



An Impact Analysis of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in its Post-Implementation Phase (2021-2025): A Trade Union Lense

**Alexander Preku, PhD
Hod Anyigba, PhD**

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**Alexander Preku, PhD
Hod Anyigba, PhD**

Alexander Preko, PhD is an Associate Professor at the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA) and Director at Emort Research Consult in Ghana. He is a quantitative and qualitative data analyst in the fields of labour migration, tourism, labour market information systems, market research, and slum-dwellers livelihood research. He consults for ITUC-Africa, ILO, GIZ, Uongozi Institute in Tanzania, Betway among others.

Hod Anyigba, PhD is the Executive Director at the Africa Labour Research and Education Institute (ALREI) of the African Regional Organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC-Africa) in Lomé, Togo. He is an economist with particular interests in the areas of international trade, labour economics, human and trade union rights, skills and jobs, climate change and environment and social protection.

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Abstract

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), established in 2018 and operating since 2021, is a significant endeavour designed to merge 54 African states into a single market including over 1.3 billion individuals and a collective GDP surpassing USD 3.4 trillion. The AfCFTA seeks to generate not just an increase in employment but also enhanced job quality, defined by equitable remuneration, security, and social protection. Ongoing evaluation and scrutiny of AfCFTA's effects on labour are crucial to guarantee fair advantages throughout the workforce. This study employs a quantitative methodology to assess the post-implementation impacts of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) from 2021 to 2025 through a trade union lens. Data were systematically collected from multiple official sources – including UNECA, the WTO, the African Development Bank, and the International Labour Organization – and then analyzed in three distinct phases: data collection, data analysis, and synthesis/reporting. A quantitative approach was used to assess AfCFTA's post-implementation progress. Descriptive statistics established baseline economic, trade, and labour market trends, while an Interrupted Time-Series (ITS) regression model was applied to isolate the effects of AfCFTA's implementation on intra-African trade dynamics. Robustness checks (e.g., Breusch-Pagan, Durbin-Watson, Ljung-Box, and Lilliefors tests) confirmed the validity of the model. Key findings indicate that AfCFTA has modestly stimulated intra-African trade, evidenced by increased export diversification and improved market access in economies such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya. However, the benefits have been unevenly distributed, with Central African countries lagging due to infrastructural deficits and weaker institutional capacities. Moreover, the analysis reveals that while trade volumes have rebounded post-pandemic, significant structural barriers remain that constrain the full potential of the free trade area. Based on these findings, the study recommends targeted policy interventions to bridge regional disparities, including substantial investments in transport, energy, and digital infrastructure to reduce transaction costs. It further calls for the integration of enforceable labour and social protection provisions into AfCFTA protocols and advocates for the active participation of trade unions in policy formulation. Finally, innovative financing mechanisms – such as blended finance and public-private partnerships – are recommended to support the necessary infrastructural and capacity-building projects that will enhance sustainable economic growth and labour standards across the continent.

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List of abbreviations

- 4IR – Fourth Industrial Revolution
- AfDB – African Development Bank
- AfCFTA – African Continental Free Trade Area
- AGOA – African Growth and Opportunities Act
- AU – African Union
- BCEA – Basic Conditions of Employment Act
- CCNI – National Collective Interprofessional Agreement
- COIDA – Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act
- COMESA – Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
- COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019
- DWA – Decent Work Agenda
- ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States
- EAC – East African Community
- EPAs – Economic Partnership Agreements
- EPWP – Expanded Public Works Programme
- FDI – Foreign Direct Investment
- GDP – Gross Domestic Product
- GITFiC – Ghana International Trade and Finance Conference
- GITFiC – (also referenced in the official list)
- GITFiC appears only once in the official list; see below.
- GTI – Guided Trade Initiative
- GVCs – Global Value Chains
- ICT – Information and Communications Technology
- ICTA – (Not explicitly used; see ITC below)
- ILO – International Labour Organization
- ICT – Information and Communications Technology
- ICSID – International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes
- ITC – International Trade Centre
- ITUC-Africa – International Trade Union Confederation – Africa
- KHRC – Kenya Human Rights Commission
- LRS – Labour Research Service
- MDWs – Migrant Domestic Workers

- MENA – (Not used in this document)
- NTBs – Non-Tariff Barriers
- NTMs – Non-Tariff Measures (the document refers to nontariff obstacles/barriers; “NTBs” is the term used)
- NICs – National Implementation Committees
- NGOs – Non-Governmental Organizations
- NYDA – National Youth Development Agency
- NYESAF – Nigerian Youth Employment Through Skills Acquisition Fund
- OTUWA – Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa
- PAPSS – Pan-African Payment and Settlement System
- RECs – Regional Economic Communities
- RVCs – Regional Value Chains
- RoO – Rules of Origin
- SACU – Southern African Customs Union
- SADC – Southern African Development Community
- SASK – The Finnish Trade Union Solidarity Centre
- SETAs – Sector Education and Training Authorities
- SPS – Sanitary and Phytosanitary (measures)
- TBTs – Technical Barriers to Trade
- TRAINS – Trade Analysis Information Systems
- UNCITRAL – United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
- UNECA – United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
- UN – United Nations
- UNCRPD – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- USAID – United States Agency for International Development (appears in the Nigeria section)
- WEF – World Economic Forum
- WTO – World Trade Organization
- XAF – Central African CFA franc
- XOF – West African CFA franc
- PWDs – Persons With Disabilities
- ITA – Inclusive Trade Agenda

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), inaugurated in 2018 and operational since 2021, represents a landmark initiative aimed at unifying 54 African economies into a single market covering over 1.3 billion people and a combined GDP exceeding USD 3.4 trillion. This ambitious agreement seeks to catalyse significant economic growth, enhance industrialization, and significantly improve socio-economic conditions across the continent by creating a cohesive economic space for the free movement of goods, services, and people. Historically, Africa has experienced fragmented markets and relatively limited regional trade, with intra-African trade amounting to only about 16% of Africa's total trade in 2018, compared to 59% in Asia and 68% in Europe. The establishment of AfCFTA has been poised to change this narrative dramatically. According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), AfCFTA could potentially increase intra-African trade by more than 50% through the elimination of import duties and by up to 100% if non-tariff barriers are also addressed. This significant increase in trade is expected to energize the continent's industrial sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture, leading to broader economic resurgence and development.

AfCFTA's promise of economic integration is anticipated to generate substantial employment opportunities, directly addressing one of Africa's most daunting challenges: high unemployment rates, particularly among youth where figures surpass 30% in several countries. By stimulating trade and industrial activities, AfCFTA aims to create not only more jobs but also better-quality jobs characterized by fair income, security, and social protection. Moreover, increased economic activity from trade is likely to enhance public services and social protection systems, as greater fiscal revenues could be reinvested into vital sectors such as healthcare, education, and social security. In the wake of structural economic shifts driven by AfCFTA, the role of trade unions is crucial. They are key in ensuring that the gains from increased trade led to tangible improvements in labour rights and working conditions. Trade unions are instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of robust labour standards within trade policies, safeguarding against economic progress coming at the cost of workers' rights. Continuous monitoring and assessment of AfCFTA's impacts on labour are essential to ensure equitable benefits across the workforce.

While AfCFTA harbours immense potential for transforming Africa's economic landscape, it also presents particular challenges for marginalised groups including women, youth, and persons with disabilities. These groups often encounter systemic barriers such as lower wages, precarious

employment conditions, and limited access to social protections. Successfully implementing AfCFTA requires tailored strategies to mitigate these challenges, ensuring no group is left behind as Africa moves towards greater economic integration.

1.2 Scope of the study

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), detailing its origins, objectives, and the multi-level factors influencing its success. It covers the historical context of Africa's fragmented markets and explains how AfCFTA seeks to remove tariffs and other barriers to forge a single continental market. In addition, the study explores the economic, regulatory, and social dimensions of AfCFTA implementation – encompassing analysis of trade data, non-tariff barriers, infrastructural gaps, and the potential for job creation – while highlighting ongoing challenges. It also discusses AfCFTA's impact on industrial development, labour markets, women and youth entrepreneurs, and marginalised groups, with a particular focus on the role of trade unions, national governments, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The study concludes by offering policy recommendations on investment, regulatory harmonisation, social dialogue, and capacity building to ensure that AfCFTA's intended benefits – such as increased intra-African trade, industrial diversification, and poverty reduction – are both achievable and broadly shared.

1.3 Objectives of the study

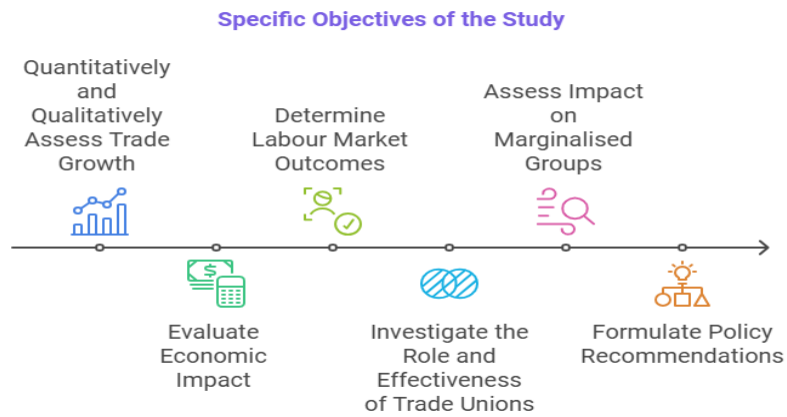
Grounded in a thorough understanding of Africa's complex trade landscape, this study aims to explore how the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can spur sustainable growth and regional integration across the continent. Specifically, it seeks:

- To detail the origins of AfCFTA and examine the multi-level factors shaping its success.
- To outline the historical context of Africa's fragmented markets and illustrate how AfCFTA intends to remove trade barriers to create a unified continental market.
- To investigate the economic, regulatory, and social dimensions of AfCFTA implementation by assessing trade data, non-tariff barriers, infrastructural shortcomings, and opportunities for job creation.
- To discuss AfCFTA's impact on industrial development, labour markets, women and youth entrepreneurship, and marginalised groups, highlighting the pivotal roles of trade unions, national governments, and Regional Economic Communities (RECs).

- To propose policy recommendations – such as enhanced investment in infrastructure, regulatory harmonisation, social dialogue, and capacity building – ensuring that the benefits of AfCFTA are both attainable and widely shared.

This is a summary of the objectives of the study (see: figure 1).

Figure 1: Summary of the specific objectives for the project



2. Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Methods

This study used a quantitative approach (see: figure 2) to assess the impact of AfCFTA on trade, economic growth, labour markets, and social protections. The methodology was divided into three phases: Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Synthesis & Reporting.

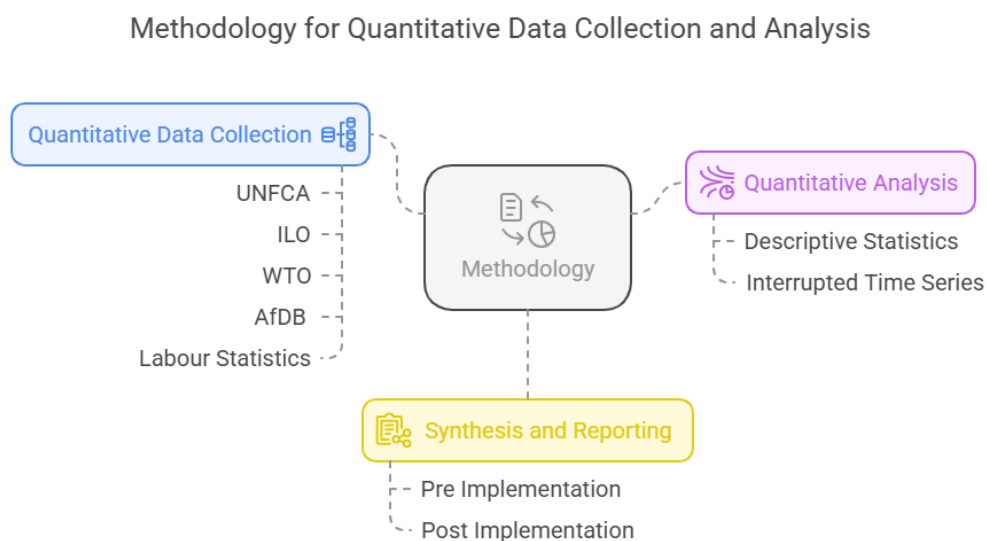
In Phase 1: Data Collection, quantitative data was gathered from various official sources. Trade data was obtained from institutions like UNECA and WTO to assess intra-African trade volumes, sectoral shifts, and tariff reductions. Economic data, including GDP growth and industrial development, were sourced from the African Development Bank (AfDB) and national statistics offices. Labour market data, such as employment rates and wage trends in both formal and informal sectors, were drawn from labour surveys and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Social protection data, including access to healthcare and unemployment benefits, were collected from national social protection agencies. A secondary data review of existing reports and literature were used.

2.2 Data Analysis Approaches

Phase 2: Data Analysis employed a varied statistical method, with a particular emphasis on quantitative approaches. Descriptive statistics were first calculated, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, to establish baseline figures for trade, labour, and economic indicators, thereby providing an initial snapshot of trends over time. Next, an Interrupted Time-Series (ITS) regression model was specified with pre- and post-intervention data to gauge shifts before and after AfCFTA implementation, enabling the estimation of level and slope changes attributable to AfCFTA while controlling for underlying patterns. Sectoral and regional comparisons were then conducted using fixed- or random-effects panel regressions, allowing researchers to isolate influences specific to different regions and industries. Finally, a disaggregated analysis was undertaken for vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities, identifying possible equity gaps in the AfCFTA's outcomes and providing a more nuanced understanding of its diverse social impacts.

In Phase 3: Synthesis and Reporting, the data analysis results were integrated to provide a holistic view of AfCFTA's impacts, informing policy recommendations focused on strengthening labour conditions, enhancing social protections, and bolstering the role of trade unions.

Figure 2: Mind map of the study methodology



2.3 Limitations

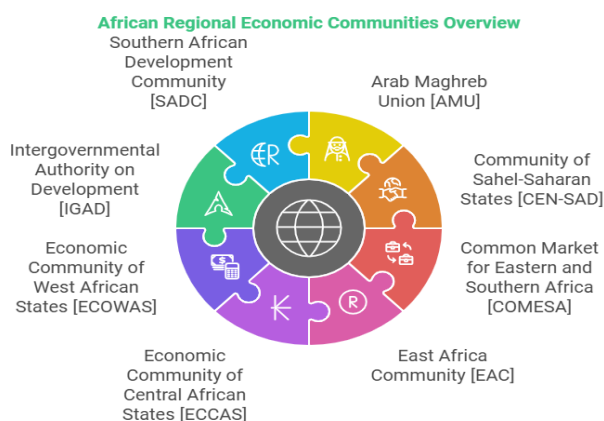
Although this study offers valuable insights into AfCFTA’s implementation and its impact on trade and labour outcomes, several limitations should be noted. First, the availability and quality of trade and employment data varied considerably across countries, which may have introduced measurement errors and potentially biased results. Second, the relatively short post-AfCFTA observation period constrains the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the agreement’s long-term effects. Third, contextual and policy-specific factors – such as political stability, infrastructure quality, and regulatory enforcement – were only partially captured, thereby limiting the study’s capacity to disentangle these influences from AfCFTA-related changes. Lastly, while disaggregated analyses were performed for specific vulnerable groups, the study could not account for all intersectional dimensions (e.g., rural-urban disparities) that may further shape outcomes in different regions.

3. The African Continental Free Trade Area – A Review

3.1 AfCFTA Overview

As stated by Cavusgil et al.(2020), the economic interdependence that arises from an alliance between two or more countries within a geographic area aimed at removing trade and investment barriers is referred to as regional integration and economic blocs. In terms of trade and investments based on shared economic interests, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is essentially an attempt to strengthen economic cooperation and integration among African countries. Thus, regional groups facilitate trade and intraregional economic activity, improve stability and security, reduce business risk, and strengthen international operations (Debrah et al. al. 2024). Despite this, firms nevertheless face many obstacles as a result of regional integration. Some member countries may become resentful of regional integration because it undermines national culture and creates a sense of loss of sovereignty, particularly when important decisions are made by individuals not subject to national accountability (Enderwick & Buckley, 2020). Among member nations, this circumstance may foster populism, trade protectionism, and nationalism. Furthermore, businesses that increase their regional commitment through deeper and wider embeddedness may eventually expose themselves to risks and weaknesses in the region, which could fail (Debrah et al., 2024). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to establish a single market for the continent. It makes regional value chains, investment, intra-African trade, and the flow of people and cash across Africa easier. Together, the member states of the African Union (AU) and eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) form the largest free trade area in the world. The agreement establishing the AfCFTA recognised eight Regional Economic Communities (RECs) as the ‘building blocks’ of the AfCFTA (see: figure 3).

Figure 3: African Regional Economic Communities Overviews



3.2 Trade Barriers and Customs Processing Post AfCFTA Implementation [2021 – 2025]

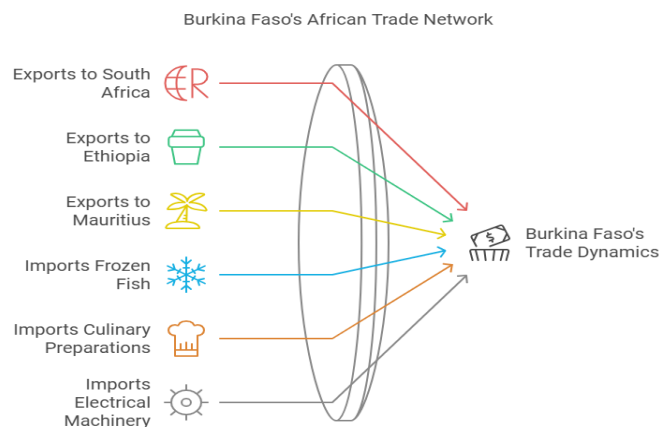
Africa has historically had fragmented marketplaces and relatively little regional trade; in 2018, intra-African trade accounted for only over 16% of Africa’s total trade, whereas Asia and Europe accounted for 59% and 68%, respectively. The creation of the AfCFTA has the potential to significantly alter this story. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) estimates that the removal of import charges under the AfCFTA could boost intra-African trade by more than 50% and by as much as 100% if non-tariff obstacles are also removed (ITUC-Africa, 2021). A World Bank report on “The AfCFTA: Economic and Distributional Effects” emphasized that a concerted effort to lower all trade costs will be necessary to establish a market across the entire continent. It would also be necessary for governments to create policies that will make their workforce more prepared to seize new opportunities (World Bank, 2020). As the majority of the world’s rapidly expanding nations diversified their economies, most African nations relied on extractive industry rents between 1990 and 2014. African economies did not diversify their exports, except for Rwanda, Senegal, and Sudan. The continent’s export diversification improved just slightly between 1990 and 2014. Central and Northern African exports grew more concentrated, and even export-diversified nations like South Africa and Morocco fell behind. On the other hand, the majority of East Asian economies managed to quickly diversify their exports and catch up to China and Korea. In light of this, it is anticipated that the AfCFTA will allow nations to expand into new African markets as they diversify their export markets and product lines (Songwe, 2019).

3.3 Trade Partners Among Selected Countries Pre-AfCFTA Adoption [2018-2019]

Intra-African trade has been modest throughout the past ten years; the greatest percentages of overall trade were 19% and 20% in 2015 and 2016, respectively. The majority of intra-African commerce occurs between nations that belong to the same regional economic community (REC); this is especially true when those nations are parties to the REC’s Customs Union (CU) or Free commerce Agreement (FTA). By the end of July 2020, official trade data from 26 of the 55 African nations had been updated to reflect 2019 trade results. Based on statistics from 35 of the 55 African countries, intra-African commerce was valued at US\$69 billion so far in 2019, which is 5% less than in 2018. Similar to 2018, intra-African trade made up 15% of Africa’s overall commerce in 2019 (Trade Law Centre, 2019). For instance,

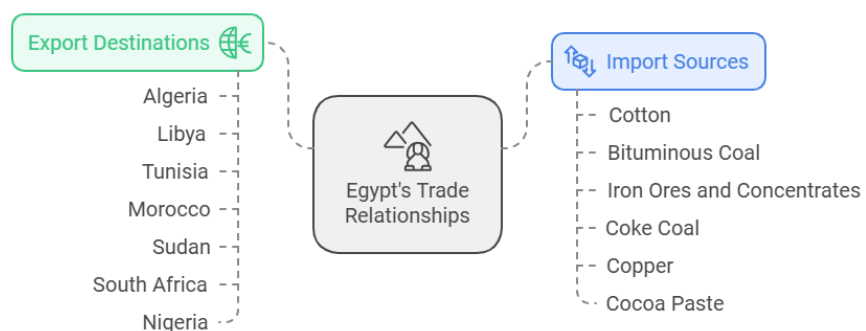
- Burkina Faso’s intra-African imports and exports fell by 5% and 13%, respectively, from 2018 and 2019. Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Togo are the three main ECOWAS nations with whom Burkina Faso trades inside Africa. Burkina Faso primarily exports to South Africa, Ethiopia, and Mauritius outside of ECOWAS, while importing frozen fish, unidentified culinary preparations, and electrical machinery from non-ECOWAS African nations (see: figure 4).

Figure 4: Burkina Faso’s African Trade Networks



- Egypt’s intra-African imports and exports decreased by 5% and 0.02%, respectively, between 2018 and 2019. Egypt mostly trades with Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Sudan within Africa. Egypt’s primary export destinations outside of AGIDIR, PAFTA, and COMESA are South Africa and Nigeria (See: figure 5).

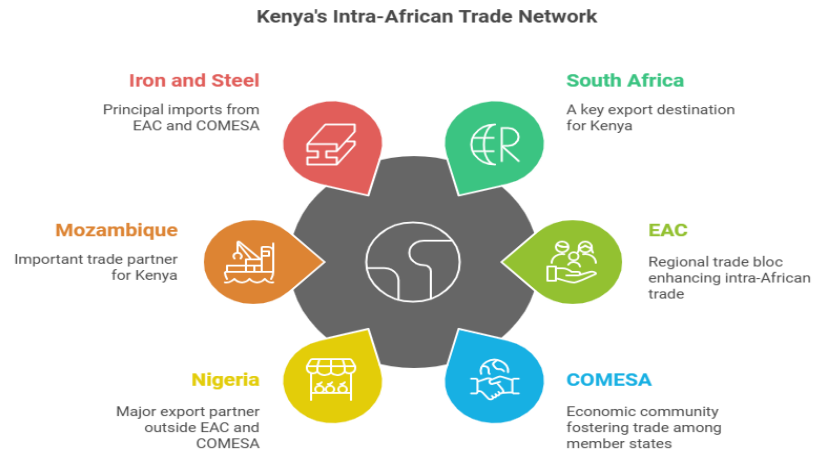
Figure 5: Egypt’s Trade Relationships



- Kenya’s intra-African imports and exports rose 3% and 7%, respectively, between 2018 and 2019. Kenya’s primary intra-African trading partners include South Africa, the EAC, and COMESA nations. Kenya mostly exports to South Africa, Nigeria, and Mozambique outside of the EAC and

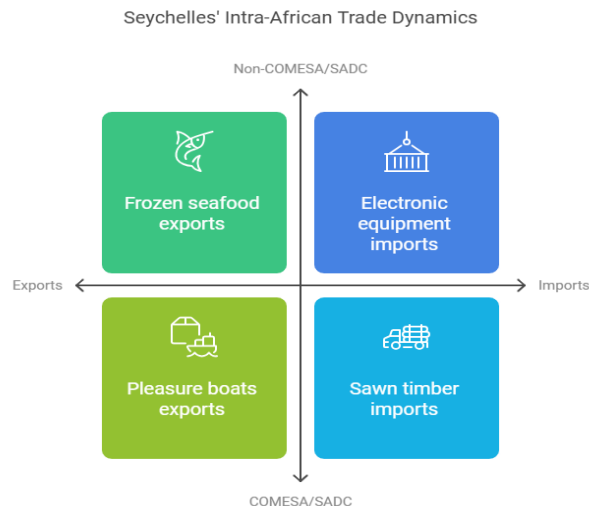
COMESA. Iron and steel, sugars, mineral fuels, cereals, and dairy goods are the principal imports from African nations in the EAC and COMESA region to Kenya (see: figure 6).

Figure 6: Kenya's Intra African Trade Network



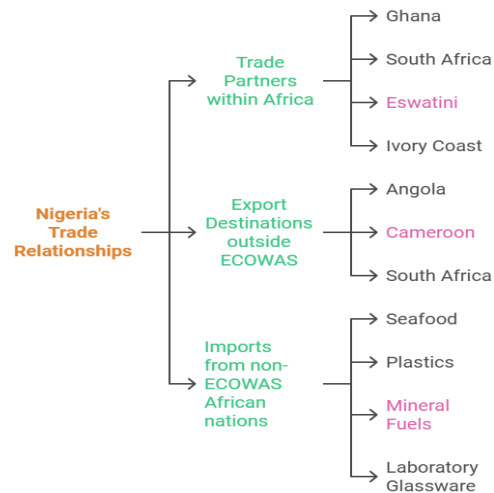
- Seychelles: In 2019, 53% of Seychelles' intra-African exports, primarily frozen seafood and pleasure boats, went to Mauritius. Trade with Ivory Coast accounted for 40% of imports and 73% of exports to and from African nations outside of COMESA and SADC (see: figure 7). While nearly all imports into Ivory Coast are duty-free, such as electronic equipment, sawn timber, and navigation instruments, the majority of exports are frozen fish, which are subject to 10% import charges. Watermelons and pineapples are the sole goods subject to tariffs (15 percent duty each).

Figure 7: Seychelle's Intra-African Trade Dynamics



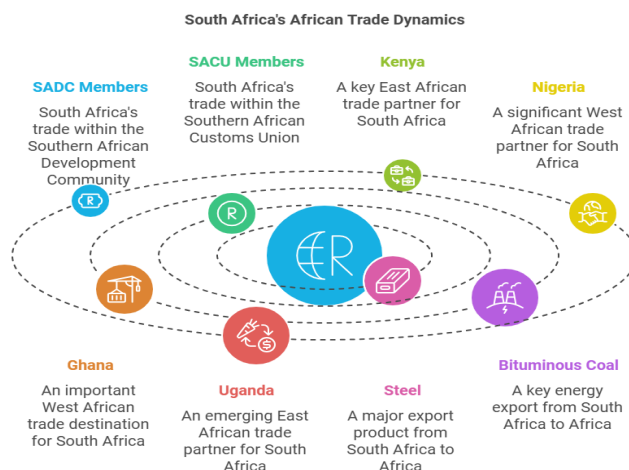
- Nigeria: Nigeria saw a 57% increase in intra-African exports and a 137% increase in imports between 2018 and 2019. Nigeria mostly trades with Ghana, South Africa, Eswatini, and Ivory Coast within Africa. Nigeria's top export destinations outside of ECOWAS are Angola, Cameroon, and South Africa. Nigeria mostly imports seafood, plastics, mineral fuels, and laboratory glassware from non-ECOWAS African nations (see: figure 8).

Figure 8: Nigeria's Trade Relationships



- South Africa: The country's intra-African imports and exports fell 12% and 4%, respectively, between 2018 and 2019. The majority of South Africa's trade is with SADC and SACU members. South Africa's top export destinations outside of SACU and SADC are Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and Uganda (see: figure 9). The primary goods that South Africa exports to African nations outside of SACU and SADC are steel, bituminous coal, polypropylene, and diesel goods vehicles.

Figure 9: South Africa's Africa Trade

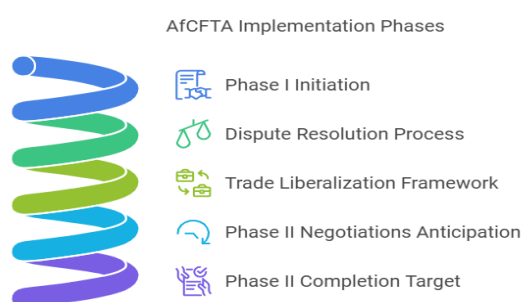


To expedite the implementation of the 1991 Abuja Treaty, the African Trade Unions decided to create the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The agreement calls on Organisation for African Unity member states to create a common African market. Since its, the AfCFTA has emerged as a major AU initiative. Despite the COVID-19 shock, African economies have seen some moderate growth rates between 2019 and 2020, and the continent has been home to the fastest-growing economies in the world (Mensah, 2023).

There are two stages to the AfCFTA’s implementation (see: figure 10). Phase I offers a dispute resolution process as well as a framework for the liberalisation of trade in goods and services. The agreement outlines the process for removing tariffs on 90% of product categories in the context of trade in goods. In the case of sensitive commodities, countries can either maintain current tariffs where the products are excluded for the remaining 10% of product categories (tariff lines) or adopt tariff reductions over a longer period. Tariff concessions, rules of origin, customs cooperation, trade facilitation, non-tariff obstacles, technological trade barriers, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and transit and trade remedies are all included in the annexes to the trade in goods treaty.

Annex 4 of the Agreement offers mechanisms for reporting and monitoring, a broad classification of NTBs, institutional frameworks for the progressive elimination of NTBs, and assistance in resolving recognised NTBs. A request-and-offer strategy centred on seven priority sectors logistics and transportation, financial services, tourism, professional services, energy services, construction, and communications – has also been agreed upon by member nations regarding the liberalisation of trade in services. Intellectual property rights, investment, and competition policy will all be included in Phase II of the AfCFTA. Phase II negotiations began after 2020. On May 30, 2019, 30 days after the 22nd ratification document was delivered to the Chairman of the African Union Commission, Phase I of the AfCFTA went into effect (Abrego et al., 2019). In all the AfCFTA implementation phases have been summarized in figure 10.

Figure 10: AfCFTA Implementation Phases



3.4 Synthesis of the literature on AfCFTA

Africa's economy was predicted to continue growing strongly in 2018 and beyond, with improved trade performance, thanks to the global trend of synchronised development driven by higher investment and fiscal expansion. Medium-term downside risks to global growth and trade, however, include the following: a contraction in global demand, particularly if China's ongoing transition and rebalancing causes a sharp slowdown in growth; a sharp tightening of financial conditions could further stress highly indebted sovereigns and corporates, which would then affect business confidence and investment decisions; and the rise of protectionist policies, which are most prominently reflected in the escalating cycle of trade restrictions and retaliations, which could stymie the current growth momentum (African Export-Import Bank, 2018).

Furthermore, Abrego and colleagues (2019) looked at the welfare implications of the AfCFTA for 45 African nations using a multi-country, multi-sector general equilibrium model based on Costinot and Rodriguez-Clare (2014). Three distinct model specifications were employed, including monopolistic and perfect competition. Import tariffs are eliminated in the simulations, while non-tariff barriers (NTBs) are reduced to a significant extent but not completely. The findings show that trade liberalisation in Africa has the potential to significantly improve welfare. The majority of these benefits stem from cutting NTBs because intra-regional import taxes are already low across the continent. Although there is significant diversity in the potential welfare benefits between countries in all model structures, overall gains for the continent are largely similar under the three model specifications employed. The report offers a thorough examination of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), examining its various effects on the continent's single market from the standpoints of sustainability, regulation, and the economy. The AfCFTA is introduced at the outset, emphasising its establishment as a significant step towards continental economic integration with the goals of boosting intra-African trade, encouraging sustainable development, and stimulating industrial diversification. Additionally, the chapter looks at the possible economic effects, such as heightened competition, integration into global value chains, and notable increases in intra-African trade.

It was anticipated that the AfCFTA would result in the abolition of tariffs and non-tariff barriers among African nations. Given the differences in trade protection among African nations and the sensitivity of some items, this was crucial. Chauvin, Porto, and Ramos (2015), for instance, demonstrate that the preferences given under the current RECs result in low imposed tariffs (and tariff dispersion) on cotton among African nations. Nevertheless, despite the implementation of numerous RTAs, trade in manufactured goods remains more protected, and applicable tariffs on tobacco and foodstuffs (including

rice) continue to be high. The impact on the creation of commerce would rely on how competitive each nation is. The efficient use of NTMs on products ought to bolster this. This necessitates openness in the mutual recognition and accreditation processes for technical barriers to trade (TBTs), as well as in the notification and harmonisation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) laws. In compliance with the provisions outlined in the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) and other pertinent Agreements/Protocols, tariffs on traded goods of Member States are eliminated with the FTA of ECOWAS. Free circulation of goods inside ETLS would necessitate the removal of NTBs in addition to zero tariffs. The Inter-State Road Transit Convention (ISRT) and integrated customs processes are two further important elements. Others include harmonising standards and conformance procedures and improving the ECOWAS RoO, especially its certification processes. Zero tariffs were applied to handicrafts and agricultural goods, and in 1990, this was expanded to include manufactured goods of origin. Levies and taxes were also removed. The two stages of the gradual liberalisation of trade in industrial products were the total liberalisation of trade and the consolidation of customs duties and NTBs (see Elumaro and Olayiwola, 2020).

A recent investigation by Tchitchoua, Tsomb, and Madomo, (2023) aimed to understand how export diversification affects income inequality in nine Central African nations between 2000 and 2019 via the employment channel. The study reveals that export diversification makes the country's income inequality worse (Tchamyu, Some, & Asongu, 2023). Nevertheless, this effect has the shape of an inverted U and is non-linear. The marginal impact of export diversification on income inequality is lessened when the number of wage workers rises, but it is increased when the number of unpaid workers rises. Furthermore, diversification that boosts employment for men is less likely to lessen income disparity than diversity that boosts employment for women. Diversification has a non-linear impact on income inequality in an inverted U-shape for oil-producing and CEMAC (Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States) countries, but a non-linear U-shape for non-CEMAC and non-oil-producing nations. In order to create more well-paying jobs and prioritise female employment, Central African nations were advised to support export diversification while fostering new productive endeavours (Tchitchoua et al., 2023).

Lower intra-African trade figures serve as a foundation for trade between the continent's nations. This indicates that prior to the AfCFTA, trade between African nations was insufficient to propel the continent towards the level of industrialisation that was anticipated of it. It is anticipated that there will be some degree of cyclical synchronisation throughout Africa due to the volume of intra-continental trade (Mensah, 2023). Africa's rapid economic integration with the rest of the globe has come at its own expense. In other regions of the world, intracontinental trade is significantly more than Africa's

16% trade. For example, roughly 67% of all trade occurs inside the European continent, 60% in Asia, and 46% in America (Mensah, 2023). Trade in Africa has its own challenges. For example, the restricted participation of actors from the informal economy, such as informal cross-border traders (ICBTs), looks to jeopardise the AfCFTA's potential as the framework for equitable socioeconomic growth in Africa (Moyo, 2023).

For East Africa, Bakouan and colleagues (2024) evaluate the possible economic effects of trade facilitation (TF) and tariff removal. The paper offers more proof of the socioeconomic advantages of the continuous trade integration process using the most recent GTAP database and a computable general equilibrium model. The findings indicate that removing tariffs would increase economic dynamism across the majority of activity sectors and household consumption. However, achieving a meaningful degree of trade integration would need more than just the removal of barriers. From a policy standpoint, the results emphasise the importance of integrating tariff elimination with complementary TF reforms, even though a phased deployment of tariff elimination is better for the zone. The socioeconomic benefits of the AfCFTA are increased by these reforms (Bakouan, Diarra, & Ouedraogo, 2024).

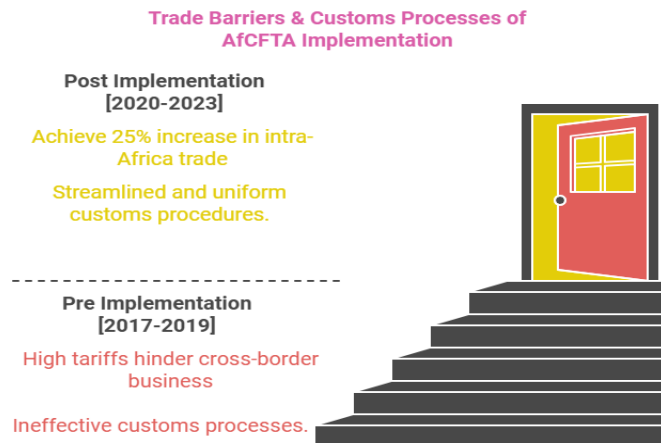
In the context of Nigeria, Chukwa and colleagues (2024) provide an analytical assessment of how commerce, revenue, and welfare in Nigeria are affected by Free commerce Area (FTA) agreements. They used data from Trade Analysis Information Systems (TRAINS) and the Common Format for Transient Data Exchange (COMTRADE). The results of the study demonstrate that the AfCFTA agreement will help Nigeria's economy by generating an estimated US\$8,860,419 million in trade, including a favourable welfare gain of US\$740,571 million. Nigeria will, however, lose US\$6,142.061 million in trade revenue. The report suggests effective revenue management and a variety of revenue collection strategies, including increased Value Added Tax and Ad-Valorem duty, to offset the impact of the income loss brought on by the FTA's removal of tariffs (Chukwu et al., 2024).

Samunderu (2024) thoroughly examined AfCFTA with a focus on the various effects it has on Africa's single market from an economic, regulatory, and sustainability standpoint. An overview of the AfCFTA emphasising its establishment as a significant step towards continental economic integration with the goals of boosting intra-African trade, encouraging sustainable development, and encouraging industrial expansion. The report acknowledged the challenges in achieving a fully integrated African market while demonstrating the AfCFTA's transformative potential. Following the implementation of the AfCFTA agreement, there have been notable changes to trade barriers and customs processing¹. An outline of the major changes is

¹ <https://opecfund.org/news/trade-as-an-engine-of-growth>

provided that prior to implementation (2017-2019) (see: figure 11). Despite the advancements in AfCFTA implementation from 2020 onwards, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, inconsistent regulations, and non-tariff barriers continue to pose significant challenges.

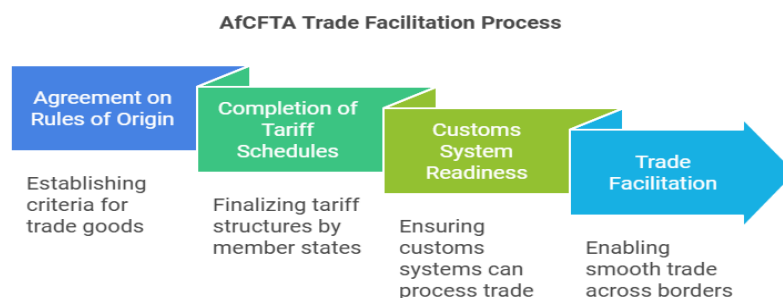
Figure 11: Trade Barriers and Customs Processes of AfCFTA Implementation



3.5 Review of AfCFTA Protocols Execution (2021-2025)

African governments have a chance to escape the bonds of economic nationalism that have ensnared vast regions of the continent for centuries with the establishment of the African Continental Free Trade Area on January 1st, 2021. Free commerce in Africa has many advantages, but it also has drawbacks. The Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) was introduced by the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2022 to start commercially significant trade under the AfCFTA. It applies to the guidelines showcased in figure 12.

Figure 12: AfCFTA Trade Facilitation Process



The GTI highlights when new nations become eligible and encourages the private sector to begin trading. In 2022, a few products were first shipped

between countries presented on figure 13.

Figure 13: Initial Trade Shipments under AfCFTA, 2022



Over time, the program spread to many more nations (Initiative for African Trade and Prosperity (IATP), 2024). Tariffs are supposed to be liberalised gradually under the AfCFTA, with more time allotted to least-developed nations (LDCs). The first objective is to eliminate 90% of tariff lines in five years for non-LDCs and ten years for LDCs. Seven percent of the remaining ten percent will be categorised as “sensitive products” and will be liberalised within ten years for non-LDCs and thirteen years for LDCs. The remaining three percent are categorised as “excluded products,” for which tariff liberalisation will not occur (IATP, 2024). Therefore, within thirteen years, the goal is to liberalise 97% of all tariff lines across all state parties. The African countries that currently trade with one another under the most-favourable-nation rates set by the World Trade Organisation will benefit the most from these liberalised tariff lines, even though they will have wide-ranging positive effects on the continent’s economy overall.

Major African markets including Nigeria and South Africa joined GTI in the first half of 2024. Of the 54 State Parties to the AfCFTA, 37 were pinned to finish these processes by the end of October 2024 – some challenges still exist. The prerequisites for rapid trading to start are created by this substantial threshold of nations and coverage of important African marketplaces (International Trade Administration, 2024).

At the 31st Ordinary Session of the AU Assembly, which took place in Nouakchott, Mauritania, from July 1-2, 2018, the Assembly decided to create National Committees on AfCFTA to guarantee important involvement from all parties and develop national AfCFTA and Boosting Intra-African Trade strategies (AfCFTA Secretariat, 2024). In 2023, which was designated as the “Acceleration of AfCFTA Implementation” year, the AfCFTA Secretariat started the process of extending the Initiative into a second phase, encompassing participating nations and products from all five African regions and islands.

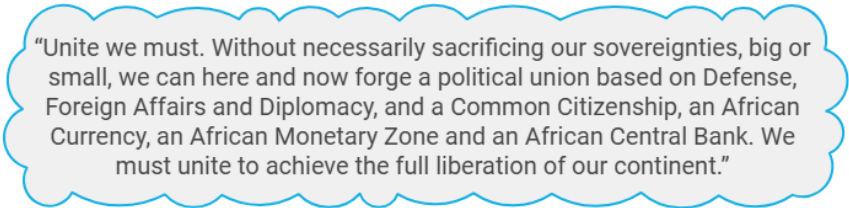
Additionally, trade-in services are covered in the second phase. The AfCFTA Guided Trade Initiative's second phase is currently being prepared, and 35 AU Member States have expressed interest in participating. The AfCFTA Secretariat has accomplished this by strengthening stakeholder engagements in the corresponding countries, advancing talks on the implementation of the AfCFTA, and offering technical help where required.

These 35 countries include:

- I. Eastern Africa Region: Kenya, Rwanda, United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda;
- II. Central Africa Region: Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Gabon, the Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Equatorial Guinea and Chad;
- III. Northern Africa Region: Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco;
- IV. Southern Africa Region: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho and Eswatini;
- V. Western Africa Region: Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo; and
- VI. Island States: Mauritius, Cape Verde, Comoros, Madagascar and Seychelles.

At the same time, a treaty promoting the free flow of people between African nations was established by the AU. For the nations of the African continent to successfully flourish socially and economically, both are seen as essential. In contrast, just four (4) countries have fully ratified the Free Movement of Persons (FMP) Protocol, which was signed by 33 nations as of January 2021, while 54 countries had signed the AfCFTA. This is evident why there have been obstacles to free movement of persons within the African continent (Hirsch, 2021).

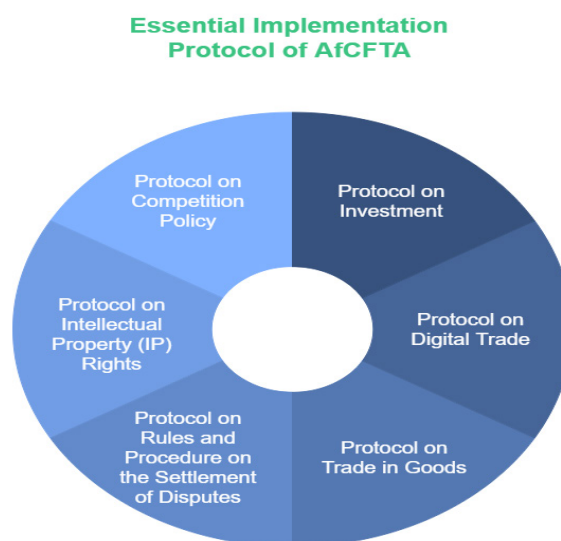
In short, Africa's economic integration drive reached a significant turning point with the AfCFTA's operationalisation on January 1, 2021. Africa's history as an economic community began with this event. A favourite quote by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was just a dream soon to be realized:



"Unite we must. Without necessarily sacrificing our sovereignties, big or small, we can here and now forge a political union based on Defense, Foreign Affairs and Diplomacy, and a Common Citizenship, an African Currency, an African Monetary Zone and an African Central Bank. We must unite to achieve the full liberation of our continent."

The implementation protocols of AfCFTA are intended to make it easier for people, products, and services to be sold on a single African market.

Figure 14: Essential Implementation Protocol of AfCFTA



3.5.1 AfCFTA Protocol on Investment

The African Union (AU) Assembly of Heads of State and Government adopted the AfCFTA Protocol on Investment in February 2023, and it was mandated that Articles 19 and 21 be reviewed. The AfCFTA Protocol on Investment aims to promote and protect investments within the African continent, enhancing economic integration and cooperation. Key Provisions are:

- Definition of Investment. This includes direct and indirect investments, such as shares, stocks, bonds, and intellectual property rights.
- National Treatment. This ensures equal treatment for domestic and foreign investors.
- Most-Favored Nation (MFN) Treatment: This ensures investors receive no less favorable treatment than those from other countries.
- Fair and Equitable Treatment: This protects investors from unfair or discriminatory practices.
- Protection Against Expropriation: This safeguards investors against unjustified expropriation or nationalization.
- Dispute Settlement: This establishes procedures for resolving investment disputes.

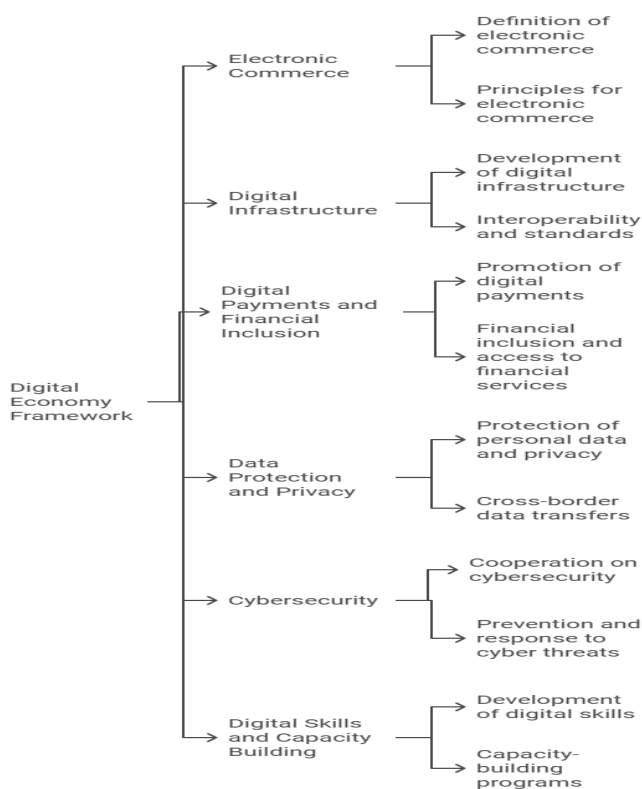
Member states are encouraged to offer incentives for investment; streamline investment procedures and reduce bureaucratic hurdles. Member states are required to support training and capacity-building programs for investment promotion agencies. Investors and member states would engage in bilateral

talks to resolve disputes and can seek arbitration through established mechanisms (e.g., ICSID, UNCITRAL). The protocol mechanism allows for appeals against arbitration decisions. Notwithstanding, the AfCFTA has to be concerned with effective implementation that requires strong institutional capacity, and investment policy coordination. Member states must coordinate investment policies. Efficient dispute resolution mechanisms are also crucial (International Trade Administration, 2024).

3.5.2 Protocol on Digital Trade

The Protocol on Digital Trade seeks to foster economic integration, innovation, and competitiveness by facilitating the expansion of digital trade across the African continent. The Protocol on Digital Trade is significant in promoting intra-African trade and guaranteeing that Africa does not fall behind in the swiftly advancing digital revolution. The key Provisions (see: figure 15):

Figure 15: Digital Economy Framework for AfCFTA



Key Institutions for protocol on digital trade are the African Digital Trade Organization (ADTO), and the National Digital Trade Authorities (NDTAs). The digital protocol acknowledges that Africa’s digitalisation requires a unified framework. It aims to establish a digital trading ecosystem on the Continent that is open, safe, and reliable. It establishes requirements for transparency in the publication of all laws about digitalisation. Important topics for

consideration include cybersecurity, new technologies (including artificial intelligence), online consumer protection, data governance, data protection, and cross-border data flows. It covers interoperability, digital payments, and how fintechs are handled (International Trade Administration, 2024).

3.5.3 AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods

The AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods is an essential part of it. Its main goal is to increase intra-African trade in goods by removing tariffs and non-tariff obstacles and improving transit, trade facilitation, and customs processes. The Rules of Origin Manual, one of the annexes that implements the Protocol on Trade in Goods, offers instructions for putting the regulations into practice. A structure for monitoring compliance and resolving disputes has also been established by the African Union. Essentially, the goal of the AfCFTA Protocol on Trade in Goods is to boost economic development, growth, and intra-African commerce. It encourages member-state collaboration and economic integration by lowering trade barriers and improving facilitation.

3.5.4 The Protocol on Rules and Procedure on the Settlement of Disputes

The Protocol on Rules and Procedure on the Settlement of Disputes creates a dispute resolution process to handle disagreements about trade between participating nations. The objectives are to provide a fair, efficient, and transparent dispute settlement process; ensure compliance with AfCFTA agreements; and prevent and resolve trade disputes. Key Provisions include Dispute Settlement Bodies; Dispute Settlement Procedures; Timeframes; Dispute Settlement Rules. The goal of the AfCFTA dispute resolution process is to foster a predictable and stable trade environment that will support African nations' economic development and collaboration. The Protocol on Rules and Procedure on the Settlement of Disputes establishes a dispute settlement mechanism to resolve trade disputes among member states. The objectives are to provide a fair, efficient, and transparent dispute settlement process, ensure compliance with AfCFTA agreements, and prevent and resolve trade disputes. Key Provisions are: Dispute Settlement Bodies; Dispute Settlement Panel (DSP); Appellate Body (AB); Dispute Settlement Procedures; Timeframes; Dispute Settlement Rules; and Dispute Settlement Stages. The AfCFTA dispute settlement mechanism aims to promote a stable and predictable trade environment, encouraging economic growth and cooperation among African countries.

3.5.5 Protocol on Intellectual Property (IP) Rights

The AfCFTA Protocol on Intellectual Property (IP) Rights aims to promote innovation, creativity, and trade in intellectual property goods and services within the African continent. The objectives:

- Protect IP rights
- Promote innovation and creativity
- Enhance trade in IP goods and services
- Foster economic growth and development

Key Provisions are:

- Section 1: General Provisions
- Section 2: Copyright and Related Rights
- Section 3: Industrial Property
- Section 4: Enforcement
- Section 5: Cooperation and Capacity Building

Key Institutions are the African Intellectual Property Organization (AIPO) and the Regional Intellectual Property Offices (RIPOs). The AfCFTA Protocol on Intellectual Property Rights aims to create a harmonized and effective IP system, promoting innovation, trade, and economic growth across Africa.

3.5.6 Protocol on Competition Policy

The AfCFTA Protocol on Competition Policy aims to promote fair competition, prevent anticompetitive practices, and enhance economic efficiency within the African continental market. It aims to:

- Promote competition and economic efficiency
- Prevent anticompetitive practices
- Protect consumer welfare
- Enhance regional integration

Key Provisions:

- Section 1: General Provisions
- Section 2: Anticompetitive Practices
- Section 3: Competition Enforcement
- Section 4: Cooperation and Coordination

The key Institutions are the African Competition Authority (ACA) and the National Competition Authorities (NCAs). The AfCFTA Protocol on Competition Policy aims to create a level playing field for businesses, promoting competition, innovation, and economic growth across Africa.

3.5.7 Protocol on Trade in Service

AfCFTA recognises the right of State Parties to impose new rules on the provision of services within their borders and to regulate in pursuit of national policy goals in order to achieve legitimate national policy goals, such as competitiveness, consumer protection, and overall sustainable development. Considering the level of service regulation development in other nations, it is especially important that State Parties exercise this right without jeopardising consumer protection, environmental protection, or overall sustainable development.

The specific objectives of this Protocol are to:

- enhance competitiveness of services through: economies of scale, reduced business costs, enhanced continental market access, and an improved allocation of resources including the development of trade-related infrastructure;
- promote sustainable development in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- foster domestic and foreign investment;
- accelerate efforts on industrial development to promote the development of regional value chains;
- progressively liberalise trade in services across the African continent on the basis of equity, balance and mutual benefit, by eliminating barriers to trade in services;
- ensure consistency and complementarity between liberalisation of trade in services and the various Annexes in specific services sectors;
- pursue services trade liberalisation in line with Article V of the GATS by expanding the depth and scope of liberalisation and increasing, improving and developing the export of services, while fully preserving the right to regulate and to introduce new regulations.

3.5.8 Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade

The AfCFTA reaffirm its determination to fulfil the objectives and aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 6, which aims to establish a people-driven continent that depends on the potential of Africans, particularly their women and youth. It desires to advance and achieve the sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development of women and youth by utilising trade opportunities, in accordance with Article 3(e) of the AfCFTA Agreement.

The specific objectives of this Protocol are to:

- a) support and enhance the effective participation of Women and Youth

in Trade in intra-Africa trade;

- b) improve the inclusion of Women and Youth in Trade in the implementation of the AfCFTA to achieve sustainable economic development at the national, regional, and continental levels;
- c) strengthen the capacity of Women and Youth in Trade;
- d) enhance access to opportunities for Women and Youth in Trade;
- e) promote value addition and innovation for increased imports and exports by Women and Youth in Trade;
- f) support the inclusion of women and youth into regional and continental value chains; and
- g) support measures that promote the formalisation of the trade activities of women and youth.

3.5.9 Instruments of Operations of AfCFTA

Among the AfCFTA's operating tools are:

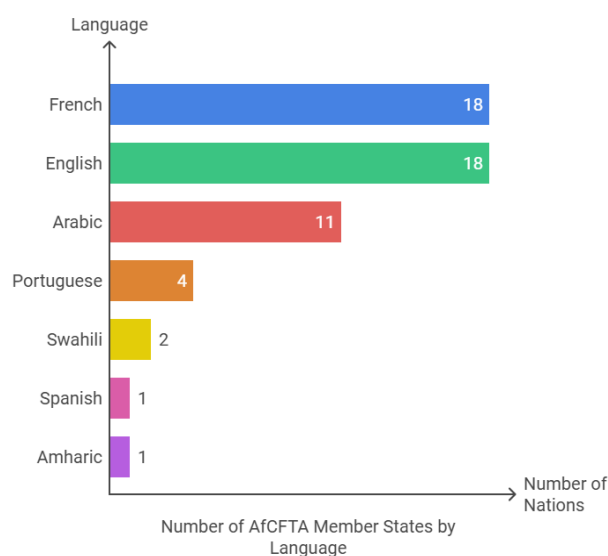
- Rules of Origin -The conditions that allow a product or service to be traded duty-free within the region;
- Tariff Concessions -The agreed-upon tariff liberalisation of 90% over ten years, plus an extra 7% for sensitive products;
- AfCFTA Online Negotiation Tool: helps member states negotiate tariff liberalization
- AfCFTA Trade in Goods Online Portal- allows 90% of tariff lines can be covered by member states' tariff offers.

A number of obstacles continue to slow down AfCFTA implementation. The AfCFTA considered the challenge of adopting an official language for trading. For instance, the notion of recommending Kiswahili as (1) one of its official languages and (2) an African lingua franca was investigated and discussed by the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) (Leshoele, 2024). However, the African Union has yet to implement this strategy, just like many of the resolutions, conventions, and treaties they enact. One of the main obstacles to the AfCFTA's implementation is the length of time it takes for some member states to ratify trade agreements because of domestic bureaucracies and ambiguity about the advantages that would be received. The challenge of achieving equitable economic integration among its member states arises from the disparity in size among the member states of the AfCFTA, as it is likely that more developed member states will experience higher levels of economic gains than less developed member states.

Another issue is the AfCFTA's capacity to offer the economic infrastructure needed to support trade between its member nations.

Finally, because there are only two common currencies among the AfCFTA member states, using more than one can be difficult. The Central African CFA franc (XAF), which is used by six-member states (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon), and the West African CFA franc (XOF), which is used by seven-member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal, and Togo), are the only currencies that are shared. The currencies of the remaining forty-two AfCFTA members are all different. Additionally, the member states of the AfCFTA speak a variety of languages (see: figure 16). As a result, the member states of the AfCFTA must cooperate to eliminate any obstacles that can hinder the agreement's success (Debrah, Olabode, Olan, & Nyuur, 2024).

Figure 16: AfCFTA Member States by Language



The work of Sabela and colleagues (2023) looked at the AfCFTA and its potential to unleash the growth of women in Africa and revealed that the lack of gender sensitivity validates the need to address the unique needs of African women, particularly those engaged in informal cross-border trade. Therefore, the formalisation of women involved in informal trade should be the main policy priority for the AfCFTA to facilitate their access to markets, knowledge, and economic possibilities (Sabela, Masuku, & Mlambo, 2023).

An essential revelation by UNECA was that Ghana's implementation of the AfCFTA has advanced significantly. Ghana has set up a National AfCFTA Coordination Office (NCO) and is home to the AfCFTA secretariat. As part of the AfCFTA's Guided Trade Initiative, Ghana is one of seven nations chosen to begin trading products under the AfCFTA on a pilot basis. To direct the implementation of the AfCFTA, Ghana has also developed the National AfCFTA Policy and Plan of Action and held sensitisation workshops.

This study does, however, demonstrate the need to further stakeholders' comprehension of the AfCFTA (UNECA, 2024).

3.6 Labour Rights and Standards – Selected Countries

In Africa, the ILO assists 54 nations in advancing workers' rights, fostering fair job opportunities, improving social protection, and fostering more robust discourse on labour-related matters. ITUC-Africa, through the SASK project, funded by the ministry of foreign of Finland, has equally made significant strides towards mainstreaming labour rights in the AfCFTA as well as the inclusion of trade unions in the National Implementation Committees (NIC) of the AfCFTA at the national levels.

The ITUC's Global Rights Index shows there is widespread non-compliance with labour norms both in Africa and worldwide. Trade unions can help advance the implementation of the AfCFTA agreement's anti-labour clauses. This could be done, for instance, by calling attention to instances of non-compliance and requesting accountability. The ILO started the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) in 1999 to promote safe, just, and equitable working conditions everywhere. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals must be taken into account and included in any labour requirements in the AfCFTA (Daniel, 2021).

The inclusion and enforcement of worker standards in trade agreements is a controversial topic that is widely discussed in trade policy and labour movement circles. Labour standards in trade agreements, according to proponents, are essential to prevent nations and businesses from unfairly gaining a competitive edge by depriving workers of their fundamental rights. Opponents, primarily developing nations, argue that labour clauses in trade agreements are protectionist and would reduce their ability to compete in international markets (ILO, 2020). Some Laws, and regulations for Senegal are tabled in 1below:

Table 1: Senegal-Regulation Decree and Ordinance

SENEGAL-REGULATION, DECREE, ORDINANCE	Specifics
SEN-2020-R-110440	Ordinance No. 001-2020 of 8 April 2020 adjusting measures derogating from dismissal and technical unemployment during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Adopted on: 2020-04-08
SEN-2019-R-108465 <u>Decree No. 2019-804 of 17 April 2019,</u>	relating to the powers of the Minister of Employment, Vocational Training and Handicrafts.

SEN-2020-R-113752- Law No. 2020-01 of January 6, 2020	On the creation and promotion of startups in Senegal
SEN-2020-R-110438 Decree No. 2020-875 of 25 March 2020	On the provisional reorganization of working hours in the State's administrative services. Adopted on: 2020-03-2
SEN-2020-R-110435	Ministerial Order No. 008231 of 25 March 2020 on restrictive measures in the land transport sector to combat Covid-19. Adopted on: 2020-03-25; Date of entry into force: 2020-03-25
SEN-2020-R-110439	Ministerial Order No. 011592 of 10 July 2020 prescribing the mandatory wearing of protective masks in public and private places. Adopted on: 2020-07-10
Senegal; Law, Act SEN-2021-L-113007	Framework Law No. 2021-28 of 15 June 2021 on the social and solidarity economy. Adopted on: 2021-06-15
Senegal; Regulation, Decree, Ordinance SEN-2021-R-111985	Decree No. 2021-1469 of 3 November 2021 on the work of pregnant women. Adopted on: 2021-11-03

Source: (ILO, 2021)

Senegal's employment law is derived from three different sources:

- The global source, which aligns with all international labour law treaties that Senegal has ratified.
- The Labour Code and its application texts are the primary legislative and regulatory texts that relate to the State source.
- The traditional source, which includes sectoral collective agreements unique to each activity area and the National Collective Interprofessional Agreement (CCNI).

Ghana's labour laws are intended to shield workers from discrimination and exploitation. The Labour Act of 2003 (Act 651) is the main piece of legislation governing employment contracts. This Act creates a strong basis for employment standards to protect workers' rights and guarantee equitable employment practices. The provisions of the Act include: Protection of Employment; General Conditions of Employment; Employment of Persons with Disability; Employment of Women, Young Persons; Fair and Unfair Termination of Employment, among others (Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, 2023).

Moreover, Kenya's Labour Laws are reflected in a training module that shows the Kenyan Human Rights Commission's (KHRC) dedication to building a critical mass of employees who are empowered and better equipped to protect their rights. The training manual summarises all five of the Labour Acts of Parliament into a single document, making it equally valuable and a convenient point of reference for employers and HR professionals. The Labour Act of Parliament are as follows: The Employment Act of 2007, the Labour Relations Act of 2007, the Labour Institutions Act of 2007, the Occupational Safety & Health Act of 2007, the Work Injury Benefits Act of 2007, and the Employment and Labour Relations Court of 2011 (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2019).

The Egyptian Labour Law No. 12/2003, which has 257 articles organised into six chapters, is the main law governing Egypt's labour laws. The following are some salient features of Egypt's labour laws: Employment Contracts; Working Hours and Leave; Termination of Employment; and Disciplinary Sanctions (ILO, 2024). These rules must be followed by Egyptian employers to guarantee that their workers are treated fairly and have a safe working environment. Employers can avoid fines and promote a pleasant workplace culture by adhering to labour laws, which also protect employees' rights. All private employers are subject to Egyptian labour legislation, regardless of the type of business company they are legally registered as. This implies that both foreign workers and Egyptian citizens employed by Egyptian companies may be eligible for several benefits under the Egyptian Labour Act. These labour regulations do not, however, apply to citizens who work for foreign companies overseas, even if they are from Egypt.

In Mozambique, the implementation of a new labour legislation, legislation No. 13/2023, went into effect on February 21, 2024. This law seeks to uphold workers' rights, encourage ethical labour practices, and adjust to the changing demands of the contemporary workforce. This law seeks to uphold workers' rights, encourage ethical labour practices, and adjust to the changing demands of the contemporary workforce. Important clauses of the new labour law include: Improved Working Conditions; Protection Against Discrimination; Regulation of Foreign Workers; Teleworking and Flexible Work Arrangements; and Increased Maternity and Paternity Leave. It is anticipated that the new labour law will improve Mozambique's workers' rights. There are worries, meanwhile, that the longer maternity leave would deter firms from hiring women, which could result in a rise in the unemployment rate for women (International Trade Council, 2022).

In South Africa workers are granted several fundamental rights under the constitution. The Labour Relations Act (LRA) provides more beyond these fundamental rights. Additionally, vulnerable workers are intended to be protected by the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA). The

Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (“COIDA”), for example, establishes a legislative insurance system that offers compensation to full-time and part-time workers who are hurt, killed, or become ill as a result of a work-related illness or accident (ILO, 2011).

Commercial farm labourers in South Africa have suffered generations of mistreatment and exploitation until the 1990s, when progressive laws were passed to provide workers’ rights to better living and working conditions, including a legislated minimum wage tailored to their industry (Devereux, 2020). However, there are many labour rights breaches in the agriculture industry, and farm workers are probably more vulnerable now than they were in the past due to persistent exploitation, casualization, and eviction. Devereux (2020) documents labour rights violations in the areas of salaries and contracts, as well as occupational health and safety, among women agricultural workers in the provinces of the Western Cape and Northern Cape. The report shows that Trade unions failed to represent farm workers and hold the government and farmers accountable, and the government is accountable for not enforcing compliance with pro-worker laws aside from farmers themselves.

Furthermore, regarding migrant workers, Vanyoro (2021) examines the conflicts in how the issues of migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in South Africa are framed by non-governmental activity, as embodied by trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It examines how, to further their objectives, ostensibly divisive trade unions and non-governmental organisations fighting for MDWs create distinct narratives about labour rights at different political junctures. By restricting MDWs to the strict classifications of “international migrants” or “domestic workers,” these monolithic frames confuse the concerns surrounding MDWs and their rights. Migrant-aligned trade unions and non-governmental organisations employ a transnational political strategy to engage with pre-existing labour movement discourses and narratives, which is shown in the framing of MDWs’ problems as international migrants’ rights issues. The phrase “a worker is a worker” is used by locally orientated trade unions and non-governmental organisations to describe the concerns of foreign MDWs as being on par with those of internal MDWs. Strong xenophobic discourses against migrants in South Africa’s labour market are produced by this homogenising framing of worker struggles, and they are consistent with both “national chauvinism” and a citizenship-based workers’ rights movement. In an attempt to appeal to a local constituency worried about the economy being “overrun” by foreign migrants, locally aligned trade unions and non-governmental organisations use the mantra to de-exceptionalize international migrants, even though it should allow every worker to defend their rights without fear of immigration detention or deportation. The article concludes that both domestic and foreign MDWs must structure themselves to acknowledge their commonalities and

take into account their distinctions (Vanyoro, 2021) .

South Africa has created a social security system, based on the constitutional right, that is made up of three main components: required social insurance, voluntary insurance, and non-contributory programs including targeted social assistance and public employment programs. South Africa has achieved significant strides since democratisation in 1994 by establishing the South African Social Security Agency, increasing payments for the elderly and children, and allowing domestic workers to participate in the Unemployment Insurance Fund. The two main initiatives that makeup South Africa's social safety net are the Child Support Grant and the Old Persons Grant (ILO, 2011).

There is therefore a need to examine the AfCFTA and how it can help women in Africa advance (Sabela et al., 2023). Improved human security, greater commercial diversification, regional integration, more foreign direct investment, and technical improvement are some of the anticipated advantages of the AfCFTA. Although there is hope that the accord would be a local innovation led by the African Union, sceptics question how much stakeholder participation has taken place. To improve results for female cross-border traders for example, the agreement needs to be gender-responsive. The absence of gender sensitivity supports the necessity of attending to the unique requirements of African women, particularly those engaged in unofficial cross-border trading. Therefore, to improve access to markets, knowledge, and growth possibilities, the policy priority for the AfCFTA should be on ensuring that women who engage in informal trade are formalized (Sabela et al., 2023).

The AU has created a draft Business and Human Rights Policy to, among other things, promote sustainable development and the implementation of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights as part of its effort to promote sustainable development rights on the continent. Bisong (2022) indicated that harnessing the advantages of intra-African trade and economic integration requires linking the free movement of people and the free movement of products and services. However, even though many African nations have approved or signed the AfCFTA agreement, less attention has been paid to the AU's free movement protocol (AU-FMP). To improve intra-African trade and economic integration. The briefing note examines the connections between the AfCFTA, AU-FMP, and the functional significance of the free movement protocol in promoting labour mobility. It offers information on the opportunities and difficulties linked to mobility that the AfCFTA has brought about, together with suggestions for improving the way the AU-FMP and the AfCFTA's labour mobility provisions are implemented (African Union, 2023).

There are numerous initiatives African countries might take to resolve the current AU-FMP ratification gridlock while giving access to critical manpower and skills to increase productivity in several economic areas. For example, they can establish new visa categories or make entry procedures easier for various migrant groups, including investors, interns, businesspeople, and small-scale cross-border traders. In addition to these actions, more work is required to comprehend the domestic motivations of African nations to advance mobility and the circumstances in which states would proceed with protocol implementation (Bisong, 2022).

In a recent meeting organized by ITUC-Africa with the support of SASK in September, 2024, trade union in Africa expressed misgivings about the non-inclusion of labour provisions and social protection in the AfCFTA protocols. Additionally, trade union groups made a statement in Abuja during the sub-regional workshop on the AfCFTA and trade union advocacy for labour rights and participation. According to the Organisation of Trade Unions of West Africa (OTUWA) and the ITUC-Africa, workers would be put in danger, and poverty on the continent would rise if labour and social rights were not included in the accord. ITUC-Africa declared that trade unions must be aware of the potential hazards that exist if AfCFTA does not include the needed labour protocols (Agbakwuru, 2024).

4. Trade Trends & Trade Dynamics in Africa: Analytical Insights

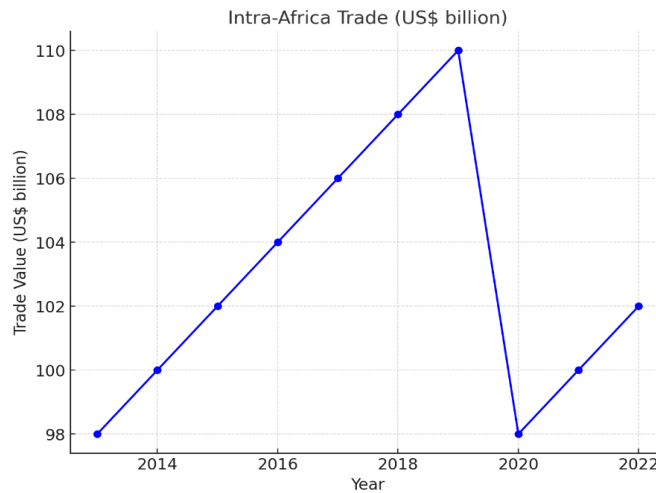
4.1 Intra-Africa Trade (US\$ billion)

Trade remains a pivotal driver of Africa's economic growth and integration. Over the past decade, the continent has witnessed a complex interplay of opportunities and challenges in its trade landscape, shaped by both internal reforms and external disruptions. These trends provide valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of African economies, highlighting the need for strategies that leverage trade for industrialization, job creation, and social progress.

By examining these patterns, stakeholders can better understand how to build a resilient and inclusive trade framework that supports sustainable development. Intra-Africa trade has emerged as a vital element in the continent's pursuit of economic integration and self-reliance. The steady growth in trade volumes prior to 2020 underscores Africa's increasing capacity to trade within its borders, while the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and global polycrisis highlights vulnerabilities that need addressing. The subsequent recovery demonstrates the potential of regional initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to enhance economic resilience and foster shared prosperity. Understanding these trends is essential for advocating policies that ensure trade translates into equitable benefits for all, including decent work and fair wages.

The figure 17 on Intra-Africa trade shows a steady growth in trade volume from 2013 to 2019, followed by a significant decline in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on global and regional economies. Trade values recovered in 2021 and 2022, indicating resilience and the potential of African economies to adapt. This underscores the importance of regional trade agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in boosting intra-continental trade. For workers and trade unions, this recovery represents opportunities to advocate for policies that ensure trade benefits translate into decent jobs and fair wages.

Figure 17: Intra-Africa Trade (US\$ billion)

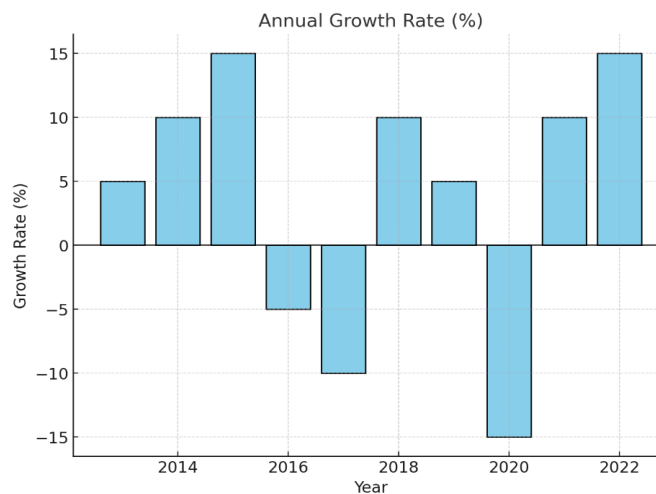


Source: Authors' Calculations based on Data from ITC Trade Map, AfCFTA, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.2 Annual Growth Rate (%)

The annual growth rate chart highlights fluctuations in intra-Africa trade growth. Positive growth in the years leading up to 2016 contrasts with contractions in 2020, again linked to external shocks like the pandemic. The rebound in 2021 and 2022 shows Africa's resilience and the critical role of trade in economic recovery. Trade unions can leverage this data to argue for more robust social protection systems for workers during economic downturns in figure 18.

Figure 18: Intra-Africa Trade Annual Growth Rate (%)

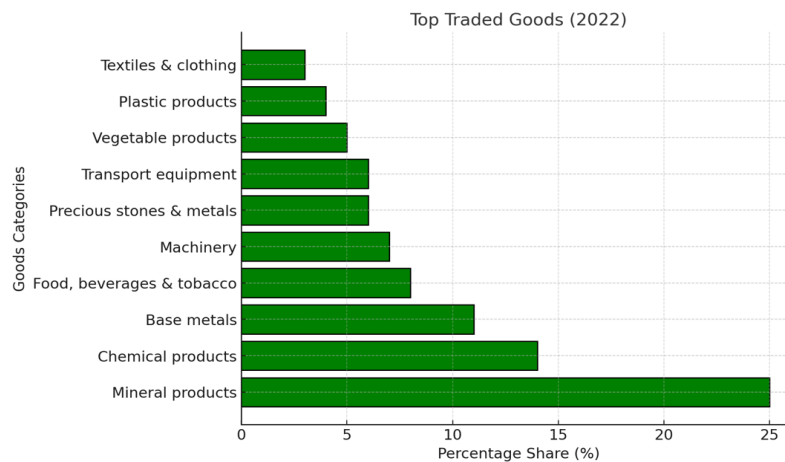


Source: Authors' Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.3 Top Traded Goods (2022)

The top traded goods in 2022 were dominated by mineral products, which accounted for 25% of total trade. Chemical products, base metals, and food, beverages, and tobacco followed in figure 19. The reliance on raw materials highlights the need for value addition and industrialization in Africa. Trade unions must hence push for policies that promote local processing industries, ensuring workers gain from the creation of higher-value jobs in domestic markets.

Figure 19: Intra-Afra Trade - Top Traded Goods (2022)

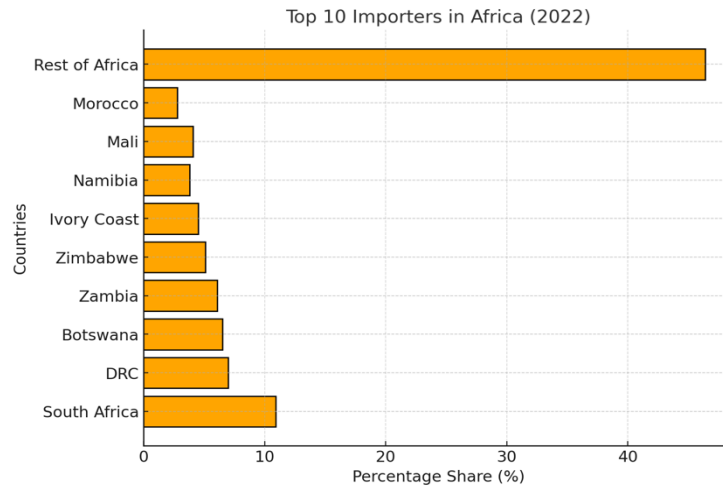


Source: Authors' Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.4 Top 10 Importers in Africa (2022)

The top importers chart reveals South Africa and the DRC as leading importers, reflecting their economic size and diversity. The 'Rest of Africa' category, which represents smaller economies collectively, shows significant trade activity as showcased in figure 20. This suggests a growing integration of smaller economies into regional trade networks. Trade unions should focus on ensuring that imports do not crowd out local industries but instead complement domestic production, preserving and creating jobs.

Figure 20: Intra-Africa Trade – Top Importers (2022)

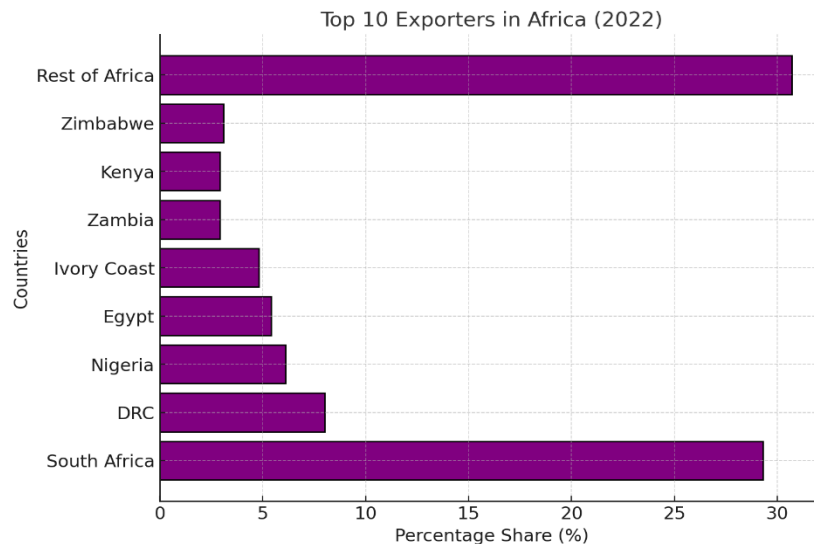


Source: Authors’ Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.5 Top 10 Exporters in Africa (2022)

South Africa dominates African exports, accounting for nearly 30% of the total, followed by the DRC and Nigeria in figure 21. The ‘Rest of Africa’ collectively contributes significantly, showing the diversity of trade contributors. Trade unions can advocate for fair trade practices and better working conditions for workers in export-driven industries.

Figure 21: Intra-Africa Trade – Top Exporters (2022)

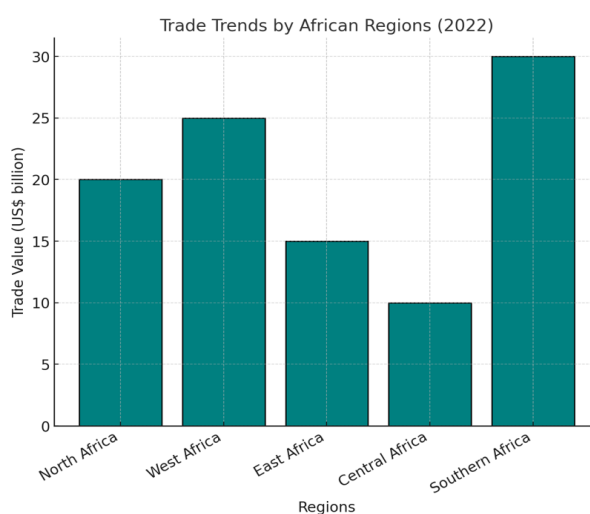


Source: Authors’ Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.6 Trade Trends by African Regions (2022)

Southern Africa leads in trade value among African regions, followed by West Africa. Central Africa lags behind, highlighting disparities in trade activity across regions in figure 22. This calls for targeted interventions to enhance trade in underperforming regions. Trade unions must hence advocate for equitable development strategies that address regional inequalities and ensure workers in all regions benefit from trade growth.

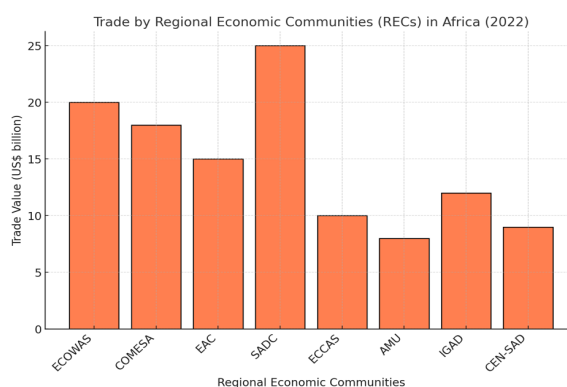
Source: Authors' Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024



4.7 Trade by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa (2022)

SADC leads among the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in trade value, followed by ECOWAS and COMESA in figure 23. This reflects the varying levels of integration and economic activity among RECs. To this end trade unions must engage in discussions on strengthening REC policies to promote inclusive trade that benefits workers across all member states.

Figure 23: Trade by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa (2022)



Source: Authors' Calculations, based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA, 2024

4.8 Interrupted Time Series Analysis: AfCFTA Implementation

In this section, we employ an Interrupted Time Series (ITS) analysis to evaluate the trade dynamics before and after AfCFTA's implementation. ITS is particularly suited for this analysis as it identifies changes in both the level and slope of trade values associated with a clearly defined intervention point. By leveraging pre- and post-intervention data, ITS provides robust causal inference while controlling for confounding factors. The analysis is supplemented by robustness checks to validate the reliability of the results, and forecasts for 2023 and 2024 are included to project the long-term impact of AfCFTA. What follows is a detailed examination of the ITS results, including diagnostic tests, regression outputs, and implications for policy and practice. This analysis not only highlights the immediate effects of AfCFTA but also offers insights into the structural and operational measures required to fully realize its transformative potential.

4.8.1 Robustness Checks

Several robustness checks were conducted to validate the interrupted time series analysis and ensure the reliability of the findings. First, the Breusch-Pagan test for heteroskedasticity resulted in a statistic of 5.9350 and a p-value of 0.1148, indicating no significant heteroskedasticity in the residuals. Second, the Durbin-Watson statistic was 2.0952, suggesting no severe autocorrelation in the residuals. Third, the Ljung-Box test for autocorrelation yielded a statistic of 0.0680 with a p-value of 0.7942, further confirming the independence of residuals. Finally, the Lilliefors test for normality returned a statistic of 0.2000 and a p-value of 0.3170, supporting the assumption that the residuals are normally distributed. These checks collectively affirm the validity of the model and its underlying assumptions.

The table 2 below summarizes the robustness checks conducted for the interrupted time series analysis.

Table 2: Robustness Checks for Interrupted Time Series Analysis

Test	Statistic	p-Value
Breusch-Pagan Test (Heteroskedasticity)	5.9350	0.1148
Durbin-Watson Test (Autocorrelation)	2.0952	N/A
Ljung-Box Test (Autocorrelation)	0.0680	0.7942
Lilliefors Test (Normality)	0.2000	0.3170

Source: Findings from the Analysis, 2025

4.8.2 Regression Results

The study utilizes the interrupted timeseries to provide deeper understanding of post-AfCFTA impact. The interrupted time series (ITS) analysis is a robust and widely accepted method for evaluating the impact of policy interventions, such as the implementation of AfCFTA in 2021. ITS is particularly useful when the intervention occurs at a clearly defined point in time, as it allows for the examination of changes in both the level and trend of the dependent variable – in this case, trade values. By leveraging pre-intervention data, ITS isolates the effects of the intervention from underlying patterns and trends, providing a more precise measure of its impact. Furthermore, ITS accounts for temporal dependencies in the data and uses robust regression techniques to control for confounding factors. This makes it an ideal analytical framework for assessing large-scale policy changes like AfCFTA, which have implications for trade integration and economic growth across Africa. Additionally, the use of robustness checks, including tests for heteroskedasticity, autocorrelation, and normality, ensures the reliability and validity of the findings. The ITS approach is therefore well-suited for this analysis, offering insights into both the immediate and longer-term effects of AfCFTA implementation.

The interrupted time series regression results provide an analysis of the impact of AfCFTA implementation on trade values. The model explains 25.6% of the variance in trade values (R-squared = 0.256), although the adjusted R-squared (-0.117) suggests that the inclusion of additional predictors does not improve the explanatory power of the model. The intercept indicates a significant baseline trade value of \$100.33 billion ($p < 0.001$). While the coefficient for time (0.8333) suggests a positive trend in trade over time, this effect is not statistically significant ($p = 0.262$). The coefficient for post-AfCFTA (-16.3333) reflects a slight negative level shift after the implementation of AfCFTA in 2021; however, this result is not significant ($p = 0.767$). Similarly, the interaction term (1.1667) shows a small positive change in the slope post-implementation, but this too is not statistically significant ($p = 0.857$), indicating that any immediate impacts of AfCFTA on trade values were minimal.

The diagnostic tests confirm the reliability of the model. The Durbin-Watson statistic (2.095) indicates no severe autocorrelation in the residuals, and the Jarque-Bera test ($p = 0.342$) suggests that the residuals are normally distributed. However, the Omnibus test ($p = 0.048$) flags some deviation from normality, which should be considered when interpreting the results. Overall, while the immediate effects of AfCFTA on trade values are not statistically significant, the positive long-term trend in trade suggests that the benefits of regional integration under AfCFTA may require more time to materialize. These findings highlight the importance of monitoring longer-term impacts and considering complementary policies to enhance trade growth across Africa. The table 3 to 5 below presents the regression results

for the interrupted time series analysis.

Table 3: Regression Results from Interrupted Time Series Analysis

Metric	Value
Dependent Variable	TradeValue
R-squared	0.256
Adjusted Rsquared	-0.117
Method	Ordinary Least Squares
F-statistic	0.6869
Prob (F-statistic)	0.592
Log-Likelihood	-26.372
No. Observations	10
AIC	60.74
BIC	61.95
Df Model	3
Df Residuals	6
Covariance Type	Nonrobust

Table 4: Coefficients from Interrupted Time Series Regression

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	t-Value	p-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Intercept	100.3333	2.818	35.607	<0.001	[93.439, 107.228]
Time	0.8333	0.674	1.237	0.262	[-0.815, 2.482]
Post AfCFTA	-16.3333	52.640	-0.310	0.767	[-145.139, 112.473]
Interaction	1.1667	6.210	0.188	0.857	[-14.029, 16.362]

Table 5: Model Diagnostics

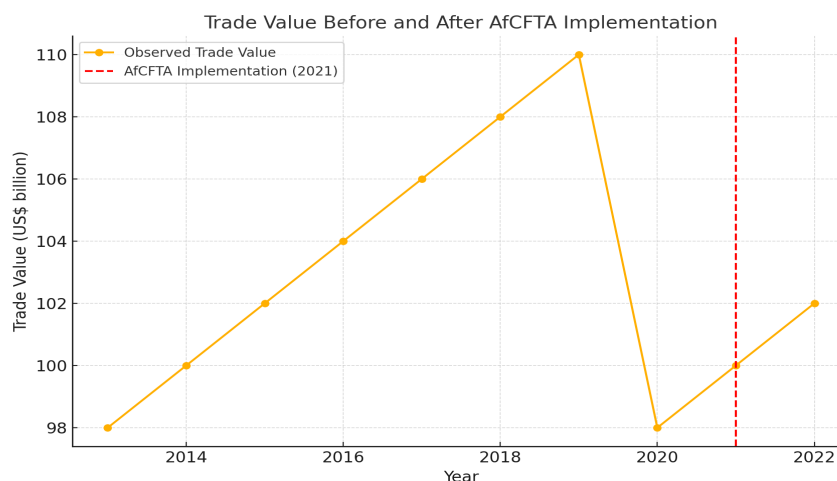
Diagnostic Test	Value
Omnibus Test	6.061
Prob (Omnibus)	0.048
Jarque-Bera (JB)	2.145
Prob (JB)	0.342
Skewness	-1.035
Kurtosis	3.929
Durbin-Watson Statistic	2.095
Condition Number	238

Notes: [1] Standard Errors assume that the covariance matrix of the errors is correctly specified.

4.8.3 Interrupted Time Series Graph

Figure 24 presents the trade Value Before and After AfCFTA Implementation.

Figure 24: trade Value Before and After AfCFTA Implementation



Source: Authors' Calculations, 2024 based on Data from ITC Trade Map, World Bank, UNECA

The graph presents trends in intra-Africa trade values from 2013 to 2022, with the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in 2021 marked by a red dashed line. This analysis explores key patterns observed in the data and interprets their significance in light of AfCFTA's objectives to enhance regional trade and economic integration.

4.9 Post-AfCFTA Implementation Period (2021–2022)

Following AfCFTA's launch in 2021, trade values began recovering from their 2020 low, rising steadily into 2022. The observed recovery suggests the initial benefits of enhanced trade integration facilitated by AfCFTA's frameworks, such as tariff reductions under the Guided Trade Initiative (GTI), harmonized customs procedures, and a unified trade policy across member states. While the post-2021 recovery is encouraging, the immediate level and slope changes in trade values remain modest. This implies that while AfCFTA has created a platform for improving trade, structural and operational challenges – such as inadequate infrastructure, non-tariff barriers, and limited regional production capacity – continue to constrain its full impact. The data suggests that the transformative effects of AfCFTA may take more time to manifest as member states implement the agreement's protocols fully.

4.10 Forecasted Values for 2023 and 2024

The forecasted trade values for 2023 and 2024 are \$103 billion and \$106 billion, respectively. These projections reflect a continued recovery and a modest upward trajectory in intra-Africa trade. The expected growth aligns with AfCFTA's objectives of fostering regional integration and enhancing trade flows by creating a unified market. The forecasted values highlight the potential for long-term gains under AfCFTA as its implementation matures and member states fully operationalize its protocols. However, the moderate pace of growth suggests that complementary measures are necessary to unlock AfCFTA's full potential. Investments in infrastructure (e.g., transport and energy), addressing non-tariff barriers, and scaling up regional industrial capacity will be critical to accelerating trade growth. The continued upward trend in the forecast suggests opportunities for member states to leverage AfCFTA to expand intra-Africa trade in value-added goods and services, especially in manufacturing. This would not only enhance the trade balance but also create employment opportunities, promote economic diversification, and reduce dependency on external trade partners.

4.11 Key Insights and Implications

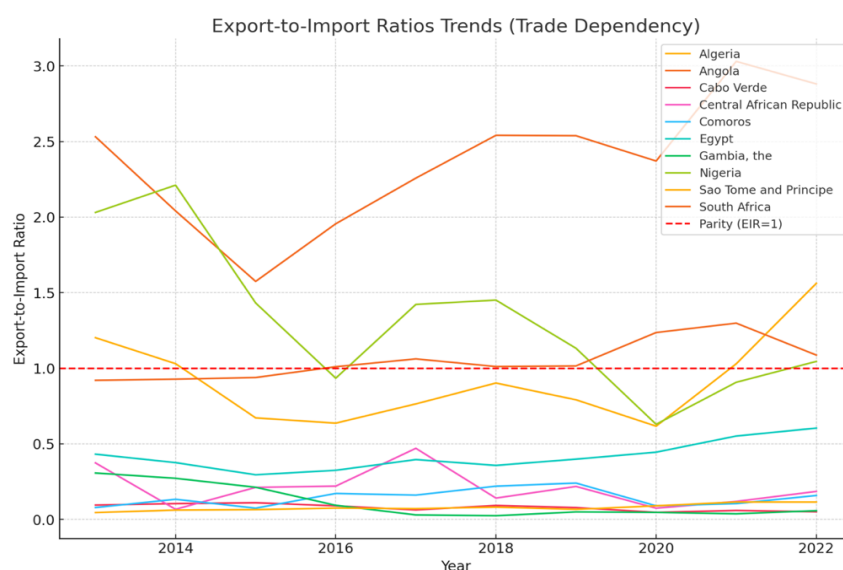
The pre-AfCFTA growth from 2013 to 2018 highlights the success of RECs in driving regional trade. However, the 2020 contraction underscores the need for stronger mechanisms to protect intra-Africa trade from external disruptions. The post-2021 recovery demonstrates the agreement's potential to stimulate trade growth. However, the data underscores that the immediate effects of AfCFTA are limited, and its success depends on addressing structural barriers and ensuring seamless implementation. The forecasts for 2023 and 2024 reflect cautious optimism for sustained trade growth under AfCFTA. These projections call for deliberate efforts by policymakers to enhance trade-enabling infrastructure, reduce non-tariff barriers, and create an environment conducive to industrialization. The role of trade unions in advocating for fair trade practices and ensuring that workers benefit from expanded trade is critical to achieving inclusive growth.

4.12 Export-to-Import Ratio (EIR) of Total Trade in Goods

The Export-to-Import Ratio (EIR) is a critical metric for analysing a country's trade dynamics and economic structure. It provides a clear snapshot of the balance between exports and imports, offering insights into a nation's trade dependency, economic resilience, and industrial capacity. In expressing the value of exports relative to imports, the EIR highlights whether a country is generating sufficient revenue from its external trade to support its import needs. This makes it an essential tool for understanding trade balance trends,

evaluating economic sustainability, and identifying vulnerabilities. The EIR was used in this analysis to assess the trade dependency of selected African countries and to draw insights into their economic structures. A high EIR (greater than 1) indicates export reliance and often correlates with resource-based economies like Angola and Algeria, where a significant portion of GDP comes from exporting commodities. A low EIR (less than 1) reflects import dependency, which can signify challenges in domestic production and industrial competitiveness, as seen in countries like Cabo Verde and Comoros. The EIR analysis is presented in figure 25. By examining the EIR, policymakers, trade unions, and stakeholders gain valuable information about the economic implications of trade dynamics. It highlights areas requiring diversification, supports strategic decision-making for industrial development, and reveals potential risks for workers, such as employment volatility or wage stagnation in export-driven sectors. Its use in this analysis underscores the importance of aligning trade policies with economic growth and labour priorities to ensure sustainable development.

Figure 25: Export-to-Import Ratios Trends (Trade Dependency)



Source: Author's Calculations based on UNECA, 2024 Data

The Export-to-Import Ratio (EIR) offers valuable insights into the economic dynamics of African nations, but its implications extend beyond macroeconomic metrics to directly affect workers and their livelihoods a central concern for trade unions. By understanding these effects, trade unions can better advocate for policies that protect workers' interests in both export-driven and import-reliant economies.

In countries like Angola, Algeria, and Nigeria, which have high EIRs, economies are heavily export-dependent, particularly on commodities like oil and gas. While these sectors contribute significantly to GDP and foreign exchange earnings, their benefits to workers are often unevenly distributed.

For instance, the extractive industries employ a relatively small fraction of the workforce compared to their contribution to exports. According to ILO data, resource-rich countries in Africa frequently face challenges such as jobless growth, where GDP rises without corresponding increases in employment. This creates a disconnect between national economic performance and workers' welfare, which trade unions need to address.

The heavy reliance on commodities also exposes workers to the volatility of global markets. During periods of low commodity prices, export revenues decline, leading to layoffs, wage cuts, and reduced social spending by governments. Nigeria's oil sector downturns in 2016 and 2020, for example, resulted in widespread job losses and increased unemployment rates. Trade unions in these contexts must push for economic diversification and stronger social safety nets to protect workers during economic downturns.

Conversely, countries like Cabo Verde, Comoros, and the Central African Republic, with low EIRs, rely heavily on imports, which can have a significant impact on domestic industries and workers. High import dependency often stifles local production and manufacturing, reducing employment opportunities in these sectors. Furthermore, trade deficits may force governments to adopt austerity measures to manage debt, cutting public sector jobs and reducing investment in essential services like education and healthcare. For workers, this translates into fewer opportunities and deteriorating working conditions, further highlighting the need for trade unions to advocate for policies that strengthen domestic production.

A balanced trade scenario offers the most sustainable benefits for workers. Countries like South Africa, which maintain a relatively diverse export portfolio, provide a model for achieving this balance. South Africa's export of value-added goods like automobiles and agricultural products creates jobs across multiple sectors, from manufacturing to logistics. According to the South African Department of Trade, the automotive industry alone employs over 100,000 workers directly and supports millions indirectly. Trade unions in such economies can advocate for continued investment in value-added industries, ensuring that trade policies prioritize job creation and decent work conditions.

The broader implications of EIR trends also intersect with issues like living wages and labour rights, core concerns for trade unions. In export-driven economies, the pressure to remain competitive in global markets often leads to the suppression of wages and weakened labour protections. Trade unions must ensure that economic growth translates into fair wages and improved working conditions. In import-dependent economies, unions need to advocate for policies that prioritize local employment and protect industries from being overwhelmed by cheap imports.

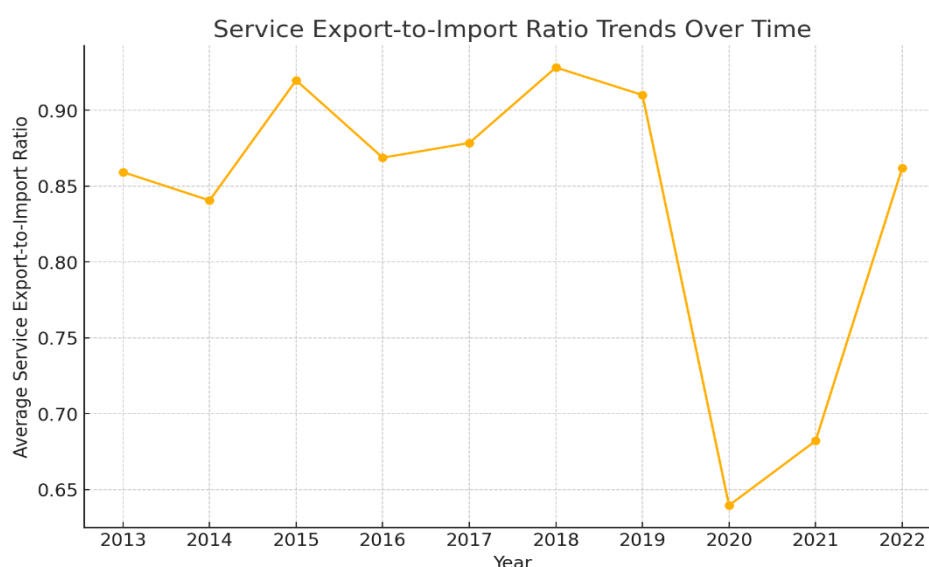
Global comparisons further underscore the importance of these strategies. For instance, economies in Southeast Asia, like Vietnam and Indonesia, have successfully used export-driven growth to create millions of manufacturing jobs while maintaining a focus on value addition and worker protections. African trade unions can draw lessons from these experiences, emphasizing the role of inclusive industrial policies that align with international labour standards.

The EIR trends in African countries have profound implications for workers, influencing job availability, wages, and social protections. Trade unions have a critical role in ensuring that trade policies and economic strategies prioritize workers' interests. By advocating for diversification, investment in value-added industries, and robust labour protections, unions can help transform trade-driven growth into a force for inclusive development. This alignment of trade and labor priorities is essential for advancing social justice and achieving equitable economic outcomes across Africa.

4.13 Export-to-Import Ratio (EIR) of Total Trade in Services

The analysis focused exclusively on trade in services, using data on service exports and imports to evaluate trade dynamics across selected African countries. The study aimed to understand the trends and determinants of service trade balances, using the Service Export-to-Import Ratio (EIR) in figure 26 as a key indicator.

Figure 26: Service Export-to-Import Ratio Trends Over Time



Source: Author's Calculations based on UNECA, 2024 Data

The visualization of the Service EIR over time reveals a steady yet varied pattern among African countries. On average, the Service EIR remained

close to parity (1.0), indicating a general balance between service exports and imports. However, significant disparities exist across countries and years, highlighting the diverse economic structures and trade dependencies of the region. Countries with an EIR above 1 consistently exhibited trade surpluses in services, driven by robust performance in sectors like tourism, information technology, and financial services. Conversely, countries with an EIR below 1 faced service trade deficits, often due to high dependence on imported services such as technical expertise and consulting.

The regression model confirmed a perfect linear relationship between service trade components and the service trade balance:

- The coefficient for service exports is 1.000, indicating that every additional unit of service export increases the trade balance by the same amount.
- Conversely, the coefficient for service imports is -1.000, showing that every additional unit of service import reduces the trade balance equivalently.
- A small constant term in the model reflects residual factors influencing trade balances but is not economically significant.

These results align with economic principles, where the service trade balance is the net difference between service exports and imports.

Service exports in Africa have become an increasingly important contributor to economic resilience, particularly in countries that have diversified their trade portfolios. For example, nations with thriving tourism industries or established financial hubs benefit from consistent service export revenues, which stabilize trade balances and reduce reliance on volatile commodity exports. On the other hand, countries with lower service EIR values face challenges in developing competitive service sectors. High dependency on imported services can strain foreign exchange reserves and widen trade deficits.

The analysis also highlights the growing potential of the services sector in addressing Africa's economic vulnerabilities. Service exports are less exposed to global commodity price fluctuations compared to goods, offering a pathway for sustained economic growth and job creation. However, the uneven performance across countries suggests a need for targeted policies to strengthen service exports, such as investments in education, infrastructure, and technology. Trade unions and policymakers should note the significant role of service trade in shaping economic opportunities for workers. The growth of service exports can lead to job creation in high-skill industries such as IT, finance, and tourism. However, disparities in service trade performance across countries necessitate measures to enhance competitiveness,

reduce dependency on imports, and ensure equitable benefits for workers. Investments in service industries must also prioritize labour rights and fair wages. Trade unions can play a pivotal role in advocating for these protections while supporting policies that promote the growth of the service sector. Additionally, addressing trade deficits in services requires strategies to build domestic capacity, such as training programs to develop local expertise and reducing reliance on foreign consultancy and technical services. The econometric analysis of service trade data reveals a clear relationship between service exports, imports, and trade balances. While the services sector offers immense potential for economic growth and stability in Africa, disparities in performance underscore the need for targeted interventions. Policymakers and trade unions must collaborate to harness the opportunities presented by the services sector, ensuring that economic gains translate into tangible benefits for workers and communities. This approach will not only improve trade balances but also foster inclusive and sustainable development.

5. AfCFTA's Impact on Economic Indicators

5.1 GDP Growth

The world GDP expanded (see: figure 27) by just 3.4 percent, down from 6.3 percent in 2021, as a result of the severe tightening of global financial conditions in reaction to steep price increases post COVID-19. Additionally, global trade growth slowed, increasing by 2.7 percent from 9.4 percent the previous year. Even while intra-African trade increased by over 18.6% to make up 15% of all African trade in 2022, it was still quite small when compared to other regions of the world.

Figure 27: Comparison of Global and Intra-African Trade Growth Rates, 2022



The demand and supply shocks associated with the crisis highlighted how urgently global supply systems must be decentralized, to withstand growth. However, rising geopolitical tensions after the Ukraine crisis gave a further boost to the push for decentralisation of global supply chains, which began with the trade war in response to persistent macroeconomic imbalances and was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, the continuous struggle for global leadership and the use of “nearshoring” or “friend-shoring” limiting supply chain networks to allies and friendly nations is likely to give rise to a new world order. This poses a threat to global growth because it requires dismantling global supply chains, but it also presents an opportunity for Africa- which, by incorporating them only as suppliers of natural resources and raw commodities, has been largely excluded from the global value chains. To strengthen firm-to-firm ties and accelerate the production of manufactured goods to boost both intra- and extra-African trade, the decentralisation of global value chains (GVCs), which has been further accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and rising geopolitical tensions, could accelerate the development of regional value chains (RVCs) within the continent and support the implementation of the AfCFTA (African Export-Import Bank, 2018).

The ability to boost and change the makeup of foreign direct investment to hasten the industrialisation and structural transformation of African

economies have made the AfCFTA, which went into effect in January 2021, a game-changer. The productivity and competitiveness benefits linked to the AfCFTA, however, offer the chance to use green minerals to spark commodity-based industrialisation in Africa in the age of climate change, especially when paired with the geopolitical push for the decentralisation of global supply chains (African-Export-Import Bank, 2023). Additionally, they can accelerate the industrialisation and development of RVCs, allowing African nations to successfully integrate into GVCs through backward activities while simultaneously lowering the shipping industry's global carbon footprint. Afreximbank sought to actively support the implementation of the AfCFTA at a time when an increasing number of studies and research have suggested that export manufacturing-led growth is coming to an end. The AfCFTA's shifting geopolitical environment and structural transformation prospects offer a great opportunity to catalyse the development of RVCs to accelerate the diversification of sources of growth for export manufacturing in Africa. The study reiterates that a small percentage of manufactured exports from Africa are concentrated in a small number of nations, driven by a small number of industries, and have a small export market. According to the report's use of GVC participation metrics, Africa's level of regional integration is +15.5 (African Export-Import Bank, 2018).

A recent World Bank analysis published in partnership with the AfCFTA Secretariat takes into consideration the extra advantages that would result from a rise in FDI, both domestically and internationally, which the agreement is anticipated to bring about. Because it provides the new money, technology, and skills that are sorely needed to improve living standards and lessen Africa's reliance on unstable commodity exports, foreign direct investment (FDI) is significant. According to this scenario, there would be 45 million fewer people living in extreme poverty and real income would increase even more, reaching almost 8% in 2035 (World Bank, 2022).

The World bank report projects that the AfCFTA would expand trade, attract investment, create better jobs, lower poverty, and promote shared prosperity in Africa by promoting deeper and wider economic integration.

- According to the AfCFTA, foreign direct investment (FDI) in Africa might rise by 111% to 159%.
- FDI inflows brought about by the AfCFTA would increase local capacity, create jobs and knowledge, and create links that would enable African businesses to become part of regional and global value chains.
- Women stand to gain the most from the AfCFTA, which can lead to better-paying, higher-quality jobs.
- Wages for men and women would increase by 9.8% and 11.2%, respectively by 2035, while there would be regional differences based on which industries in a given nation grow the fastest.

- African states should ensure the agreement covers intellectual property rights, e-commerce, investment and competition policy, that discussions are concluded as scheduled in order to maximise the benefits of the AfCFTA.
- The goal of African countries should be to expand public support for the AfCFTA and assist companies in taking advantage of its provisions.
- Impacts on distribution should be closely watched, and policies that offer social safety nets and programs for job change and worker retraining should be developed.
- Real income might increase by 9% and 50 million people could be lifted out of extreme poverty by 2035 if the objectives of the AfCFTA are completely achieved.
- By 2035, full integration would increase Africa's exports to the rest of the world by 32% and its intra-African exports, which would be dominated by manufactured goods, by 109%.

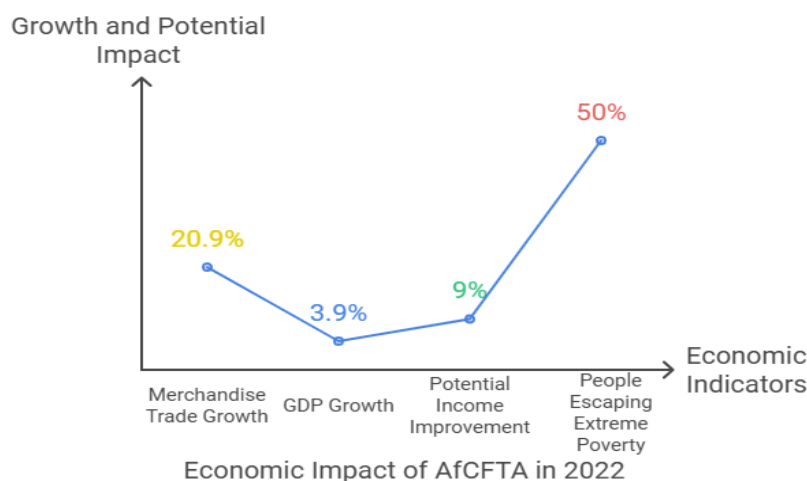
In a recent study, Tchamyou and colleagues (2023) also assess how financial growth patterns may moderate the impact of African trade integration on women's labour force participation rates. The empirical data focuses on 47 African countries between 1995 and 2019. The findings show that financial development moderates African trade integration, which has a positive overall effect on female labour force participation. Furthermore, to fully mitigate an early negative impact of intra-African trade integration on female labour force participation, financial depth, as measured by liquid liabilities, needs to reach a level of roughly 14.304 (percentage of GDP). Therefore, only after the predetermined level of financial depth is reached does financial growth become a necessary and sufficient condition to limit intra-African trade integration to favourably effect female labour force participation (Tchamyou, Some, & Asongu, 2023).

The 2023 African Trade Report (African-Export-Import Bank, 2023) was titled "Regional Value Chains and Export Manufacturing in Africa Under a New World Order." The report shows that the majority of manufactured exports from Africa are concentrated in a small number of nations, driven by a small number of sectors, and have a small export market. Regarding this, the paper indicates that, excluding high-income nations, the level of regional integration in Africa is about six times lower than in developing Asia based on GVC participation measures. Once more, the fact that China has experienced a drop in its market share since 2016 due to the peaking of several labour-intensive items creates export opportunities for a new generation of exporters.

The 2023 edition of the African Export-Import Bank's African Trade Report (2023ATR) looks at trade and economic developments in Africa and other parts of the world in 2022. The report shows in figure 28, where 20.9%

increase in merchandise trade growth, 3.9% GDP growth, 9% potential income improvement and 50% growth in people escaping extreme poverty.

Figure 28: Economic Impact of AfCFTA in 2022

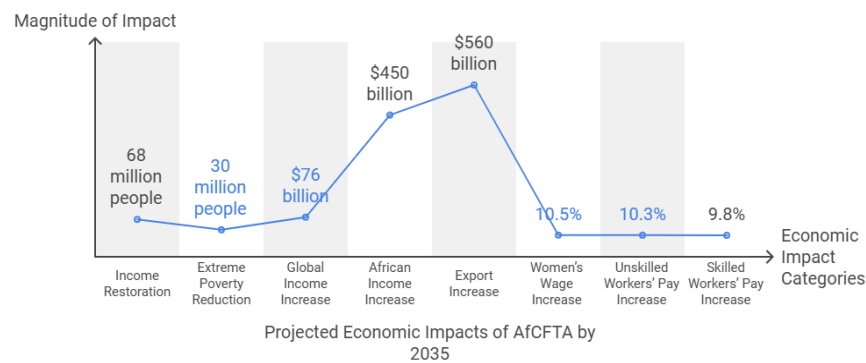


During this time, the world economy saw a sharp synchronised global deceleration due to several overlapping global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic’s aftereffects, especially in China, where the country’s “Zero COVID” policy caused a sharp drop in output; the escalating geopolitical tensions stoked by the Ukraine crisis; the risk of fragmentation exacerbated by geopolitical tensions; and the ongoing trade wars, among other things. Only 3.4 percent of the world’s GDP grew, compared to 6.3 percent in 2021. Additionally, the ongoing Ukraine crisis has made global supply chains more disrupted, and record high inflation and tightening global financial conditions have made debt crises more likely, particularly in low-income and developing market economies with few refinancing options. These effects of globalisation, where manufactured goods dominate trade, are made worse. During the pandemic downturn, the limitations of the just-in-time supply chain model and global value chain globalisation, which had fuelled global growth and trade before COVID-19 and accounted for over 50% of trade at the height of globalisation, became apparent because countries were unable to afford essential goods and products at a time when they were most needed (African-Export-Import Bank, 2023).

Africa’s GDP might rise by almost 10% as a result of the AfCFTA, and by 2043, there could be approximately 32 million fewer people living in extreme poverty. The industrial and services industries in Africa would gain a great deal from the successful implementation of the AfCFTA. An additional \$397.6 billion in gains are anticipated in the services sector, which is 10.7% more than the Current Path. In comparison to the Current Path, the

manufacturing sector is expected to increase by \$110.3 billion, or 8.1% more, while the materials sector may grow by \$66.5 billion, or 24.2% more, by 2043 (Chipanda & Cilliers, 2024). Africa continues to be the world's poorest continent, failing to capitalise on globalization. Africa only contributes 2.9% of its GDP, despite making up 18.2% of the world's population. Its transaction is performing poorly in terms of both volume and content even though its trade has increased in recent years. Its share of global exports has remained low, stagnant, and heavily skewed towards primary goods despite signing numerous trade agreements, such as the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) with the United States, Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), and various trade-investment agreements with China. Its exports made up just 2.2% of global exports in 2023 (Chipanda & Cilliers, 2024). The World Bank estimates the benefits of the AfCFTA in figure 29.

Figure 29: Projected Economic Impacts of AfCFTA by 2035



5.2 Industrial Development [automation, new industries that emerged from introduction]

Ogbuabor (2023) looked into how Africa's productive potential was impacted by trade openness, industrialisation, and labour force participation, for 49 African economies from 2000 to 2018. They also looked at how industrialisation affects the relationship between labour force participation, trade openness, and productive capacity. The work establishes that Africa's economic potential is being greatly increased by industrialisation, trade openness, and labour force participation. Interestingly, the beneficial benefits of labour force participation and trade openness on Africa's productive potential are considerably mitigated by industrialisation. The findings also show that while infrastructure development and natural resource endowment primarily have negative effects on productive capacity, human capital development, foreign direct investment inflow, and institutional quality are important drivers (Ogbuabor, Emeka, & Iheonu, 2023). One of the main concerns of economic theory has long been uneven industrial progress. Economists have discussed

and contested the idea of the “developmental state” to define the basic elements of a state that can support industrial development. In recent discussions on what works and what doesn’t for fostering equitable and sustainable progress across nations, the developmental state has become a key concept (Sampath, 2014). Sampath (2014) demonstrates that encouraging technology-led growth is not as simple as it once was since technological advancement is deeply ingrained in trade ties. As a result, industrial policy must address the crucial trade-technology connections. The study then uses statistical data from 1970 to 2012 to illustrate a number of these connections and how they hinder African nations’ attempts to advance structural reform.

Africa’s involvement in the international governance of digital technologies is essential to preventing it from playing a supporting role in the global knowledge system and guaranteeing transformational rather than transactional interactions with the 4IR. To critically evaluate Africa concerning the 4IR, this paper contends that analysing digital diplomacy as diplomacy for digital technology, that is, negotiating the governance of digital technologies offers a helpful perspective (Masters, 2021). Empirical studies show that less than 13% of Africa’s primary commodities were exported inside the continent between 2006 and 2016, whereas manufactured items accounted for more than 20% of exports. In terms of information and communications technology (ICT) development, Africa continues to perform the worst, notwithstanding recent improvements in digitalisation. As per the International Telecommunication Union’s 2017 ICT Development Index, only six African nations were in the top 100 globally in terms of ICT development. Africa’s best-performing nation, Mauritius, came in at number seventy-second globally. Technological, skill, and infrastructure gaps, encourage investment in vital areas, and will enable African nations to take full advantage of the industrialisation opportunities presented by the digital economy (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2018).

Although the digital economy is becoming a crucial component of economic diversification, regional trade blocs are not supportive of establishing legislative frameworks that would enable cross-border e-commerce among its member nations (Thiébaud, 2024). This paper suggests a centralised shipping approach for an integrated cross-border e-commerce system, providing significant insights and suggestions for policymakers. In particular, this suggests upgrading infrastructure, funding methods, and harmonising customs procedures. This commentary looks at industrialisation as one of the main topics of the AfCFTA and how it could support economic development in Africa. It then briefly describes and analyses Canada’s interests in Africa before offering actionable suggestions on how Africa’s daring move with the AfCFTA in place gives Canada a chance to re(de)fine the nation’s trade, development, and diplomatic ties with Africa (Oloruntoba & Tsowou, 2019). This revolutionary development gives Canada a starting point to implement

its inclusive trade agenda (ITA) throughout the continent. AfCFTA has made way for great prospects for the emergence of new sectors throughout the continent. In short, the AfCFTA is expected to significantly expand Africa's automotive sector, improve healthcare access through harmonised regulatory frameworks, boost logistics and transportation, boost manufacturing output from \$500 billion to \$1.7 trillion by 2030, encourage agro-processing, and encourage the development of green technology, thereby enabling African nations to transition to sustainable energy sources. The development of Africa's mineral resources is anticipated to be accelerated by the AfCFTA, opening up new avenues for economic expansion. Along with boosting economic growth, these new sectors will raise living standards, generate new job possibilities, and make Africa more competitive internationally. Indeed, the continent has entered a new phase of economic transformation as a result of the AfCFTA.

The AfCFTA Secretariat's Digitalisation and Trade Facilitation journey includes the AfCFTA e-Tariff Book. The purpose of this web-based electronic Tariff Book can be consulted via the AfCFTA website, for easier access to information about duty rates applied by AfCFTA State Parties under their Schedules of Tariff Concessions to be published. Furthermore, A centralised financial market infrastructure called the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) makes it possible for money to move across African borders safely and effectively. To supplement trading under the AfCFTA, the African Union and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) developed a scheme that allows users to make near-instant payments (within 120 seconds) in their local currency without the need to convert to a foreign currency or use a third-party institution or bank. Five switches, 28 commercial banks, and seven central banks make up the PAPSS network as of October 2022. By the end of 2023, it would spread to all five African regions. All commercial banks could join by the end of 2025, and all central banks must do so by the end of 2024.

5.3 Labour Market Outcomes

The promise of economic integration offered by the AfCFTA is expected to create a significant number of job possibilities, directly tackling one of Africa's most difficult problems: high unemployment rates, especially among young people, where numbers in some countries exceed 30% (ITUC-Africa, 2021). The AfCFTA has the potential to revolutionise Africa's economic development by providing significantly bigger benefits than previously thought in terms of jobs, growth, and poverty reduction if its ambitious objectives are completely achieved. The AfCFTA and its potential to unleash the growth of women in Africa were examined by Sabela and colleagues (2023). Sabela and associates noted that to improve the results for female cross-border traders, the agreement needs to be gender-responsive. They conclude that

gender insensitivity validates the necessity of attending to the particular requirements of African women, particularly those engaged in non-unofficial cross-border trading. Therefore, to improve access to markets, knowledge, and growth possibilities, the policy priority for the AfCFTA should be on ensuring that women who engage in informal trade are formalised (Sabela, Masuku, & Mlambo, *Unleashing the development potential of Africa's women through African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA)*., 2023).

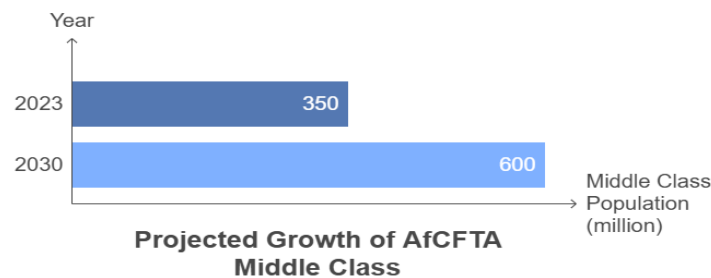
Majune and colleagues (2023) analysed the present export survival rates across the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), and the overall economic integration agreement (EIA) provide Majune and colleagues with insights to add to this conversation. The average length of trading is longer under an agreement than when there isn't one, according to data from Kenya's monthly firm-product-destination customs transactions from January 2006 to December 2017. However, the impact varies according to the scope and depth of the agreement. The COMESA has a favourable influence while the EAC has a negative one. Additionally, we discover that the "timing" effect varies based on the type of agreement. All things considered, even if the AfCFTA would increase market access, low failure rates for exporters might not be guaranteed (Majune, Turkcan, & Moyi, 2023).

The Initiative for African Trade and Prosperity (IATP, 2024) indicates that the efficiency of the free trade area (FTA) may be diminished by several issues, even despite the expected advantages of the AfCFTA. These threats include the existence of rogue nations that refuse to follow the agreement that established the AfCFTA, the high prevalence of non-tariff barriers, disputes over rules of origin (ROOs), inadequate technology penetration, infrastructure deficits, burdensome regulatory environments, and low levels of economic freedom (indicating a lack of economic opportunity) (Initiative for African Trade and Prosperity (IATP), 2024).

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, shifting consumer and worker expectations, and the pressing need for an energy and green transition are also reshaping the workforce's sectoral makeup and increasing demand for new skills and jobs. The challenges of growing inflation, rising commodity costs, economic instability, and geopolitical unpredictability must also be promptly addressed by global supply networks (World Economic Forum, 2023b). The Future of Jobs Report 2023 provides insights into these changes and explores how businesses anticipate navigating these labor-market shifts from 2023 to 2027. According to the research, 86% of businesses are likely to use platforms and applications, and 75% of businesses are likely to adopt e-commerce and digital trade. This indicates the impact of the digitalisation of commerce and trade. With 81% of businesses hoping to implement this technology by 2027, education and workforce technologies rank second (World Economic Forum,

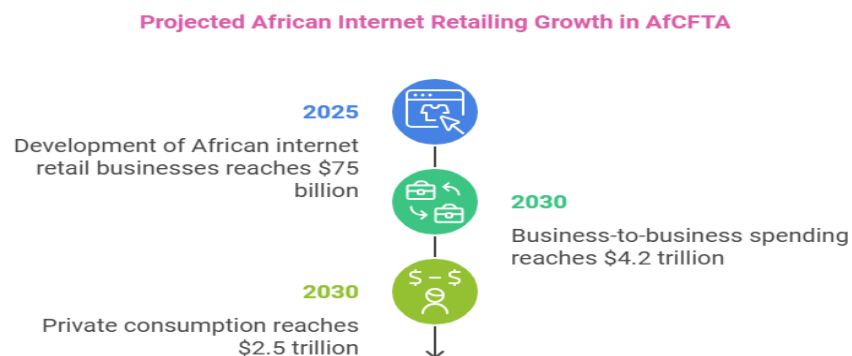
2023b). Below is the statistics on the predicted AfCFTA market in millions by 2030.

Figure 30: Projected Growth of AfCFTA Middle Class



An appraisal by the Ghana International Trade and Finance Conference (GITFiC), a year after AfCFTA observed a steady growth in E-commerce. The African internet market prediction by McKinsey & Company in 2025 is presented figure 31.

Figure 31: Projected African Internet Retailing Growth in AfCFTA



Again, the ultimate benefactors of the AfCFTA trading system are without a doubt the continent’s more than 1.3 billion inhabitants. Therefore, the population must comprehend the essential principles underlying the new African trading system (GITFiC, 2022).

5.4 Employment Rates and Job Creation

In Africa, the informal economy is reflected in the informal cross-border trade (ICBT). The ICBT pattern predates both colonial and post-colonial state borders, originating in African communities, a substantial portion of intra-African commerce involves it (Hirsch, 2021). The informal economy is still widespread and accounts for a significant portion of all jobs in Africa, notwithstanding its decline. Eighty-three percent (83%) of Africans work in the informal sector, which is the primary source of employment, production, trade, and revenue generation (International Labour Organisation, 2023).

Based on the number of member nations, the AfCFTA agreement will establish the largest free trade area globally. With a combined GDP of US\$3.4 trillion, the treaty links 1.3 billion people in 55 nations. The implementation of substantial legislative reforms and trade facilitation measures is necessary to realise its full potential, which could elevate 30 million people out of extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020).

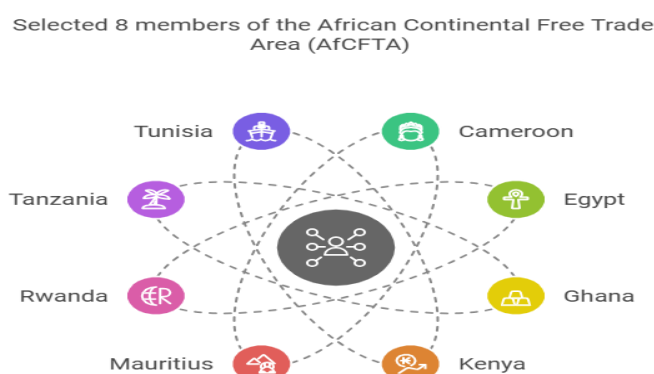
The AfCFTA has the potential to create better-paying, higher-quality jobs, with the largest wage increases going to women. Though there would be regional differences based on the industries that grow the most in particular nations, wages would increase by 9.8% for males and 11.2 percent for women by 2035 (World Bank, 2022). For instance, the majority of sub-Saharan African economies rely heavily on the informal sector, which accounts for between 30 and 90 percent of all non-agricultural employment and 25 to 65 percent of GDP. The majority of sub-Saharan African countries are expected to have sizable informal sectors for many years to come, which presents both opportunities and challenges for policymakers, even though global history shows that the informal economy's share decreases as development levels rise. According to ILO surveys, in certain sub-Saharan African nations, between 30 and 90 percent of non-agricultural employment takes place in the informal sector. In sub-Saharan Africa, the informal industry is a significant employer, according to household surveys. In low-income and resource-rich sub-Saharan African nations, family businesses account for between 55 and 75 percent of non-agricultural employment. The consumption levels of households with salaried workers are significantly higher than those of agricultural workers, with an average of 60% of agricultural workers having consumption levels below the 25th percentile of salaried workers. Although the spending level is still below that of salaried jobs at the 50th and 75th percentiles, the situation is significantly better for home businesses. Except in Rwanda and Uganda, where consumption is comparable to that of salaried workers, this is also true at the 25th percentile. African nations have a significant chance to improve the lives of 68 million people who make less than \$5.50 a day and lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Of the \$450 billion in potential economic benefits, \$292 billion would come from trade facilitation measures that streamline customs operations and reduce red tape as a result of the AfCFTA. AfCFTA implementation would aid in bringing about the kinds of significant changes required to improve African nations' long-term growth (World Bank, 2020).

The work of Adeboje, Folawewo, and Adedokun (2022) demonstrated that while trade integration has not resulted in a rise in employment in West Africa, higher trade volumes between nations would encourage the creation of more jobs. The study has three policy implications. First, there aren't many advantages to trade between West African nations in terms of boosting

economic expansion and job creation. Second, West Africa is better positioned to gain from increased growth and job creation through trade integration with other SSA nations and regions. Third, West Africa must prioritise the implementation of the AfCFTA since increased commerce within the continent has the potential to accelerate growth and create more jobs.

Harmonising e-commerce, investment, and intellectual property rules are one of the agreement’s most ambitious objectives, and it must be achieved to reap its potential benefits. Successful implementation of the AfCFTA’s will lead to sustainable development, more good jobs, and a higher standard of living for all citizens. The AfCFTA aims to guarantee the inclusion of women and young people, particularly those in rural areas, the growth of SMEs, and the general industrialisation of the continent. Eight nations participating in the AfCFTA’s Guided Trade Initiative (GTI) as of February 2022 8 nations representing the five regions of the continent (see: figure 32).

Figure 32: Trade Patterns of Selected Members of AfCFTA



The GTI aims to promote trade between interested AfCFTA state parties who have fulfilled the Agreement’s minimum trade requirements. Tourism, transport, business services, financial services, communication services, and tourism and travel-related services are the five key areas in which the AfCFTA Guided Trade will concentrate on trade in services in 2023 (United Nations, 2023).

Although about half of Africa’s workforce is employed in agriculture, which accounts for 35% of the continent’s GDP, billions of dollars’ worth of agricultural products are still imported annually. Africa will need to import less under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) accord, and its local processing capability will be greatly increased (World Economic Forum, 2023a). The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can provide employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people, according to a report from the International Trade Centre. The report highlights the potential for Africa to become a hub for manufacturing, agriculture, and

services, with one-third of the world's youth expected to reside in the region by 2050. However, young Africans face issues such as unemployment, financial access, business scale barriers, and migration tensions.

International Trade Centre (ITC) Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton stated, "ITC is dedicated to assisting youth in utilising the market opportunities provided by the AfCFTA." However, according to Kgosietsile II Matthews Mmopi of the Youth Alliance for Leadership and Development in Africa, young Africans deal with "far-reaching problems including unemployment, lack of access to finance and financial aid, barriers to scale for small businesses, and tensions arising from intraregional and international migration." [(International Trade Centre, 2021). Furthermore, the Brookings Institution estimates that manufacturing will gain the most from the AfCFTA, adding up to 16 million additional jobs. According to the paper, young Africans will gain since "growth in this sector will help bridge the youth employment gap." More jobs for young people and more chances for entrepreneurship are also promised by the agreement's service marketing. Additionally, young people can benefit from an AfCFTA e-commerce protocol, highlighting the significance of the digital economy (International Trade Centre, 2021).

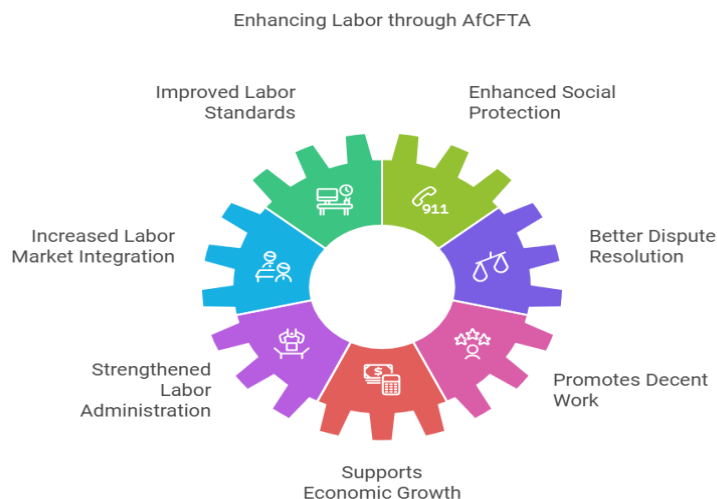
An AfCFTA e-commerce protocol is also available to youth, highlighting the significance of the digital economy. According to the report, to ensure that the agreement fulfills its full potential and specifically benefits young Africans, international organisations and policymakers must work to increase awareness of youth issues, boost the digital economy, and make it easier for young entrepreneurs to obtain financing (International Trade Centre, 2021). Additionally, they must increase investments in education and skill development, strengthen youth networks and business support organisations, and raise awareness among young people of the potential presented by the pact.

5.5 Quality of Employment form Improved Social protection, Social dialogue, Fair Wages, and Negotiations

Many nations in Africa rely heavily on the informal economy, which is essential to their economic development. For instance, the elements that contribute to informality in Nigeria and South Africa (SA) were examined by Etim and Daramola (2020). They also examined governmental initiatives aimed at informal sector providers, the leading subsectors, and the obstacles impeding the informal sector's growth dynamics. The information gathered from thirty-one (31) primary studies (17 for South Africa and 14 for Nigeria) showed that the informal sector in both countries is driven by several factors, including unemployment, income inequality, high tax burdens, excessive government bureaucratic obstacles, inflationary tendencies, poor corruption

control, GDP per capita, and a lack of social protection survival tendencies. The need Social Protection for Labour initiatives within AfCFTA is evident to safeguard workers’ rights, advance decent employment, and provide social welfare for workers throughout the African continent. Key proposals are presented in the figure 33.

Figure 33: Purpose of Labour Initiative of the AfCFTA



5.6 Trade Unions and Marginalized Groups

Trade union participation remains indispensable for ensuring that AfCFTA negotiations and national-level discussions incorporate the perspectives of Africa’s diverse workforce. By actively engaging in these processes, unions can advocate for fair wages, safe working conditions, and inclusive social protections – elements essential for AfCFTA to fulfil its objectives. The table below outlines key trade union organisations and allied structures in selected African countries, demonstrating the depth of existing networks. Notably, many include women’s committees, youth wings, and organisations for persons with disabilities (PWDs), whose voices are often overlooked in trade policy debates.

Crucially, state actors can invite these institutions to town-hall meetings, broad stakeholder forums, and other public consultations to ensure that marginalised groups gain a seat at the table. In doing so, policymakers benefit from on-the-ground insights, while unions and community-based organisations build deeper capacity to negotiate and shape policy outcomes. Moreover, several of these countries have benefited from the advocacy support of ITUC-Africa, the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and SASK (Finnish Trade Union Solidarity Centre), enabling local actors to develop advanced competencies in trade-related engagement. This capacity-building is evident in how trade unions in Ghana, Nigeria, and elsewhere increasingly contribute

substantive ideas on labour clauses, social protection, and inclusive economic policies.

When trade unions collaborate closely with government representatives and regional bodies, they help align AfCFTA's economic ambitions with the broader goals of decent work and equitable development. By integrating labour concerns—especially for women, youth, and PWDs—trade union advocacy ensures AfCFTA's policies are both robust and socially inclusive. Such a participatory model not only enriches the accord's outcomes for African workers but also fosters resilient economies that value all segments of society.

Table 6: Key Trade Union Organizations and Structures Relevant for Inclusion in AfCFTA Negotiations and Discussions at the National Levels – Selected Countries.

Countries	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
Ghana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC), Women’s Committee • Ghana Federation of Labour (GFL) Women’s Wing • Women’s Committee of the Public Services Workers’ Union (PSWU) • Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) Women’s Committee • Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) Women’s Committee • Health Services Workers’ Union (HSWU) Women’s Committee • Ghana Women’s Association of Businesses and Professions (GWABP) • Federation of African Women Entrepreneurs (FAWE) Ghana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Employment Agency (YEA) • National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI) • Opportunities Industrialization Centre Ghana (OICG) • Youth Leadership and Skills Training Institute • Youth in Agriculture Programme (YIAP) • National Entrepreneurship Innovation Programme (NEIP), previously Youth Enterprise Support (YES) • Rural Enterprises Programme (REP) • National Service Scheme (NSS) • Nation Builders Corps (NABCO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD) & its members below: • Ghana National Association of the Deaf • Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled • Ghana Association of Persons with Albinism • Mental Health Society of Ghana • Inclusion Ghana – a group of people with intellectual disability • Share Care Ghana – a group of people with auto-immune and neurological disorders • Burns Survivors Association – Survivors of various degrees of burns • Ghana Stammering Association – Persons with various levels of speech impediment.
ACTS/ LAWS/INITIATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TVET transformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ghana has ratified the UNCRPD to protect the rights and liberties of PWDs • PWDs Act, 2005

Nigeria	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Association of Nigerian Traders (NANTS) • Nigerian Women Entrepreneurs Association (NIWEVA) • Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ) • Nigerian Association of Women in Trade and Commerce (NAWITAC) • Federation of Nigerian Women Entrepreneurs (FENWE) • Nigerian Women Farmers Association (NWFA) • Women Entrepreneurs Association of Nigeria (WEAN) • Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (AWEN) • Nigerian Women in Business (NWIB) • International Association of Women Entrepreneurs (IAWE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) • National Youth Empowerment Fund • Graduate Entrepreneurship Fund (GEF) • Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) • Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme (YES-P) • Youth Ignite Programme • Youth Upscaling Fund • Nigerian Youth Employment Through Skills Acquisition Fund (NYESAF) 	<p>National Associations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities (JONAPWD) • Nigeria Association of the Blind (NAB) • Nigeria Association of the Deaf (NAD) • Nigeria Spinal Cord Injury Association (NASIA) <p>State-Based Associations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lagos State Association of Persons with Disabilities • Kano State Association of Persons with Disabilities • of Persons with Disabilities <p>Specialized Associations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism Awareness Foundation Nigeria • Cerebral Palsy Association of Nigeria • Down Syndrome Foundation Nigeria
<p>ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HerAfcFTA Initiative • National Gender Policy (2006) • Policy on Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) • Nigeria Decent Work Country Programme III (DWCP) 2023-2027 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act, 2018 • National Disability Act, 2018 • National Health Act, 2014 • Labour Act, 2004 • Nigerian Constitution, 1999 (as amended)

Chad	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union des Femmes du Tchad (UFT) (Women’s Union of Chad) • Confédération Syndicale des Travailleurs du Tchad (CSTT) (Trade Union Confederation of Chad) • Syndicat des Femmes Travailleuses du Tchad (SFTT) (Union of Working Women of Chad) • Association des Femmes Chefs d’Entreprises du Tchad (AFCE-TCHAD) (Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Chad) • Réseau des Femmes pour le Développement du Tchad (REFEDE-TCHAD) (Network of Women for the Development of Chad) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chad Skills Development for Youth Employment and Competitiveness Project • Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship in Productive Sectors (YES) Programme • District Entrepreneurship Programme (DEP) • Youth Network for Development and Leadership in Chad (RJDLT) • Youth for Sustainable Employment Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chadian Federation of Associations of People with Disabilities (FCHPH) • Association of Parents of Children with Disabilities (APED) • Chadian Association for the Promotion of People with Disabilities (ACHPPH) • Association for the Promotion and Integration of People with Disabilities (APIPH) • National Union of People with Disabilities (UNPH)
<p style="text-align: center;">ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitution of Chad (2018) • Right to Education (Article 38) • Right to Work (Article 13) • Promotion of Gender Equality • Protection from Discrimination (Article 14) 		<p style="text-align: center;">Constitutional Provisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article 19 of the Chadian Constitution (2018) • Article 33 of the Chadian Constitution (2018) <p style="text-align: center;">Laws</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law No. 036/PR/2013 on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2013) • Decree No. 1049/PR/MJS/2014 on the Creation of the National Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2014).

			Other Relevant Laws and Policies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Policy on Disability (2015) • The National Action Plan for the Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016-2020)
Rwanda	National Centres/ Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons with Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rwanda Women’s Network (RWN) • Association of Kigali Women in Sport (AKWOS) • Haguruka: A non-governmental organization that fights for women’s and children’s rights, providing legal support and advocacy services • Central des Syndicats des Travailleurs du Rwanda (CESTRAR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Igire (Rwanda Television Agency) • Hanga Pitchfest • Rwanda Youth Entrepreneurship Program • National Youth Service (NYS) • Rwanda Education and Development Initiative (READI) • YouthConnekt • African Management Initiative (AMI) • Rwanda Entrepreneurship Development Program (REDP) • East African Business Council (EABC) • GIZ Youth Employment Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rwanda National Association of Deaf Women • National Union of Disability Organizations in Rwanda (NUDOR) • Rwanda Federation of the Deaf (RFD) • Rwanda National Association of the Deafblind (RNAD) • Cheshire Homes Rwanda • Rwanda Disabled Peoples’ Organization (RDPO)

<p>ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda (2003): Article 9 • The Penal Code (2012): Law No. 01/2012 • The Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender-Based Violence (2009): Law No. 59/2008 • The Inheritance and Succession Law (1999): Law No. 22/1999 g • The Labor Law (2001): Law No. 47/2001 • The Law on the Rights of the Child (2001): Law No. 27/2001 • The National Gender Policy (2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Strategy on Elimination of Child Labor • Strategic Plan for the Integrated Child Rights Policy (2019-2024) • Anti-Human Trafficking Action Plan • Labor Law: Article 5 of the Labor Law sets the minimum age for work at 16 years • Ministerial Instruction Relating to Prevention and Fight Against Child Labor • Law Relating to the Rights and Protection of the Child: Article 47 • Law Determining the Organization of Education • Penal Code: Articles 178, 211, 251, 259-262, and 263 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rwanda Disability Law No. 01/2007 • Law Relating to the Protection of Disabled Persons • Prohibition of Discrimination at the Workplace • Criminalization of Discrimination
<p>Tunisia</p>	<p>National Centres/Key Stakeholders</p>	<p>Youth & Women Structures</p>	<p>Persons With Disabilities Structures</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT) - Women's Commission • Fédération Tunisienne des Femmes Diplômées des Carrières Scientifiques (FTFDSC) • Association Tunisienne des Femmes Démocrates (ATFD) • Union des Femmes de Tunisie (UFT) • Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (CGTT) - Women's Bureau 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ReBootKamp • Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) • Open Regional Fund for Promoting Training and Employment for Young People in Tunisia • The ACREM-MEDMED 1 Project • Multi-Partner Trust Fund for Youth and Employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tunisian Association for the Defense of Disabled Rights (ATDR) • Tunisian Federation of Associations for People with Disabilities (FTAPH) • Association Tunisienne des Paralysés (ATP) • Association pour la Promotion des Personnes Handicapées (APPH) • Tunisian Association for the Blind (ATB) • Association Tunisienne pour l'Éducation et la Réadaptation des Enfants Handicapés (ATEREH) • Tunisian Association for the Deaf (ATD)

<p>ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2014 Tunisian Constitution: Article 21 • Code du Statut Personnel (CSP) of 1956 • Law on Eliminating Violence Against Women (2017) • Law on Equality in Inheritance (2018) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor Code of 1966 • Law No. 66-27 of 1966 • Decree No. 2009-1735 of 2009: National Authority for Employment and Independent Work, • Law No. 2011-53 of 2011: Youth employment, including tax incentives • Decree No. 2015-127 of 2015: Youth Employment Fund 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decree-law No. 83-114 of 1983: Concerning the Protection and Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. • Act No. 2004-72 of 2004: Concerning the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. • Act No. 2014-27 of 2014: Concerning the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. • Decree No. 2015-1234 of 2015: Concerning the Accessibility of Buildings and Public Spaces for Persons with Disabilities. • Act No. 2017-30 of 2017: Concerning the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Education. • Decree No. 2019-197 of 2019: Concerning the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in the Public Sector.
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South Africa	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African Women Entrepreneurs Network (SAWEN) (2004) • National Women’s Coalition (NWC) (1992) • Business Women’s Association of South Africa (BWASA) (1976) • South African Women in Construction (SAWIC) (1997) • Women in Mining South Africa (WiMSA) (2010) • The South African Women Lawyers Association (SAWLA) (2013) • Association of Black Women in Business (ABWB) (1983) • South African Women in Tourism (SAWIT) (2014) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) (2008) • Youth Employment Service (YES) (2018) • National Youth Service (NYS) (2014) • Job Fund (2011) - a R9 billion fund established to support job creation and youth employment initiatives. • Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) (2004) • Learnerships and apprenticeships (2011) - programs offered by the Department of Higher Education and Training to provide young people with work experience and skills training. • The Employment Tax Incentive (ETI) (2013) • The National Skills Fund (NSF) (1999) • The Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) (1998) • The Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) (2020) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) (1974) • Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) (1984) • South African Disability Alliance (SADA) (1997) • National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa (NCPDPSA) (1939) - provides support and resources for people with physical disabilities. • Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA) (1929) • South African Autism Association (SAAA) (1982) • Cerebral Palsy Association of South Africa (CPASA) (1947) • QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA) (1979)

<p>ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996): Section 9 of the Constitution • The Employment Equity Act (1998) • The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997) • The Labour Relations Act (1995) • The Occupational Health and Safety Act (1993) • The Unemployment Insurance Act (2001) • The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum Age Requirement • Prohibition of Hazardous Work • Regulations for Young Workers: The Sectoral Determination 13: Farm Worker Sector regulates the employment of young workers in the agricultural sector, including provisions for working hours, rest periods, and minimum wage • Protection from Exploitation: The Constitution of South Africa, 1996, and the Children’s Act, 2005, • Education and Training: The Skills Development Act, 1998, and the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Employment Equity Act (1998) • The Labour Relations Act (1995) • The Code of Good Practice on the Employment of People with Disabilities (2002) • The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007)
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Kenya	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Organization of Trade Unions (COTU-K) • Kenya Women Workers Organization • Maendeleo Ya Wanawake Organization (MYWO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Employment Service (YES) • Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) • National Pathway Management Network (NPMN) • National Youth Service (NYS) program • Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator • Tshepo 1 Million platform • Youth Forward initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) (1929) • Deaf Federation of South Africa (DeafSA) (1929) • National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) (1999) • South African Disability Alliance (SADA) (1996) • QuadPara Association of South Africa (QASA) (1975) • Cerebral Palsy Association of South Africa (CPASA) (1944) • South African Federation for Mental Health (SAFMH) (1994) • The Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) - South Africa (2000) • The South African Disability and Development Alliance (SADDA) (2002) • The African Disability Forum (ADF) (2002)
<p>ACTS/ LAWS/ INITIATIVES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) • Children’s Act (2005) • