-19 'green recovery' framework, it will be important to ensure that climate finance from Europe to Africa takes gender issues into account, such as women's access to credit. Concretely, this could mean ensuring that women's groups get access to credit from the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund. It could also mean climate projects that specifically target women.

### 3.3. Regional integration and trade

The EU is Africa's main trade partner, accounting for 31% of exports from Africa and 29% of imports to Africa in 2019.<sup>29</sup> The EU is also the biggest provider of Aid for Trade support to most African countries. Through its trade policy, the EU aims to facilitate African trade, investment opportunities, regional integration and economic development. Gender equality intersects with trade and investment policies due to the gender-differentiated impacts these policies have. Gains and losses resulting from trade policies and trade relations often fall along gendered lines, affecting gender inequalities at the macro, meso and micro levels.<sup>30</sup> The distributional effects of trade also differ by gender, and existing gender inequalities can limit gains from trade. Empirical studies show that the EU's trade relations with third countries have had conflicting impacts on women and women's empowerment. There is evidence that trade liberalisation helps bring women into paid employment (EP 2017). Yet, Brachet and Meijers (2018) demonstrated that without adequate regulation, EU trade and investment liberalisation can contribute to rising inequalities, particularly impacting women and girls.<sup>31</sup>

#### Including gender in cooperation supporting AfCFTA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is being hailed as a game changer for African trade. With the goal of boosting intra-Africa trade and regional integration, it remains Africa's foremost continental flagship project. At the same time the AfCFTA has huge potential as a vehicle for post-pandemic economic recovery, though COVID-19

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<sup>29</sup> [Africa-EU - international trade in goods statistics](#).

<sup>30</sup> Women Watch. N.d. [Gender Equality & Trade Policy](#).

<sup>31</sup> Concord. 2018. Women's rights and Trade: Time for a radical shift.

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has pushed back the start of trading under the agreement to January 2021.<sup>32</sup> Mainstreaming gender needs to be an essential part of AfCFTA implementation to maximise its economic diversification and trade benefits (UNECA 2019).

AfCFTA implementation could set a course for the eventual negotiation of a comprehensive continent-to-continent free trade agreement between the EU and Africa in the long term. This is one of the EU's motivations for supporting the AU in this ambitious integration undertaking (EC 2019b). The EU has supported various phases of the negotiations, focused both on supporting the AfCFTA and increasing EU investment. For example, under the European External Investment Plan (EIP) the EU financed an initiative for enhanced evidence-based policymaking on trade and investment.<sup>33</sup> Other EIP investments in Africa promote regional economic integration through regional value chain development, and various commitments have been made to stimulate inclusive and sustainable growth and more and better jobs, especially for youths and women.

The above mentioned EIP initiative on evidence-based policymaking mentions gender specifically, stating "gender considerations will be mainstreamed in all initiatives and targeted efforts will be made to assist women to participate in business development innovation and opportunities for growth". The EU has invested €10 million in blended finance operations to promote women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion in sub-Saharan countries.<sup>34</sup> These investments are expected to leverage further private funds towards women's economic empowerment.

When implementing the AfCFTA, the AU and its member states have an opportunity to pave the way for a process of economic development that benefits all people, regardless of gender, leading to greater gender equality. The EU can play a role by pushing for a strong focus on gender equality through its trade and investment relations and support for the AfCFTA. Whether this will happen in practice remains to be seen. It is clear that leadership and concrete commitments are needed to build gender analysis activities. Both the AU and the EU have demonstrated their general commitment to gender equality in trade, investment and economic development. In its gender strategy, the AU has stated that it will "integrate and implement gender dimensions into AU Flagship projects, transformational initiatives and protocols on economic empowerment, financial inclusion and social protection" (AU 2018).

Though the AfCFTA does not dedicate a specific chapter to trade and gender, its preamble does make reference to the importance of gender equality in the context of international trade and economic cooperation. Gender equality has also been presented as one of the AfCFTA's general objectives (Parshotam 2019). On the European side, the EU has been engaged in a process of revising some of its trade agreements to include gender-specific chapters, demonstrated by the renewed EU trade agreement with Chile. The EU-Australia and EU-New Zealand agreements also now have a dedicated section on gender impact analysis. In addition, the EU has established mechanisms in its trade policy to address effects on women's labour and human rights and to monitor the gender impacts of its trade preferences.<sup>35</sup> Such gender chapters, though at times criticised as little more than nice rhetoric (Brachet and Meijers 2018), do raise awareness and increase the credibility of a gender perspective on trade.

While the EU is a global leader in regulation of non-trade policy objectives (NTPOs) via trade agreements, it is not easy to champion gender equality through trade policies, especially with African countries, as conditionalities can

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<sup>32</sup> The AfCFTA's operational phase was launched in July 2019 and the finalised schedules were expected by February 2020, with the start of trading scheduled to begin by July 2020. Negotiations on the Phase II of the AfCFTA (investment, competition and intellectual property) will also be ongoing in 2020 and are aimed to be concluded in June 2021.

<sup>33</sup> The programme is titled "Boost African continental integration and EU-Africa economic integration through enhanced evidence-based policy making on trade and investment (2018-2020).

<sup>34</sup> [Empowering women and girls.](#)

<sup>35</sup> See EP 2019c, however, the European Parliament also found that that prior European Commission 26 sustainability impact assessments (SIAs) that had been completed as of June 2017 did not include any specific statistics on Trade and Gender, see EP 2017.

come across as patronising and as having colonialist undertones (Illunga 2017). It has been easier for the EU to focus on implementation of specific support programmes for gender equality and women’s empowerment as ‘flanking measures’, for example, accompanying Aid for Trade agreements. These actions could be reinforced in the process of AfCFTA implementation. However, it must be noted that this strategy has drawn criticism, as the EU’s own second gender action plan (GAP II) fails to address the link between trade and gender in specific terms. The EU has also been criticised for implementing gender initiatives predominantly through development cooperation rather than by adapting its trade policies. The EU did not mention gender equality at all in its ‘Trade for All’ communication (EC 2015). However, in its 2020-2025 gender strategy, the Commission did commit itself to actively promote gender equality through trade policy, including through active engagement in the World Trade Organization (WTO).. Progressive EU member states, such as Sweden, and the European Parliament have lobbied for broader gender equality mainstreaming to the EU’s trade and investment relations as part of the EU’s third gender action plan (GAP III), now under development.

