

SPECIAL RESEARCH REPORT

FIFTEEN YEARS OF THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA AT THE AU PEACE AND SECURITY COUNCIL

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I. INTRODUCTION

Africa's peace and security landscape has undergone profound transformations over the past decade, marked by the proliferation of non-state armed actors, the entrenchment of violent extremism, protracted political transitions, and increasingly complex humanitarian crises. These dynamics have deepened insecurity across multiple regions, from the Sahel and the Horn of Africa to the Great Lakes and Sudan, while simultaneously exposing structural weaknesses in state protection mechanisms and regional peace architectures. Within these contexts, women and girls continue to bear a disproportionate burden of conflict, experiencing heightened levels of displacement, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), economic marginalisation, and exclusion from decision-making processes.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda remains a critical normative and operational framework for responding to these gendered impacts of conflict. Anchored in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and reinforced by a robust African Union (AU) normative architecture, including the Maputo Protocol, the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the Continental Results Framework (CRF), and most recently the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, the WPS agenda affirms women's rights to protection, participation, prevention, and relief and recovery. However, the persistence and escalation of conflict-related sexual violence, shrinking civic space, and the marginalisation of women from peace processes underscore the distance that remains between commitments and lived realities.

Against this backdrop, this special research report examines the Peace and Security Council's (PSC) fifteen-year engagement with the WPS agenda, assessing both progress achieved and enduring gaps. It situates PSC deliberations within Africa's evolving conflict dynamics and evaluates the extent to which normative advances have translated into operational impact across conflict prevention, mediation, peace support operations, and accountability mechanisms. The report argues that renewed political will, institutional coherence, and sustained resourcing are essential to ensure that the WPS agenda functions not only as a set of principles, but as a strategic tool for addressing Africa's contemporary peace and security challenges.

II. AFRICA'S CHANGING CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND THE IMPERATIVE OF AN ENHANCED WPS LENS/ GENDERED IMPLICATIONS OF AFRICA'S EVOLVING CONFLICT LANDSCAPE

The evolving conflict landscape in Africa is increasingly shaped by the rise of non-state armed actors, widening regional tensions, and deepening humanitarian crises, all of which have profound implications for women. Findings from the UN Secretary-General's 2025 WPS report underscores that in 2024, 676 million women (17% globally) lived close to deadly conflict, an all-time high and over twice the number in 1990.¹ Rising global military spending and an escalating

¹ United Nations Security Council, *Women, Peace and Security Report of the Secretary-General, 'S/2025/556'* (2025). Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/556>

backlash against gender equality are simultaneously straining the WPS agenda, weakening protection systems and shrinking the resources available to support women's rights in conflict settings.

Across the continent, traditional state structures are being challenged by the proliferation of armed groups, ranging from private military contractors to community-based militias and extremist organizations. Their expanding influence, as observed in regions such as the Sahel, the Great Lakes, and the Horn of Africa, has undermined state authority and contributed to escalating violence. This shift has produced fragmented security environments where women, particularly those in remote or marginalized communities, face heightened vulnerability due to the absence of accountable state protection mechanisms.

The humanitarian fallout of these conflict dynamics is severe. Funding shortages are closing clinics and reducing food and education assistance in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Sahel. In Ethiopia, for example, the World Food Programme reduced refugee rations from 60 to 40 per cent due to shortages, with programmes for breastfeeding women and malnourished children expected to end without new funds.² In Somalia, women and children, who face heightened risks of Gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, and eviction, make up more than 80

² World Food Programme, 'Refugees in Ethiopia Face Rising Hunger as WFP Forced to Reduce Rations' (ReliefWeb, 2025). Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/refugees-ethiopia-face-rising-hunger-wfp-forced-reduce-rations>

per cent of the displaced population.³ Similarly, in South Sudan, violence has reached its highest level since the 2017 cessation of hostilities, and women and girls continue to be targeted. Reports from El-Fashir, Sudan, indicate severe malnutrition, with 38 per cent of pregnant and lactating women affected.⁴ As indicated by Anna Mutavati, UN Women Regional Director for East and Southern Africa recently stated, 'Women and girls are being raped and killed in their homes, and as they flee, seek food, water and medical care. The use of sexual violence has been embedded in the blueprint of Sudan's war'.⁵ These realities echo warnings from the NGO Working Group on WPS, whose 2025 open letter stresses that WPS norms remain far from realised and condemns growing backlash against women's autonomy, rights, and those who advocate for them.⁶

³ Amnesty International, 'Somalia 2024' (2025). Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/east-africa-the-horn-and-great-lakes/somalia/report-somalia/>

⁴ 'Thousands trapped in El Fasher, Sudan siege "on edge of survival", says report RSF', *The Guardian* (15 October 2025). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2025/oct/15/thousands-trapped-in-el-fasher-sudan-siege-on-edge-of-survival-says-report-rsf>

⁵ UN Women 2026. 'Sudan's war on women: The number of people in need of sexual violence support quadruples as abuse of women and girls becomes the blueprint of war, three years on', press release, 15 April. New York: UN Women.

⁶ NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, '2025 Open Letter to Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in Advance of the Annual Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security' (2025). Available at: <https://www.womenpeacesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025-WPS-Civil-Society-Open-Letter-English.pdf>

Terrorism and violent extremism remain central drivers of instability, especially in the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin. As attacks spread southwards toward coastal West Africa, insecurity has disrupted livelihoods, access to services, and social cohesion. Similar patterns of intensifying violence have emerged in the Horn of Africa, where groups such as Al-Shabaab have expanded their operations, and in the Sahel, where violent extremists have increased attacks on civilians. These conflict trends have triggered mass displacement across the continent, contributing to one of the largest forced migration crises in the world. Women disproportionately bear the social and economic consequences of displacement. As caretakers of families and communities, they often assume additional burdens in camps and informal settlements while simultaneously facing elevated risks of exploitation and abuse.

Inter-state tensions and geopolitical rivalries further complicate the security environment. The resurgence of the M23 in eastern DRC, the strained relations among Great Lakes countries and the withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali from ECOWAS illustrate how national conflicts intersect with regional politics. These tensions undermine coordinated peace initiatives and strain regional institutions such as Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Eastern Africa Community (EAC). As these bodies grapple with fragmentation and diminished authority, opportunities for women to participate in conflict resolution and peacebuilding become even more limited. Political transitions are equally fragile, particularly in states experiencing military rule or protracted

civil war. Delays in returning to civilian governance weaken institutional capacity and often deprioritize gender-responsive governance frameworks.

Sudan stands as one of the most acute illustrations of how these conflict dynamics translate into gendered harm. As of 2026, the situation had deteriorated to a critical point, with an estimated 12.7 million people requiring GBV services, 2.01 million of whom were targeted for support, and funding needs escalating to USD 93 million.⁷ The war has produced systemic sexual violence, including rape, gang rape, and sexual slavery, used by armed groups as a tool of terror and control. Women and girls fleeing violence face assault not only in their homes but also during displacement journeys and within sites where they seek refuge. The collapse of essential services, including health systems, restricts access to maternal care, psychosocial support, and treatment for survivors of sexual violence. In areas under the control of non-state groups, the absence of functioning justice systems leaves survivors with little recourse. Moreover, the destruction of infrastructure and restrictions on humanitarian access create conditions in which food insecurity is weaponized, disproportionately affecting women who are often responsible for securing household nutrition.

Across Africa, the interplay between political instability, state fragmentation, terrorism, and regional polarization

⁷ UNFPA 2026. *Genderbased Violence in Sudan: Crisis Overview and Response Priorities in 2026*, 2nd ed. New York: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 25 February. Available at: file:///C:/Users/gedi1/Downloads/Gender-Based%20Violence%20in%20Sudan%20Crisis%20Overview%20and%20Response%20Priorities%20in%202026_2.pdf

creates environments in which women's rights and safety are severely compromised. Gender-based violence becomes both a symptom and a strategy of war, while displacement magnifies existing inequalities by restricting mobility, access to livelihoods, and participation in civic processes. Despite their central role in sustaining families and communities during crises, women remain largely excluded from peace negotiations and decision-making processes. This exclusion persists even as the complexity of contemporary conflicts, shaped by external actors, shifting alliances, and entrenched armed groups, demands perspectives that prioritize human security and community resilience.

These dynamics reaffirm the critical importance of the WPS agenda as both a normative and operational framework for addressing the gendered impacts of conflict in Africa. The WPS agenda underscores women's right to protection from violence, their meaningful participation in peace processes, and the need for gender-responsive prevention strategies, areas where current conflict realities reveal significant gaps. Some improvements are observed by embedding WPS principles into national policies, regional mechanisms, and peace operations, in moving towards a more inclusive and sustainable pathway to peace. Therefore, as highlighted by the former Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, "the evolving nature of conflicts, driven by climate change, economic strife, and the rise of violent extremism, requires us to adapt and respond with renewed commitment and urgency."⁸

⁸ African Union Commission and United Nations Office to the African Union, *She Stands for Peace: 20 Years, 20 Journeys* (3rd edn, AUC/UNOAU,

III. PSC'S FIFTEEN-YEAR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WPS AGENDA

Over the past fifteen years the PSC has held 28 sessions dedicated to the WPS agenda,⁹ as stated in Amani Africa Special Research Report consistently emphasizing five priority areas: strengthening accountability and ending impunity for violations against women; expanding women's access to justice; increasing women's representation in decision-making roles across conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction; addressing structural gender inequalities and the root causes of conflict; and institutionalizing the WPS agenda, including deploying gender advisors across AU institutions and peace support operations.¹⁰

3.1. Normative and Institutional Frameworks for WPS

The period saw consistent reaffirmation of the AU's normative commitments to the WPS agenda, rooted in UNSC Resolution 1325, the Maputo Protocol and AU gender strategies. In 2021, the PSC emphasized the four WPS pillars, prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery, while promoting cultural

2023) https://ugc.production.linktree/6dd1b1b5-ef55-4731-9102-1852b65da1e7_She-Stands-for-Peace-3rd-Edition-for-Online-Use.pdf

⁹ Amani Africa, 'PSC Outcome Documents' (Other Thematic Issues), available at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/other-thematic-issues/>

¹⁰ Amani Africa, *10 Years Review of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda of the AU Peace and Security Council* (Amani Africa Report No. 8, 16 October 2020). Available at: https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/08_10_Years_Review_of_the_Women_Peace_and_Security_Agenda_of_the.pdf

and community-based approaches to peacebuilding, including investments in arts and culture to support women's agency. This reflected a recognition that gender-responsive peacebuilding requires not only legal instruments but also shifts in societal norms and cultural practices.¹¹

A major institutional shift over the past fifteen years can be attributed to the appointment and sustained engagement of the AU Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, whose role significantly shaped the evolution of PSC deliberations. After delivering her (then Special Envoy Bineta Diop) first briefing in December 2014 (476th session), the Special Envoy's engagement became more regular from 2016 onward. In May 2016, during the PSC's 600th session, the Special Envoy submitted the first continental report on the State of Implementation of WPS Commitments, which remains a baseline instrument for assessing Member States' progress.¹² This marked a turning point in establishing systematic, continent-wide monitoring of WPS norms.

The period also witnessed new structural innovations, most notably the institutionalisation of the High-Level

¹¹ African Union, *Communiqué of the 987th Meeting of the PSC Open Session on 22 March 2021 on the Theme "Women, Peace, Culture and Gender Inclusivity in Africa"* (22 March 2021) <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/987th-meeting-open-session-22-march-2021.pdf>

¹² Peace and Security Council of the African Union, *Press Statement of the 600th Meeting on the Role Played by the AU and its Member States in the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (PSC/PR/BR.(DC), 18 May 2016*, Available at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/600th-psc-press-statement-on-women-peace-and-security.pdf>

Ministerial Seminar on WPS, referred to as the Swakopmund Process in 2024, establishing a predictable, continent-wide platform for high-level review and commitment-setting on the WPS agenda.

3.2. Participation and Leadership of Women in Peace Processes

Women's participation remained the most consistently reiterated theme, though also one of the least realised in practice. Despite 44+ member states having ratified the Maputo Protocol and the adoption of a National Action Plans (NAPs) by 37 member states, women's representation in mediation, negotiation, early warning, and decision-making roles remained considerably low.

The Council's most important interventions on participation came in:

- 2023, when the PSC called for appointing women as lead mediators and emphasised the need for gender parity across peace processes.
- 2024, during the Swakopmund Process, when the PSC requested the AU Commission to develop a Policy Framework on Women's Quotas in Formal Peace Processes, aiming for a statutory minimum of 30%.
- 2025, when the PSC encouraged accelerated adoption of NAPs and clearer monitoring indicators.

The Special Envoy's office has also contributed to the enhanced participation of women-led organizations and civil society actors in PSC open sessions. Through her networks and collaboration with partners such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, she

facilitated direct briefings from women refugees in Gambela and Kakuma (2019) and from Sudanese women-led groups who played critical roles in the country's political transition. These engagements expanded access to the PSC for grassroots constituencies previously excluded from continental decision-making, a practice further strengthened by the Special Envoy's field missions to conflict-affected countries. Also recently, in 2023, the PSC directly engaged women from the DRC and Sudan to bring conflict-affected women's voices into continental decision-making and expose the exclusionary nature of peace processes on the ground.

3.3. Protection and Responses to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and CRSV

Protection concerns dominated PSC discussions across the five-year period. Sessions repeatedly condemned conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), early and forced marriages, harmful traditional practices, and rising pandemic-related violations. The 1109th session in 2022 represented a turning point, where the PSC issued its strongest condemnation of CRSV and acknowledged that Africa reports the highest number of CRSV cases globally.¹³ Yet, despite extensive normative language, the Council did not advance concrete mechanisms for documenting or reporting CRSV in conflict settings or integrate protection concerns into its conflict-specific deliberations. Proposed dedicated sessions on CRSV and calls for integrating CRSV monitoring into PSC briefings did not materialise.

¹³ African Union, *Communiqué of the 1109th Meeting (PSC/PR/COMM.1109 (2022), 3 October 2022)*. Available at: https://amani-africa-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/1109.comm_en.pdf

The PSC's engagement on protection remained largely thematic, rather than operational. Even when acknowledging the scale of CRSV in Sudan, eastern DRC and other crises (2023), the PSC did not link protection failures to its broader decisions on AU-supported peace operations, sanctions, or preventive diplomacy.

In 2025, the PSC again reiterated zero tolerance for sexual violence and called for accountability and early warning mechanisms specifically focused on women. Yet the Council's approach often failed to confront protection deficits in AU missions or state-led forces, and rarely addressed the political conditions, impunity, weak justice systems, and militarization that sustain systematic violations.

3.4. Women's Participation in Peace Support Operations (PSOs)

From 2018 onward, PSC sessions increasingly emphasised the need for improved representation of women in peace support operations, recognising both their operational contributions and symbolic value. At the 1242nd session in 2024, the PSC highlighted the contributions of women peacekeepers in Somalia under AMISOM and ATMIS, pointing to their roles in community engagement, frontline operations, and local confidence-building. The Council called for: stronger women's leadership within military and civilian PSO components, improved peace support infrastructure responsive to women's needs, medical, legal, and psychosocial support for women peacekeepers, enhanced gender-responsive training, and monitoring mechanisms for UNSCR 1325 in PSOs.¹⁴

¹⁴ African Union, *Communiqué of the*

3.5. Integrating WPS into Emerging and Cross-Cutting Thematic Policy Issues

The Special Envoy's continued participation influenced the agenda-setting of PSC sessions, steering the Council towards more focused thematic issues within the WPS agenda. From late 2016 onward, PSC sessions addressed a wide range of thematic priorities that had previously been absent or underemphasized, including: the role of the media in enhancing WPS accountability; women's roles in protecting lives in insecure environments; women's involvement in preventing and countering violent extremism; community-level peacebuilding; the contributions of women refugees, IDPs and returnees to conflict prevention and reconstruction; sexual violence in armed conflict; and women's leadership in driving social change. Several sessions were also aligned with the AU annual themes. In 2023, for instance, the PSC examined the integration of WPS into the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This broadened the WPS agenda beyond conflict contexts to include economic resilience, cross-border mobility, and trade-related security challenges.¹⁵

These targeted themes enabled deeper and more nuanced deliberations on

1242nd Meeting (Open Session) on the Briefing on Women, Peace and Security Interlinkage (PSC/PR/COMM.1242 (2024), 31 October 2024). Available at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1242.comm-en.pdf>

15 African Union, Communiqué of the 1144th Meeting of the PSC Open Session on 14 March 2023 Dedicated to Women, Peace and Security (PSC/PR/COMM.(1144), 14 March 2023). Available at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/1144.comm-en.pdf>

the diverse dimensions of women's experiences in conflict and post-conflict settings. This thematic expansion is also significant, as it positions women not merely as vulnerable populations in conflict zones, but as economic actors whose empowerment contributes directly to continental stability.

3.6. Monitoring, Reporting, and Accountability: The CRF and Shadow Reporting

Monitoring and accountability weaknesses were repeatedly highlighted throughout the recently held PSC sessions. While the CRF provided a continental framework for tracking progress, the PSC consistently acknowledged that reporting remained irregular, member-state driven, and insufficiently evidence-based.

A major breakthrough occurred in 2025, at the PSC's 1309th session, which requested the AU Commission to establish a mechanism for complementary civil society shadow reports under the CRF.¹⁶ This decision reflects growing recognition that: state self-reporting is insufficient, grassroots women's organisations hold unique insights into WPS implementation, and transparency and independent monitoring are critical for continental accountability.

If implemented effectively, shadow reporting could significantly strengthen WPS oversight, harmonise regional reporting, and reduce fragmentation across RECs/RMs and AU organs. Still, its viability will depend on political space for

16 African Union, Press Statement of the 1309th Meeting on Women, Peace and Security (30 October 2025) https://amaniafrica-et.org/wp-content/uploads/1309.press_stat-en.pdf

civil society at the national level, an issue the PSC did not explicitly address.

IV. OVERVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS ON THE WPS AGENDA OF THE AU

4.1. Stronger Normative Foundations of the WPS Agenda in AU Legal Instruments

Beyond the emphasis on UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the Women, Peace and Security agenda is anchored in a dense normative architecture derived from African Union legal and policy instruments. The Maputo Protocol (2003) strengthens continental obligations consistent with Resolution 1325 by requiring women's participation in peace processes and protection in situations of conflict, particularly through Articles 10–11.¹⁷ The AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) further reinforces state commitments by mandating annual reporting on women's rights, parity, and gender equality across peace and security, governance, economic, health and social sectors. Complementing these, the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018–2028) aligns Agenda 2063 with the Sustainable Development Goals, prioritising dignified lives, effective laws and institutions, economic empowerment, and strengthened leadership and voice for women across AU organs and Member States. Norms on protection are bolstered by the AU Policy on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Exploitation and

¹⁷ African Union, *Maputo Protocol (July 2003)*, <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-women-africa>

Abuse in Peace Support Operations (2018), which establishes a survivor-centred system based on zero tolerance, mandatory training, confidential reporting, and accountability measures including repatriation, sanctions and referrals for national prosecution. Most recently, the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (2025) expands the AU's legal guarantees by obligating states to prevent, protect, prosecute and provide survivor-centred support for all forms of violence, ranging from domestic violence to cyberviolence and femicide, thereby complementing and deepening commitments under the Maputo Protocol. Collectively, these instruments form the normative backbone of the AU's WPS agenda, ensuring that operational initiatives undertaken through monitoring, coordination, capacity-building and PSC engagement are grounded in binding continental standards.

4.2. Strengthened Monitoring and Accountability Architecture

One of the major milestones in advancing the WPS agenda was the 2018–2028 Continental Results Framework (CRF), which provided the first standardized, continent-wide system for tracking WPS implementation. The CRF enables Member States, RECs, and AU institutions to report on 41 indicators across the four pillars of participation, prevention, protection, and relief and recovery, thereby promoting consistency and comparability in monitoring efforts. While the 28 indicators measure implementation by AU Member States, the remaining 13 indicators are intended to gauge AU efforts on WPS.¹⁸ Developed

¹⁸ African Union Commission, *'Second Report of the Chairperson of the African Union*

through the Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS, the CRF now serves as the principal roadmap for measuring commitments, encompassing not only National Action Plans (NAPs) adopted by 37 Member States¹⁹ but also the expansion of regional women's mediation networks and the formal recognition of women's leadership in peace processes. Following its adoption, the PSC institutionalized annual reporting obligations for the AU Commission starting in 2018.²⁰ In line with efforts to enhance CRF effectiveness, a high-level workshop in June 2025 on 'Reinvigorate CRF Monitoring' recommended key reforms, including the introduction of a simplified digital reporting tool, biennial reporting, real-time feedback loops, harmonized AU reporting timelines, and leveraging CRF outputs to guide policymaking and budget allocations.²¹ The Special Envoy's Office is currently developing the digital reporting tool as recommended by the workshop. These measures, together with

Commission on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa 2020' (2020). Available at: https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/42544-doc-WPS_AGENDA_IN_AFRICA_REPORT_2020_ENGLISH_VERSION.pdf

¹⁹ African Union Commission, 'The Windhoek Legacy: African Union Commission's Special Envoy on WPS Galvanizes Action for the Next 25 Years of Women, Peace and Security' (AU, 17 October 2025) <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20251017/special-envoy-wps-galvanizes-action-next-25-years-women-peace-security>

²⁰ African Union, Peace and Security Council, 'Communiqué of the 772nd Meeting on the Continental Results Framework for Monitoring and Reporting on the Implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Africa' (May 2018).

²¹ African Union Commission, 'AU Commission Concludes High-Level Workshop to Reinvigorate Women, Peace and Security Monitoring' (June 2025). Available at: <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20250627/high-level-workshop-reinvigorate-women-peace-security-monitoring>

the Updated AU Gender Scorecard and reporting under the African Women's Decade (2010–2020 and 2020–2030), have created a strengthened mechanism that could improve comparative analysis of gender-equality performance, and reinforced accountability mechanisms across the continent.

Furthermore, the establishment of the ECOSOCC Advisory Opinion Group and the Civil Society Working Group on WPS has expanded continental mechanisms for tracking implementation, generating independent analyses from women's networks and CSOs.²² Parallel efforts, including the development of gender-responsive reporting toolkits, operational guidance notes on gender-sensitive early warning, and mechanisms for integrating gender into the PSC Framework for the DRC, have helped institutionalize accountability standards across AU organs, RECs/RMs, and Member States.²³

4.3. Increased AU-Level Coordination and Visibility

The Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS expanded production of continental WPS implementation reports between 2019 and 2025. Although there was an interruption with the publication of the report, it has contributed in providing evidence-based analysis that shaped PSC discussions and AU Assembly decisions. Established in 2017, FemWise Africa and the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) advance mediation and the promotion of women's leadership, respectively. FemWise Africa, a subsidiary

²² African Union, 'Women, Gender, Peace and Security' (African Union). Available at: <https://www.aupaps.org/en/page/80-women-gender-peace-and-security-1>

²³ *Ibid.*

mechanism of the AU Panel of the Wise, identifies, trains and deploys women mediators in AU peace efforts and election observation processes, while AWLN increases women's participation in decision making through peer learning, mentoring, solidarity, advocacy and capacity building. Through these initiatives, the AU has broadened its ecosystem of trained women mediators and peacebuilders, building a talent pipeline that has become visible in electoral observation, early warning, and conflict-resolution processes.

4.4. Enhanced Capacity Building and Programming

The AU Gender, Peace and Security Programme (GPSP) has training on gender-responsive mediation, prevention of sexual and SGBV, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) prevention, and child-protection frameworks, directly addressing capacity gaps in PSOs in the Central African Republic (CAR), Somalia, and the Sahel. These efforts include tailored tools like operational guidance notes on gender mainstreaming in early warning mechanisms and security sector reform curricula, developed per PSC directives.²⁴

Joint AU-REC collaborations with ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC have been fortified through platforms for sharing best practices on WPS implementation, aligning regional gender frameworks with the Continental Results Framework (CRF) standards. Recent initiatives, such as continent-wide consultations for the 25-year WPS review in partnership with FemWise-Africa and UN Women, emphasize digital tools and intergenerational leadership to enhance

monitoring and response in conflict zones.²⁵

GPSP also supports National Action Plans (NAPs) in priority countries like Somalia and CAR, focusing on SGBV survivor protection, women's election participation, and peacebuilding, while documenting CSO success stories for broader replication. These advancements build on APSA assessments, promoting whole-of-society approaches with predictable financing and integration of emerging threats like climate security.

4.5. Greater PSC Engagement with WPS Issues

Since the PSC decided to consider WPS as a standing agenda item during its 223rd session, the Council has sustained engagement through annual open sessions, and briefings from women's coalitions. This has lightly deepened the Council's engagement with gender-responsive conflict prevention, mediation, and oversight. By institutionalizing the Swakopmund Process and encouraging routine gender-responsive reporting, the PSC has moved toward more structured integration of WPS considerations in its deliberations. Between 2020 and 2025, the PSC significantly increased reference to gender issues in its country-specific sessions on Sudan, Somalia, CAR, and the Sahel. PSC communiqués during 2022–2025 showed more explicit calls for gender-responsive peace operations, strengthened SEA accountability, and systematic implementation of National Action Plans (NAPs) on UNSCR 1325. The PSC also mainstreamed gender-responsive language into discussions on transitions, sanctions, election-related violence, and the AU's role in peace

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*.

processes.

V. PERSISTENT GAPS IN THE PSC'S FIFTEEN-YEAR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WPS AGENDA

Despite important normative advances, institutional innovations, and increased visibility of the WPS agenda within the PSC, significant gaps persist between commitments and practice. These gaps cut across all pillars of the WPS agenda, limiting the effectiveness and transformative potential of PSC engagement.

5.1. Normative–Operational Disconnect

A major gap in the PSC's engagement with the WPS agenda is the persistent disconnect between strong normative commitments and their weak operationalisation. While the PSC consistently reaffirms continental instruments, such as the Maputo Protocol, the AU Solemn Declaration, the CRF, and most recently the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, the integration of these norms into conflict-specific decision-making remains limited. The PSC's omission of the 2025 Convention in its own communiqué underscores this misalignment, revealing how continental norm advancement often outpaces the Council's deliberative priorities. Although Member States have widely ratified WPS frameworks, many lack the institutional capacity, political will, and financial resources to implement them. As a result, the WPS normative architecture remains robust on paper but insufficiently translated into concrete mandates, operational guidance, or

country-specific actions.

5.2. Persistent Low Participation of Women in Peace Processes

Despite repeated PSC calls for gender parity, the appointment of women as mediators, and the institutionalisation of initiatives such as the Swakopmund Process, women's participation in peace processes remains one of the least realised commitments. Structural constraints, including shrinking civic space, political repression, and persistent patriarchal norms continue to exclude women from formal peace and mediation efforts. The PSC's directives for a 30% quota in mediation teams and greater inclusion of women peacebuilders lack enforcement mechanisms, timelines, or accountability processes. In major political dialogues, including those concerning Sudan (2023–2024), Libya (2020–2024), and eastern DRC, women's representation rarely exceeded 20%. Even where women-led organisations are invited to brief the PSC, their involvement depends significantly on the networks of the Special Envoy rather than being anchored in an institutional mechanism for civil society engagement. While the Special Envoy's office has facilitated the participation of women-led organisations, such engagement remains ad hoc and insufficiently institutionalised within PSC processes. Grassroots women, especially those affected by displacement, rural insecurity, and informal cross-border trade, rarely have structured access to the Council. The Council has not yet established clear pathways to ensure meaningful, safe, and sustained participation of women in peace processes at national, regional, and community levels. Without institutionalised, resourced channels for grassroots input, the PSC risks

perpetuating elite-driven processes that overlook the lived experiences and priorities of women most affected by conflict.

5.3. Limited Operationalisation of Protection Commitments (SGBV and CRSV)

Protection remains an area where the gap between rhetoric and action is most visible. While the PSC consistently condemns sexual and gender-based violence, harmful practices, and conflict-related sexual violence, it has not established concrete mechanisms for monitoring, documenting, or responding to these violations. Proposed mechanisms, such as dedicated CRSV sessions and systematic integration of CRSV reporting into PSC briefings, have not materialised. Even in severe crises, including Sudan, eastern DRC, Somalia, and Central African Republic (CAR) the PSC's recognition of protection failures does not translate into operational decisions linked to early warning, sanctions regimes, mission mandates, or preventive diplomacy. Structural drivers such as impunity, militarisation, and weak justice systems are acknowledged but seldom addressed through actionable policy directives, leaving survivors without access to justice and protection mechanisms under-resourced or absent.

5.4. Weak Accountability and Follow-Up Mechanisms

The PSC's accountability architecture remains uneven and largely dependent on Member State self-reporting, which is often irregular, incomplete, and lacking verification. Although the CRF provides a continent-wide monitoring system, the PSC has not ensured consistent follow-up

or enforced reporting obligations. The 2025 decision to introduce civil society shadow reporting under the CRF is a promising step toward enhancing transparency and strengthening independent monitoring, but its success depends on political conditions within Member States, an issue the PSC has not addressed. Moreover, PSC communiqués often lack measurable indicators, timelines, and designated responsibilities, reducing the Council's ability to drive implementation across AU institutions, RECs, and Member States. Without stronger mechanisms for tracking compliance, WPS commitments risk remaining aspirational.

5.5. Fragmented Integration of WPS in Peace Support Operations (PSOs)

Despite increased attention to women's roles in Peace Support Operations (PSOs), substantive integration of WPS principles into mission planning, mandates, and accountability frameworks remains limited. The PSC frequently calls for greater participation of women peacekeepers, enhanced gender-responsive training, and improved support structures for women in PSOs, but it has not established clear mechanisms for monitoring compliance with these directives. The failure to address SEA in AU missions through mandate reviews or accountability mechanisms reflects the broader gap between normative commitments and operational practice. Gender mainstreaming within missions remains inconsistent, and PSC oversight on these issues is limited, undermining efforts to ensure protection and meaningful participation of women in mission contexts.

5.6. Ad Hoc and Inconsistent Thematic Agenda

While the PSC has expanded the thematic scope of its WPS engagements, including areas such as media, P/CVE, economic integration, displacement, and community peacebuilding, the selection of topics often appears ad hoc and lacks continuity. Except for recurring discussions linked to the CRF, thematic sessions rarely build on previous deliberations or generate sustained follow-up. As a result, innovative themes such as the WPS–AfCFTA nexus receive insufficient operationalisation, and insights generated during open sessions do not consistently translate into concrete policy or programming guidance. The lack of a structured thematic roadmap limits the Council's ability to develop cumulative expertise or institutional memory on emerging WPS issues.

5.7. Inadequate Resourcing and Institutional Support

Resource limitations significantly weaken the implementation of the WPS agenda across AU institutions. The Office of the Special Envoy on WPS, despite its central role in agenda-setting and stakeholder engagement, continues to operate with limited and unpredictable funding. Many National Action Plans (NAPs) remain donor-dependent or underfunded, limiting their operational impact. The PSC rarely addresses the resource implications of its directives, resulting in commitments that lack financial or institutional backing. This gap undermines efforts to scale up gender-responsive programming, support country-level implementation, or sustain monitoring and reporting initiatives.

5.8. Insufficient Integration of WPS into Country-Specific Crises

Although the PSC has improved gender mainstreaming in its country-specific communiqués, WPS considerations remain inconsistently incorporated into analyses of ongoing crises. Critical issues such as CRSV, displacement, and marginalisation of women are often referenced briefly rather than systematically integrated into the Council's political decisions on early warning, sanctions, post-conflict reconstruction, or peace support operations. This limits the PSC's ability to use the WPS agenda as a strategic tool for conflict resolution and prevention. The absence of sustained gender analysis in country situations, particularly in Sudan, Somalia, CAR, and DRC, weakens the Council's capacity to address the root causes and gendered dynamics of conflict.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Fifteen years of sustained engagement by the Peace and Security Council have firmly embedded the WPS agenda within the African Union's peace and security architecture. The establishment of the Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS, the institutionalisation of the Swakopmund Process, the development of the Continental Results Framework, and the expansion of women's mediation and leadership networks collectively represent significant normative and institutional milestones. These advances have strengthened the continent's policy ecosystem for addressing the gendered dimensions of conflict and have opened important, albeit uneven, avenues for the

participation of women, including those from conflict-affected and displaced communities, in continental peace and security deliberations.

Yet, this special research report demonstrates that heightened visibility and robust normative frameworks have not translated into consistent operational impact. The PSC's engagement with the WPS agenda continues to be marked by a persistent disconnect between commitments and implementation, weak accountability and follow-up mechanisms, and the limited integration of gender analysis into country-specific decision-making. Women remain systematically underrepresented in peace negotiations and mediation processes, protection responses to sexual and gender-based violence and conflict-related sexual violence remain largely declaratory, and monitoring frameworks rely heavily on irregular self-reporting with minimal verification. These shortcomings are compounded by resource constraints, fragmented thematic engagement, and inconsistent oversight of peace support operations, collectively constraining the transformative potential of the WPS agenda.

Against this backdrop, and in light of the persistent gap between normative commitments and operational delivery, the following recommendations outline priority actions for the PSC the AU Commission, and Member States to translate the WPS agenda into measurable, accountable, and sustainable outcomes.

6.1. Strengthen the Operationalisation of WPS Commitments

The PSC should decisively shift from norm-setting to implementation by systematically integrating the WPS agenda across the entire conflict continuum, from prevention and early warning to mediation, peace support operations, and post-conflict recovery. In line with the Swakopmund Process Conclusions of March 2024, the PSC should prioritise women's meaningful participation as a core operational requirement in all AU-led and AU-co-led peace processes. This requires the adoption and enforcement of a gender-parity policy that guides the selection and appointment of mediators, special envoys, and technical experts, embeds gender analysis in terms of reference, and establishes measurable participation targets at each stage of peace processes. Regular, systematic reporting to the PSC on progress in implementing these commitments is essential to address the persistent gap between stated objectives and outcomes.

6.2. Institutionalise Women's Meaningful Participation in Peace Processes

To address the continued underrepresentation of women, particularly in high-stakes negotiations and security sector reform processes, the PSC should institute concrete mechanisms to operationalise its commitments on participation. This includes enforcing the AU-endorsed minimum 30% quota for women's participation in mediation, peace missions, and peace processes at AU, REC/RM, and national levels. The PSC should require periodic monitoring and

trend analysis on women's participation, supported by disaggregated data and clear benchmarks. Member States should be urged to embed WPS commitments in national and local peace processes and, where National Action Plans are absent, to adopt costed, time-bound plans developed through inclusive consultations with women, youth, and grassroots organisations. Where NAPs exist, stronger alignment with the Continental Results Framework and clearer accountability for implementation should be prioritised.

6.3. Enhance Protection and Accountability for SGBV and CRSV

The PSC should strengthen the operationalisation of protection commitments by moving beyond condemnatory language toward concrete mechanisms for monitoring, documentation, and response. The Council should request the AU Commission to systematically mainstream WPS updates, including protection and gender analysis, into all conflict-related briefings and reports submitted to the PSC. In addition, the PSC should task the Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS with monitoring, tracking, and documenting violations against women in conflict and crisis situations across Africa, and with producing a dedicated annual continental report on conflict-related sexual violence and other grave violations. These efforts should be directly linked to early warning, preventive diplomacy, mandate reviews, and accountability measures to ensure that protection failures inform PSC decision-making.

6.4. Strengthen Monitoring, Reporting, and Follow-Up Mechanisms

To improve accountability and reduce reliance on uneven self-reporting, the PSC should strengthen implementation of the Continental Results Framework by enforcing reporting obligations and integrating CRF findings into its deliberations and policy guidance. The introduction of civil society shadow reporting under the CRF should be operationalised in a manner that protects civic space and enables meaningful participation of women-led organisations. PSC communiqués should include measurable indicators, timelines, and clearly assigned responsibilities to facilitate follow-up and implementation across AU institutions, RECs/RMs, and Member States. Regular review of implementation trends would enable the Council to identify gaps and recalibrate its interventions accordingly.

6.5. Deepen Integration of WPS in Peace Support Operations

The PSC should ensure that WPS principles are substantively integrated into the planning, mandates, and oversight of AU peace support operations. This includes establishing clear benchmarks for women's participation across military, police, and civilian components, addressing persistent gender gaps in peacekeeping, and strengthening accountability mechanisms for sexual exploitation and abuse. Gender-responsive training, infrastructure, and support systems for women peacekeepers should be treated as operational priorities rather than auxiliary considerations. Enhanced PSC oversight through regular performance

and compliance reviews would reinforce accountability and operational coherence.

6.6. Improve Thematic Coherence and Strategic Continuity

While the PSC has expanded the thematic scope of its WPS engagement, greater strategic coherence is needed to ensure cumulative impact. The Council should develop a multi-year thematic roadmap for WPS deliberations, linking emerging issues such as prevention of violent extremism, displacement, economic integration, and climate-related security risks to clear implementation pathways. Insights generated through thematic open sessions should be translated into concrete policy directives, operational guidance, and programming priorities to avoid ad hoc engagement and institutional fragmentation.

6.7. Ensure Adequate Resourcing and Institutional Coordination

The PSC should explicitly address the resource implications of its WPS-related decisions by advocating for adequate, predictable, and sustained financing at continental, regional, and national levels. This includes strengthening support for the implementation of National Action Plans, expanding well-resourced national and regional FemWise chapters to broaden the pool of women peace experts, and reinforcing gender-responsive programming across peace and security institutions. The Council should also reaffirm and strengthen the coordinating role of the Office of the AU Special Envoy on WPS, ensuring that it is adequately resourced to fulfil its monitoring, convening, and reporting mandates. Integrating climate-related

risks and other emerging threats into WPS implementation strategies would further enhance the agenda's relevance and effectiveness in addressing Africa's evolving conflict dynamics.

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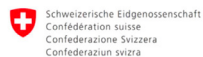
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We support the pan-African dream of peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa through research, training, strategic communications, technical advisory services, and convening and facilitation.

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ADDRESS

On the Corner of Equatorial Guinea St. and ECA Road, Zequala Complex,
7th Floor, Addis Ababa
Tel: +251118678809
Mobile: +251944723204 Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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