### How to integrate gender aspects in AfCFTA implementation?



Photo courtesy of [UN Women/Ryan Brown via Flickr](#).

Implementation of the AfCFTA will bring adjustment costs and structural changes that could exacerbate gender inequality. To benefit women and men equally, the AU and its member states need to not only analyse possible impacts of the AfCFTA with a gender lens but also identify priority sectors and industries with potential to advance women’s participation. Constraints that prevent women and men from engaging in intra-African trade also need to be identified and addressed.<sup>36</sup> AfCFTA provisions should be designed and implemented in such a way as to open new opportunities for women and enhance

their economic participation and integration in high-paid sectors of the economy (UNECA 2020). One valuable area of analysis is how intra-African trade liberalisation under the AfCFTA could alter the characteristics of an industry and the different implications of such change for women and men. Such studies would help ensure that the AfCFTA does not exacerbate existing patterns of inequality in economic activity, especially in key sectors such as agriculture, in which women still comprise the majority (UNECA 2020). Freer intra-African trade will help workers by increasing opportunities for decent employment. The growing manufacturing sector, for example, could provide new job opportunities, especially for women (WB 2020). The AfCFTA also aims to promote agricultural transformation and growth, thereby contributing to more sustainable food systems and food security, but this will not be feasible without taking gender considerations into account (Box 3).

<sup>36</sup> Constraints to trade in goods include inadequate infrastructure, poor trade logistics and onerous administrative and regulatory requirements, among others. While these affect all types of trade and traders, there are variations for men and women traders.



### Box 3: Getting to sustainable food systems through agricultural transformation and growth



Achieving more resilient and sustainable food systems is impossible without taking gender dynamics into account. Evidence clearly shows that to reduce or eliminate hunger, multiple dimensions of empowerment and gender inequalities have to be addressed (World Food Programme 2020). COVID-19 makes this all the more urgent. The pandemic has amplified calls to invest in our food systems and make local and global food provision more sustainable and shock resilient. In Ethiopia and in other countries experiencing food price spikes in times of hardship, women's assets are often sacrificed first. COVID-19 policy responses need to protect and rebuild women's assets so the health crisis does not increase their vulnerability.<sup>37</sup>

The EU and AU share a common interest in food security. However, they do not as yet have a concrete joint process in place for food security, beyond support programmes related to agriculture, climate and trade – all of which impact food systems in Africa and Europe.<sup>38</sup>

In the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth (NEPAD 2014) the AU set ambitious targets for agricultural development on the continent. Although gender equality is far from being mainstreamed in Malabo-related policy processes, the declaration does include specific targets on women's empowerment and gender equality in agriculture. Use of scorecards and biennial reviews for monitoring make it easier to hold governments accountable for their progress towards the Malabo targets (European Commission 2020).

In the EU, the European Commission launched an ambitious food strategy, called 'Farm to Fork' in May 2019. The strategy, part of the European Green Deal, sets clear targets to build healthier and more sustainable food systems in Europe. For example, use of the most hazardous pesticides is to be halved by 2030, nutrition labelling has been proposed and work is under way on sustainability standards for food products. The Commission has sold the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, to the European public as making good economic sense, as they lay a foundation for high quality jobs and future-proof economies in Europe. Surprisingly, the strategies say very little about gender equality, women's empowerment and the external dimension.

The EU has signalled its readiness to boost investment in African countries, particularly in agrifood systems, which are seen as offering sustainable growth and economic opportunities. Private sector investments in the food economy need to be part of these efforts and take gender dynamics into consideration to contribute to more SDG-aligned food systems. Otherwise, attempts to accelerate sustainable agricultural transformation risk reinforcing existing gender imbalances in access to assets, resources and financial services. A review of high-value agriculture projects in Africa and Asia (Quisumbing et al. 2015) found that positive project outcomes, such as increased production, income and household assets, were often constrained by existing gender norms. Moreover, the projects did not always reduce existing gender gaps in assets. Some increased men's incomes more than women's.

The UN Food Systems Summit, now scheduled for late October 2021, will be an important moment to take stock of the COVID-19 situation on both continents and look at ways to improve AU-EU cooperation towards more sustainable and gender-inclusive food systems. A roadmap in the lead-up to the Food Systems Summit, linking milestone events in 2020 such as the AU-EU ministerial meeting, COP26, and the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, could point to opportunities for decision makers to take concrete steps towards more coherent and effective gender-sensitive policies and interventions, especially in trade and investment instruments like the European Green Deal Investment Plan.

<sup>37</sup> One example is Groots, a women group in Kenya, which started as a caregiver network in the HIV pandemic, but saw the need to address the lack of targeted agricultural extension information to women. They have contributed to women now having an increased voice in decision making. See <https://grootskenya.org/>

<sup>38</sup> Concerns about the transparency of the negotiation space and power dynamics around for example more robust sustainability provisions in trade agreements and the impacts on African food systems are growing. ECDPM and IPES-Food specify a number of concrete actions the EU can take to position sustainability as an explicit objective of its trade and other external policies. See: Rampa, F., O. de Schutter, S. Woolfrey, N. Jacobs, S. Bilal, J. van Seters and E. Frison. [EU trade policy for sustainable food systems](#). Joint IPES-Food and ECDPM brief. October 2020.

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## Women traders in the informal sector

Women operate more than 70% of the small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa. Their gains from these enterprises reduce poverty for entire families (UNECA 2019). This does not only concern the formal economy, but women contribute to the large and economically important informal sector, which is a large and vital part of Africa's economy, accounting for 38.7 % of GDP in sub-Saharan Africa (McKinsey 2019). According to the McKinsey Global Institute (2019), "Africa is the only region in the world that has both high rates of labour-force participation and low representation of women in the formal economy." In contrast women account for the majority of workers in the informal sector in Africa. Any African women who work as small-scale, informal, (cross-border) traders face multiple challenges and are often targeted for abuse (Brenton et al. 2013). COVID-19 is one of these challenges, as the pandemic has disproportionately impacted informal sectors and low-skilled workers, further exacerbating women's vulnerability.



Photo courtesy of [UN Women/Ryan Brown via Flickr](#).

A simplified trade regime for the AfCFTA will extend the benefits of the expanded trade opportunities to informal cross-border traders (Hartzenberg 2019, Bayat 2019). Gender-responsive trade facilitation measures aimed at streamlining and harmonising customs and border procedures can help ensure that female cross-border traders, and women entrepreneurs in general, have equal access to economic opportunities under the AfCFTA (UNECA 2020). Regional-level efforts towards these objectives are already under way,<sup>39</sup> but female traders would also benefit from national

legislation. National policies are needed, for example, to improve the business environment for small-scale trade and to provide women access to finance to operate their businesses and facilitate their trade.

## Trade in services: An opportunity for women in Africa

Trade in services provides an avenue for better gender equality outcomes in African economies. While agriculture remains the main source of employment for African women, globally women's employment is shifting into services and away from agriculture.<sup>40</sup> The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Services makes explicit reference to improving the export capacity of formal and informal service suppliers, with particular attention for micro, small and medium-sized operators and "women and youth service suppliers". The AfCFTA prioritises liberalisation in five services industries: business services, communication services, financial services, tourism and travel, and transport. Overcoming existing

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<sup>39</sup> For example in the EAC, TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) has set up gender sensitive border infrastructure such as restrooms for women traders and one stop border posts to facilitate quicker access to markets. TMEA also aims to improve women's business competitiveness through targeted training on non-tariff barriers, enterprise development, customs procedures, regulations, business development and regional integration. Similarly, COMESA has adopted a [simplified trade regime](#) and [Minimum Standards for the Treatment of Small Scale Cross-Border Traders in the COMESA Region](#) to facilitate quicker clearance of goods, reduce costs and improve data capture. Their success has differed between different border posts.

<sup>40</sup> World Bank and WTO (2020) [Women and trade: The role of trade in promoting gender equality](#).

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gender barriers is key in all of these industries. Tourism and travel<sup>41</sup> and communication services,<sup>42</sup> particularly, hold great potential for women's empowerment, though women still face high discrimination in the transport sector.<sup>43</sup>

Diverging national regulatory policies and market access restrictions remain huge obstacles for Africa's cross-border trade in services. Services, including those in the informal sector, are still insufficiently reported in official statistics, leading to underestimation of their contributions to national economies (Keller 2019). Gender-sensitive regulatory and policy frameworks in African countries could enable women to take advantage of higher-skilled services jobs in the AfCFTA-prioritised industries, while providing inroads for women's participation in the larger continental market. Vertical labour segregation in services industries means that women "in employment are usually in low and mid-cadre occupations, with very few rising to positions of management" (Lipowiecka and Kiriti-Nganga 2016). Other measures that can promote gender equality in relation to trade in services are ensuring that women have access to skills upgrading and vocational training and promoting women and girls' participation in literacy and education programmes, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields.

### Improving gender-disaggregated data on trade

Several initiatives are under way to generate better data on women and men in African trade and economies. These will hopefully lead to improved trade analysis and ultimately more gender-sensitive trade policies. To be of value, data collection on women in trade must include informal cross-border traders. The EU has committed to collecting gender-disaggregated data to ensure that trade-related aspects of gender are adequately addressed in its trade agreements (EC 2020a). Then there is the [African Trade Observatory](#), a joint effort of the EU, the AU Commission and the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched in 2019 to assist African countries and the private sector compile essential statistics for monitoring continental trade and for evidence-based policymaking. ITC, through the SheTrades initiative, collects other gender-disaggregated data as well, for example, on the challenges women face in trade. SheTrades aims to create an enabling trade system for women by promoting equitable policies. Its '[Empowering Women in the AfCFTA](#)' project, also launched in 2019, aims to empower women-owned businesses to benefit from the trade opportunities created by the AfCFTA through capacity building, networking and advocacy (ITC 2019). ITC, the AU Commission and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) have also launched a collaboration of more than 40 women businesses, representing one million African women entrepreneurs and producers' associations across the continent, to shape an AfCFTA that works for women. These are all important initiatives that can point the way forward. More regular collection of gender-sensitive data as well as in-depth studies will also help to inform diagnostic trade integration studies, especially in least developed countries. Both the AU and the EU (e.g. through Aid for Trade support) have an important role to play in their promotion.

### Monitoring AfCFTA progress at the national level

National AfCFTA strategies are important as they provide a coherent and strategic means to plan measures to complement the AfCFTA. While gender mainstreaming is not explicitly part of the AfCFTA negotiation process, the guidelines for developing national AfCFTA strategies do highlight gender as a cross-cutting issue in AfCFTA implementation. Because the national strategies are created through domestic policies and politics, they are beyond the direct influence of the AU. For economic gains from the AfCFTA to support gender equality, gender mainstreaming processes need to be incorporated into national policies and implementation plans (UNECA 2019). A key test of the gender sensitivity of AfCFTA implementation will be whether there is domestic traction for gender

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<sup>41</sup> The UNWTO points out that "the African tourism sector has the highest female labour participation rate of all world regions (69%) and more women in high-level leadership and management positions than the broader economy", yet that participation of African women in tourism remains at a severe disadvantage to their male counterparts. See [UNWTO 2020](#).

<sup>42</sup> According to a 2015 global survey by GSMA, African telecommunication companies were "relatively strong at attracting and recruiting female employees, with an average of 35% women at agency and staff levels, which is representative of the local labour pool", while local cultural barriers to increase the proportion of women still exist. See [GSMA 2015](#).

<sup>43</sup> SEI '[Women and transportation in East Africa](#)' and <https://transportandouthemploymentinafrica.com/>

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issues related to trade in the AU member states. Despite support by the African Trade Policy Centre, this is precisely where many African countries struggle. The COVID-19 crisis has forced some to shift focus away from AfCFTA issues, resulting in reduced commitment to and preparedness for implementation of the national AfCFTA strategies as well – including their gender mainstreaming aspects.

### Leveraging e-commerce for women's empowerment

National lockdowns and social distancing in the context of COVID-19 have triggered high demand for digital solutions in business operations and commerce. Increasingly, markets are moving online. The new digital era has the potential to promote African trade, integration and development while supporting women's economic and social empowerment. For micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, many of which are owned by women, integration into global markets through cross-border e-commerce can be a powerful force for sustainable development. So far, 158 countries worldwide have adopted e-transaction laws, including 68 developing or transition countries and 30 least-developed countries. In Europe, virtually all countries (44 of the 45) have enacted e-transaction laws; but that share in Africa is just 61%. The AU has underscored the importance of e-commerce development, and continues to pursue the phase III AfCFTA negotiations on e-commerce. New online platforms can enable women to bypass traditional trade barriers and expand their entrepreneurial skills, while better and flexibly managing work and other responsibilities (WB 2020b). Yet, women still face challenges in tapping the potential of e-commerce. For example, women traditionally have less access to financial capital, technology skills and training. These factors are exacerbated by discrimination against women. Countries can respond by adopting gender-inclusive approaches that counter inequalities in the digital sphere. Solutions will be found in legal and regulatory frameworks and e-commerce policies related to ICT infrastructure, online payments and skills development. For women, promotion of ICT education remains important, alongside enhanced access for women to finance and technologies and targeted support for women's online entrepreneurship.

In EU (Aid for Trade) support to the AfCFTA, it will be important to continue prioritising interventions in key areas such as facilitation of economic mobility across sectors and occupations, enforcement of anti-discrimination legislation and labour standards, strengthening institutional mechanisms to incentivise participation of small-scale female producers and traders, design of appropriate training and skills development programmes, and financing of gender-sensitive physical infrastructural projects.<sup>44</sup> The EU's Aid for Trade strategy stipulates that a systematic gender analysis must be performed for every project to promote women's economic empowerment. Other donors, too, appear to be increasing gender responsiveness in their Aid for Trade support. However, more assistance is needed "in sectors such as transport, energy, finance and business, mining, and industry, where the proportion of gender-responsive aid is low" (OECD 2019b: 2). For any future AU-EU trade agreement, adequate and gender-sensitive impact assessments need to be carried out based on data collection systems that should be established as part of the domestic AfCFTA implementation process. The EU could explore whether its trade and investment policies can help unlock opportunities for female traders by integrating them better into value chains. Investment policies may be able to create incentives for larger corporations to contract women-owned businesses as suppliers.<sup>45</sup> Finally, it is worthwhile to note that gender equality and women's empowerment experiences in Africa's formal economy may not be dissimilar to those of European women in trade. The AU and EU may thus be able to learn from each other. Balanced exchanges of experiences could provide a basis for a more equal partnership between the AU and EU in advancing gender equality in trade, including e-commerce.

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<sup>44</sup> [ICTSD 2011](#).

<sup>45</sup> The IFC has for example partnered with banks and credit institutes to include women-owned distributors into larger value chains of big corporations. Such an approach exists also with regards to integrating migrants and refugees into economic systems. See McKinsey Global Institute (2019) *The Power of Parity: Advancing women's equality in Africa*.



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### 3.4. Migration and mobility

Migration, mobility and displacement will continue to be an important element of Europe-Africa relations in 2021. The EU Commission's recently released 'New Pact on Migration and Asylum' includes a focus on the external dimension of migration, specifically return and reintegration. The AU objective has been rather to change the Eurocentric migration narrative, which has been accompanied by efforts to establish bilateral migration deals between the EU and African governments. The AU views these as running counter to African dynamics and understandings of migration and mobility. The AU has championed its own frameworks, such as the Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action (2018-2030)<sup>46</sup> and its 'free movement protocol'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, migration remains one of the most controversial aspects of the strategic partnership discussions between the AU and EU, whether as part of AU-EU Summit preparations or in the negotiations towards a post-Cotonou agreement.

Gender aspects are rarely highlighted or accurately portrayed in the politicised debates about migration today. However, experiences of migration and mobility are not gender neutral, nor are the challenges and opportunities that migration and mobility bring. Gender roles, power relations and gendered inequalities influence who migrates and why they do so. While women are not necessarily more vulnerable, the policies and attitudes of transit, destination and origin countries often put women at heightened risk. According to the African Migration Report, "[d]iscriminatory policies can limit legal migration channels, relegating many women to vulnerable labour sectors or as dependents, increasing their vulnerability". The report points out the "significant competitive disadvantages" facing low-skilled women migrants who earn their livelihoods as cross-border traders.<sup>48</sup> When it comes to migrant workers, both men and women may be restricted to specific occupations with particular job conditions and wage levels (Smith et al. 2020).

COVID-19 has brought such gendered effects of migration to the fore. The pandemic has increased the vulnerabilities of migrants in general, but affected female and male migrants differently. Women migrants are more likely to work in essential jobs, such as health and care occupations, as nurses, cleaners or as laundry workers. Despite low pay, these jobs place migrant workers at high risk of exposure to the coronavirus. Furthermore, 8.5 million women migrant domestic workers without secure employment contracts are facing income loss and a greater risk of abuse and exploitation due to the pandemic. Particularly hard hit have been those who are unable to return home due to travel bans and border controls (UN Women 2020b).

Policies on migration can either facilitate equal opportunities or exacerbate existing gender differences. Yet, beyond generally worded commitments to gender equality, gender has not usually featured as a strong element of European and African joint or unilateral migration policy frameworks. Unlike in the area of peace and security, where the WPS agenda has provided strong normative guidance, migration has no common international framework linked to gender issues.<sup>49</sup>

#### Reigniting the AU-EU partnership on migration and mobility in a gender-sensitive way

Both sides' proposals for the migration objectives and measures of a renewed AU-EU partnership have not been specific about the differences between male and female migration – though they do acknowledge female, male and children migrants and identify gender as a cross-cutting issue. This continues a pattern set by past overarching frameworks. The Joint Valletta Action Plan mentions providing equal opportunities for men and women through skills training and other initiatives and highlights women's vulnerability in trafficking, but it does not explicitly

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<sup>46</sup> African Union. 2018c.

<sup>47</sup> African Union. 2018d.

<sup>48</sup> International Organization for Migration. 2020. (p. 111; Chapter 9)

<sup>49</sup> Though arguably some of the elements of WPS also apply to migrant women and processes.

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promote gender-sensitive migration policies. The 2014 EU-Africa Declaration on Migration and Mobility does not mention the topic at all (European Council 2014).

While the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the European Agenda on Migration, and the Migration Partnership Framework (EC 2016) make little mention of gender sensitivity or gender mainstreaming,<sup>50</sup> the AU's Migration Policy Framework for Africa and Plan of Action dedicates a whole section to it. Building on this example, devoting more explicit attention to the gender dimension of mobility, to gender-sensitive analysis and to gender-responsive migration governance as part of a renewed continent-to-continent dialogue would send a strong signal of the issue's importance. Gender-sensitive programming and implementation of projects to support migration governance in Africa will equally have to be part of the picture. There is thus still much work to do. Jump-starting progress in the coming period will be particularly important given that the EU Trust Fund for Africa, one of the largest EU instruments to finance migration-related projects, has fallen short of introducing strong gender sensitivity across the board.

The Global Compact for Migration and related processes can provide a key framework for championing the gender, migration and development agenda in AU-EU relations. The Global Compact strongly emphasises gender issues.<sup>51</sup> Though it is seldom cited in EU policies, or even in joint frameworks with partners, due to the fact that not all EU member states have signed it, the European Commission can still support the framework's implementation with partner organisations and countries. A number of African countries have started to frame their national migration governance policies in relation to the Global Compact, and the AU's implementation plan for the Global Compact includes several elements that promote the opportunities and rights of women migrants.<sup>52</sup> Cooperation between the commissions of the AU and EU on gender equality and migration can link into these ongoing processes at the global level. To follow up on and promote gender in relevant areas of AU-EU relations and in migration-related cooperation between African and European states, the partnership could think of establishing an expert working group for gender equality and women's rights as part of their partnership on migration, similar to the working group set up at the global level in the context of the Global Compact for Migration.

### Introducing a more nuanced framing of male and female migration

Gender-sensitive migration policies require a shift in the narrative about migration to one that more accurately portrays the different opportunities and constraints that male and female migrants face. Male migrants' experiences are now often taken as the norm while female perspectives are neglected. In EU debates, migration is typically portrayed from Eurocentric perspectives and along stereotypical gender lines. Representations in the media tend to echo these. Most articles and news stories about asylum and migration are about male migrants, as a recent media study found.<sup>53</sup> This is despite the fact that in European countries including France, Portugal and the United Kingdom, "women even represent the majority of the African diasporas".<sup>54</sup>

Since most irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving in Europe from Africa are male, and given that irregular migration – though smaller in number than regular migration to the EU – occupies the foreground in political debates, the predominant framing of African male migrants has become that of 'bogus' economic profitters who represent a threat to Europe. Discussions of the vulnerabilities of male migrants and their contributions to economies are rare amidst today's securitised migration debate. Women, in contrast, are framed predominantly in

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<sup>50</sup> The Global Approach for Migration and Mobility, the EU's framework for external action on migration adopted prior to the Migration Partnership Framework only notes gender in the context of trafficking.

<sup>51</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/imig.12640>

<sup>52</sup> African Union N.d.b.

<sup>53</sup> [CCME and WACC Europe 2017](#) (see page 20).

<sup>54</sup> OECD 2019c (p.3).

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terms of vulnerabilities and their need for protection, such as in the case of trafficking victims.<sup>55</sup> Policies in many receiving countries implicitly assign women migrants the status of ‘dependents’ of men (wives or daughters). This bypasses women’s independent identity and limits their economic opportunities.<sup>56</sup> The perception of female migrants as empowered economic and social contributors is often absent. Such gender-tinted images even affect migration and asylum policies in EU member states. For instance, research in the Netherlands found that gendered images influenced decision-making within Dutch asylum procedures, likely discriminating against male asylum seekers.<sup>57</sup> In African countries, too, policies often view migration through a male lens, despite the reality of a growing feminisation of African migration.<sup>58</sup> While there is always some truth in stereotypes, the realities of female and male migration are much more complex. A renewed AU-EU partnership on migration and mobility needs to integrate this more nuanced understanding.

### Data and knowledge about gendered migration

The limited availability and public dissemination of gender-disaggregated data may play a role in popular representations. More comprehensive data could steer policies to respond to migration’s gendered realities. To date, the gendered nature of migration within African and between Africa and Europe remains underexplored. According to the UN International Organization for Migration (IOM), “large data gaps mean that gender-specific needs, behaviours and capacities of migrant women are unknown”.<sup>59</sup> The AU and EU could usefully jointly focus on the aspect of knowledge, data and guidance on gendered migration experiences, as well as the impacts of migration policies on men and women, as the basis for establishing gender-sensitive migration governance. Labour migration data in Africa can be improved by supporting countries that do not yet include migration modules in their census and household surveys. National statistical offices can be supported in more regularly gathering gender-disaggregated labour migration data, to detect annual or biannual trends.<sup>60</sup> But beyond data collection along gendered lines – and this may include persons identifying as LGBTI if this does not risk exacerbating their vulnerabilities – mechanisms are needed to make use of the increased knowledge about gendered experiences within AU-EU policymaking. Despite the many existing AU-EU dialogue frameworks, there is very little cooperation on data and information sharing on migration across continents, or even within them. This is a missed opportunity to produce data for better policy decisions.<sup>61</sup>

### Designing labour mobility opportunities in a gender-sensitive way

As mobility rules and regulations are reconsidered, we need to look at how they impact women and men and how they can be leveraged to increase opportunities for all. The AU and EU both understand the need for safe and legal migration paths between the continents. Yet, EU member states have demonstrated little interest in designing new schemes or opening up their labour markets to African migrants beyond a few pilot initiatives. Immigration remains a national competence and is not governed at the European level. However, the European Commission can play the

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<sup>55</sup> For instance, the only time gender aspects are mentioned in the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum is in the context of a risk for women and girls becoming victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation or other forms of gender-based violence (European Commission 2020c).

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/women-and-migration-incorporating-gender-international-migration-theory>  
However, this has interestingly also led to positive outcomes for women compared to male counterparts in Europe. As the UNDP ‘Scaling Fences’ report points out, while differences in work opportunities exist, the gender-wage gap between men and women in Africa resoundingly reverses in Europe, with women earning 11% more, contrasting with previously earning 26% less in Africa.” One key factor in this is the reality that more women had travelled to be with family and children and policy environments in Europe are more disposed to provide for female migrants. Moreover, female migrants also have a higher level of education compared to that of their peers at home. UNDP 2019 (p. 6)

<sup>57</sup> Mascini, P. & Bochove, M. (2009).

<sup>58</sup> ISS 2018.

<sup>59</sup> International Organization for Migration 2018 (p.3)

<sup>60</sup> See the data shortcomings of the most recent African Union Report on Labour Migration Statistics in Africa [AU 2017](#)

<sup>61</sup> See International Organization for Migration 2020. (p.6)

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role of mediator and facilitator. It has suggested use of ‘talent partnerships’ to boost mutually beneficial international mobility and to better match labour and skills needs while providing African workers with legal mobility opportunities. In the context of ageing societies, European interest in such initiatives may grow. Already, a number of possibilities for such schemes have been presented.<sup>62</sup> One option to advance on this agenda is to hold regular summits that bring together member states of the EU and AU to discuss and agree on specific skills and labour market goals as part of a larger migration dialogue. Gender considerations should be integrated in these as well. The selected sectors would need to be vetted not only according to whether they advance gender equality in migration opportunities but also regarding how flanking measures and integration opportunities can be designed in a gender-friendly way. To date, such mobility schemes have remained small in scale. If a ‘race for talent’ were to pick up, African countries would need to carefully assess the risk that mobility schemes pose for African labour markets. They could, for example, lead to national labour shortages in key sectors, which would also have gendered implications. While the EU currently has a number of programmes to facilitate provision of gender-sensitive services for migrant women in African countries, initiatives specifically dedicated to safe labour migration for women (like those that already exist in Asia) could empower women further, advancing gender equality in labour migration.<sup>63</sup>

## 4. Financing gender commitments

Adequate funding is paramount to realise the ambitious objectives that the AU and EU have set for themselves on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Financing will also determine what a renewed AU-EU partnership can achieve. Gender-responsive budgeting and mainstreaming gender in financial commitments will be a key part of this equation.

### 4.1. EU financing and programming in support of gender equality

The EU long-term budget negotiations and the related programming exercise is where the EU has to put its money where its mouth is. Many components of the EU’s partnership with Africa will draw on EU financing. The stance on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the proposed Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) has been greatly improved since the original European Commission proposal of June 2018. But the gap between policy and practice remains wide. That gap will need to be filled at the programming stage of the EU’s international cooperation too.

The European Council in July 2020 [reduced the size](#) of the EU’s international funding envelopes under the ‘Neighbourhood and the World’ heading from €108 billion to €98 billion (2018 prices). This meant that the NDICI also shrank, to €70.8 billion. Support to the African continent was less affected by these cuts than other regions. Africa will receive at least €26 billion from the sub-Saharan Africa envelope of the NDICI and part of the €17.2 billion earmarked for the European neighbourhood that includes North Africa. While these are sizeable resources, the pie has undeniably grown smaller, though Von der Leyen’s ‘geopolitical’ Commission has raised the EU’s ambitions in external action towards the continent.

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<sup>62</sup> For instance, see the proposal for Skills Partnerships – [CGDEV Roadmap](#) or [CEPS 2019](#).

<sup>63</sup> Different genders have in past labour mobility schemes also led to different outcomes. As part of a Spanish programme recruiting female workers, for instance the return rate increased while this group faced gender-specific vulnerabilities in Spain which required specific attention. See p.9 (footnote 25) [MPI 2019](#). Examples aiming to contribute to closing gender-gaps through migration or mobility, such as the female track of the Digital Explorers Project facilitating mobility and exchange of female Nigerian ICT experts to Lithuania, are still rare, and could be replicated.

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The NDICI regulation now includes a separate target for action with a gender dimension. This is in line with the targets of GAP II, which require that 85% of new actions have a gender dimension and that 5% of those have gender equality and women's empowerment as a principal objective. This is an improvement from the initial 2018 proposal, in which gender equality and women's empowerment actions were lumped together under social inclusion and human development interventions. The current targets will likely be confirmed in the forthcoming GAP III, though a further improvement could be to link a financial monetary value to the commitments for gender-specific activities (with gender equality as a principal objective) rather than to number of projects. The strategy of targeting specific funds for dedicated gender equality projects could also be extended to the mainstreaming of gender issues in wider sectoral portfolios. In the past, EU delegations have gained valuable insights and gender capacity by formulating dedicated projects in thematic sectors.

While commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment cut across all thematic areas of EU external action, it will be important to specify what gender-inclusive financing means in each. The NDICI regulation, for instance, suggests a 25% target for EU external action contributing to climate objectives and a 10% target for actions addressing migration. This is qualitatively different from the proposed gender target, which refers to an overall number of activities, with no specific quantitative monetary target attached. Nor is it specified how much attention each sector will need to give gender equality, beyond the general 85% target. In the past, there has been an imbalance in gender considerations across EU sectoral interventions. Most attention to gender has been found in social sectors, such as education and health, as well as in governance. Integration of gender issues in, for example, trade, infrastructure and private sector development has lagged. The discussions on the financing of peace and security efforts in Africa demonstrate the need for greater clarity about how gender principles should be integrated into specific themes and how finances will be allocated within sectors.

Since the launch of GAP II, some progress has been made in mainstreaming gender equality in EU external action. However, the latest GAP II annual implementation report indicates that "reaching the target of 85% will require more focused efforts" (Vila 2019). EU international cooperation and development actions were marked as gender-relevant (either principal or significant objectives) in 68% of cases in 2018, while only 55 % of neighbourhood and enlargement actions were marked as such. Use of the marker which identifies actions as having no potential impact on gender and justification of this conclusion have lagged. Moreover, the increased mainstreaming efforts incentivised by the target set by GAP II for projects with gender components has not always led to better quality gender integration. In some cases, the result has been a box-ticking exercise.

The EU needs to improve the quality of its gender mainstreaming, for instance, through improved templates and better accountability systems and internal checks. The upcoming GAP III and new budget provide an opportunity for the EU to raise its ambitions on the funding of initiatives targeted specifically at gender equality and women's empowerment. Global data show that donors have become better at mainstreaming, but dedicated funding for gender action and organisations supporting it is still astonishingly low (Holton 2020).

Civil society organisations and the European Parliament have positioned themselves strongly in favour of intensified gender action. Proposed actions include a gender budgeting analysis for the whole EU long-term budget and the new recovery package ('Next Generation EU'), the introduction of gender impact obligations, and better monitoring of gender-related spending (European Women's Lobby 2019a, CARE 2018, EP 2020, EP N.d., EP 2019a). In line with these demands, gender-responsive budgeting will need to be integrated into the MFF, and particularly the NDICI. Monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the NDICI will also need to have a strong gender dimension. These elements are essential to ensure that gender actions are meaningfully integrated into EU programmes and then are transparently monitored and communicated to the public.

#### Box 4: Securing gender-inclusive financing for peace and security in Africa



Securing predictable, balanced and gender-sensitive funding for peace and security and conflict prevention in Africa is a crucial task for the AU and EU. Despite the establishment of the AU Peace Fund, and its growing contributions, the financing of African-led peace support initiatives remains an open discussion – including with regard to countries' assessed contributions to the UN. While much attention has been on how to finance conflict management through peace support operations, women's organisations active in conflict resolution and peacebuilding have remained underfunded. For the gender equality and WPS agenda it matters where financial priorities lie between mediation, conflict prevention and 'harder' conflict management efforts (such as the financing of military capabilities) (see Peace Women).

##### Changing peace and security financing instruments

In preparation for the new multiannual financial framework (MFF) cycle, the EU launched proposals in 2018 for the European Peace Facility (EPF) to replace the African Peace Facility and serve as Europe's global instrument for peace and security (Hauck 2020). The EPF is seen as an expression of the 'growing' geopolitical ambition of the EU, but it also represents a shift away from the EU's traditional focus on 'soft' power. This raises questions about how this initiative fits within the EU's wider ambition to contribute to international peace and security beyond purely military means (Deneckere 2019). There is a risk of an imbalance between mediation, conflict prevention and conflict management in the newly proposed financing instruments, both the EPF and the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). Civil society has called for more investment in conflict prevention as opposed to management (EPLO 2019). If the EPF remains heavily focused on military support (including training and equipment), the security partnership may become largely focused on hard security, resulting in a deprioritisation of financing for the WPS agenda. So far, the EU has said little about how it will support and finance mediation and conflict prevention. The March 2020 communication 'Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa' asserts the intention to "adapt and deepen [EU] support to African peace efforts with a focus on an integrated approach to conflict and crises" (European Commission 2020b).

##### AU endeavours to secure funding for peace and security in Africa

In 2017 the AU relaunched its own AU Peace Fund as a way to mobilise and pool resources from its member states and other partners to finance its operational peace and security activities. The Peace Fund has three thematic areas: mediation and preventive diplomacy, institutional capacity, and peace support operations -- similar to the structure of the EU's former APF. As of June 2020, the AU Peace Fund had gathered more than US \$176 million from fifty AU member states, representing 68 % of the expected funds (African Union 2020c). Accelerated efforts therefore will be needed to achieve the APF's monetary target (African Union 2020c). It is as yet unclear how much funding will be allocated to each of the three windows (African Union 2020e). The EU and UN have been invited to serve on the Fund's Board of Trustees, as a gesture of both appreciation for their support so far and their shared responsibility and partnership going forward (African Union 2020e). Also here it will be crucial to ensure that sufficient funds are available within the Peace Fund to cover the WPS agenda, including existing mediation initiatives such as FemWise-Africa.

##### Gender-responsive budgeting under the EPF and AU Peace Fund

The EU and AU need to address the lack of dedicated funding for gender by including clear financial targets for gender-focused activities under both the EPF and the AU Peace Fund. Strengthening gender budgeting, or gender-earmarking, in any support mechanisms for peace and security in Africa will signal how serious the AU and EU are about implementing commitments to gender equality and WPS. This can be ensured, for example, by introducing gender mainstreaming targets and by earmarking certain financial allocations within the NDICI. Members of the European Parliament have already called for these steps. Targets need to be established both under the geographic component for sub-Saharan Africa and in the thematic component on peace and stability. The AU Peace Fund has not yet earmarked specific funding objectives for conflict prevention or conflict management. Nor has the AU indicated how the Peace Fund will specifically contribute to the financing and implementation of the WPS agenda. A collective commitment to a financial target for gender-responsive peace and security initiatives would provide a tangible commitment to predictable and gender-responsive funding in the AU-EU partnership on peace and security. Ring-fencing funding for implementation of the WPS agenda will help ensure that gender equality objectives are advanced as part of peace and security efforts.



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The next programming phase is expected to begin in late 2020. This is the phase in which the EU will decide how to frame international cooperation with third countries and globally. It will thus offer opportunities for further progress on support for gender equality in Africa. The EEAS and the EU Commission have already conducted strategic pre-programming assessments, including country, regional and thematic assessments and initial concept notes on cooperation. Results from this exercise demonstrate that more must be done to include gender in the upcoming plans.

The challenge now is to link lessons from such preparatory analyses to the formal programming process and to square these with the changed context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Di Ciommo and Jones 2019). GAP II has stimulated growing use of gender analysis and gender experts by EU delegations. It has also brought more engagement with civil society organisations, more officials working on gender, and the insertion of gender into human rights dialogues across Africa – though with significant differences between regions. The programming exercise can build on these experiences. But it will have to be more focused and strategic while living up to the requirements of cross-cutting issues and commitments with targets attached, such as gender, climate change and migration.

Overall, gender needs to be further integrated throughout EU planning and implementation. Greater gender capacities are needed among staff, as well as more consistent use of gender-disaggregated data, especially in the Southern neighbourhood and in East and Southern Africa (Vila 2019). To be successful in identifying transformative gender activities, EU delegations will also need to communicate their gender-related targets to partner countries and national stakeholders early on as part of dialogue – especially given that not all African partner countries prioritise specific gender equality programmes within their bilateral portfolios.

Early engagement with and dedicated funding for gender-focused and women’s movements and organisations in programming will help provide a sound base for action in the diverse contexts of African countries. Grassroots organisations and bottom-up activities can provide interesting points of entry. However, in a number of African countries such engagement may be hampered by a lack of managerial and operational capacities, which may mean that bottom-up initiatives fall short of requirements for EU funding. Further capacity support may then be the next step.

The European Commission foresees making use of a wider range of implementation methods and modalities, including guarantees, in addition to grants, budget support and technical assistance. European development finance institutions (DFIs) will need to be part of efforts to promote gender equality through investment. A recent survey found that DFIs, including European ones, have made serious efforts to integrate gender analysis and objectives into their portfolios, although other than FinDev, European DFIs were not among the top performers. Overall, DFIs and multilateral development banks (MDBs) are more active in integrating gender equality into their transactions than official development assistance (ODA).<sup>64</sup> Yet, room for improvement exists, particularly in increasing transparency and setting concrete targets for volumes and shares of investments to support gender equality. To implement these, every investment proposal or decision needs to take the gender equality dimension into account. This will incentivise clients to adopt a gender-sensitive approach. An example in this regard is the recent call to action by the 2X Challenge Working Group and the Gender Finance Collaborative to ensure that DFIs, investors and other financial intermediaries consider gender in COVID-19 responses<sup>65</sup> (Lee et al. 2020, Ahairwe and Bilal 2020).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ahairwe and Bilal 2020 (p.7).

<sup>65</sup> See 2X Challenge 2020 for more details.

<sup>66</sup> Ahairwe and Bilal 2020.

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## 4.2. Progress on AU reforms and implications for financing gender commitments

The AU is engaged in a reform process that includes a review of its financing model for programme and operational budgets. This is where support for gender commitments falls. Currently, the AU's operations and programmes are heavily dependent on donor funding. Its reform process aims to transform this structure to a predictable, sustainable and equitable funding from the AU member states, with less dependence on donor funds such as the EU. Progress on the reform, and the amount of finance the AU foresees for gender-related activities, alongside how gender issues will be mainstreamed in AU operations overall, will thus remain important themes on the AU agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The African Women's Decade identified ten themes implemented annually with financial support provided by the AU Fund for African Women (FAW). Since 2010, this fund has been the AU's mobilising vehicle for implementation of gender-targeted projects at the continental level.<sup>67</sup> AU Heads of State and Government committed to invest 1% of the received annual contributions from AU member states to the FAW. Yet, as of 2017, only 0.5% had been mobilised and used, corresponding to about US \$1.6 million.<sup>68</sup> This is a small fraction of the budgets in other thematic areas.

The AU aimed to focus more strongly on results from the FAW projects and to expand its resource base, including mobilisation of resources from the private sector to support women's economic empowerment.<sup>69</sup> In February 2020, at its 36th Ordinary Session, the AU Executive Council instructed the Commission to establish a mechanism to properly manage the FAW and to submit a credible financial report in February 2021.<sup>70</sup>

Of course, while targeted expenditure under a dedicated FAW is important, larger progress occurs through gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming across all thematic areas of AU operations. Some focus on the financing of gender-related activities does exist, for example, in regard to peace and security, through FemWise (see also the discussion for financing gender efforts peace and security activities in box 4). Overall, however, there is little transparency about the amount of financial resources allocated to gender equality commitments, through the AU operational budget, donor-financed programmes and off-budget activities. There also seems to be little research on how well the AU departments are doing in terms of mainstreaming gender equality aspects in their operations.

## 5. Conclusion

The preparatory weeks and months leading up to the 2021 AU-EU Summit provide opportunities for the AU, the EU and the two continental unions together to send a strong signal on gender and to incorporate gender sensitivity in a renewed AU-EU partnership. Two of these opportunities will be the EU-AU Leaders Meeting currently planned for December 2020 and the finalisation of the EU's third gender action plan (GAP III) now under development.

A comprehensive partnership between Africa and Europe will be less effective if gender considerations are not an integral part of joint cooperation. Inclusion of the gender dimension is particularly key in COVID-19 recovery efforts in the short, medium and long term. This paper provided food for thought and points of entry to facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment in thematic areas of importance for the partnership.

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<sup>67</sup> The AU-FAW supports predominantly grassroots projects submitted by AU Member States and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and fits under the themes of the AWD.

<sup>68</sup> African Union 2018. (p.44)

<sup>69</sup> African Union 2018f (p.33)

<sup>70</sup> African Union 2020.



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Gender equality and women's empowerment have long been championed by the EU, the AU and their individual member states. Yet, nuances in their understandings of gender concepts and sensitivities around perceptions of the EU imposing its norms will be challenging to navigate. Indeed, the current geopolitical reality is one in which stronger pressures exist than in the past to oppose advancements for gender equality and women's empowerment and full implementation of the WSP agenda. Nonetheless, there is still common ground for supporting specific gender agendas.

Putting enough resources behind the gender equality agenda and its objectives is one of the most fundamental tasks at hand. This paper has outlined some of the challenges and opportunities for strengthening gender-inclusive budgets and financing agendas. A key message, however, is that incorporating gender sensitivity into the activities supported by the EU's international and development cooperation instruments, particularly the NDICI, and into the AU's reform process and budget will be important, but insufficient alone. Gender considerations also need to influence policies on climate, trade, migration and food security, and other thematic areas of the partnership not covered in this paper, such as the digital and knowledge economy, technological transformation and the transport and health sectors.

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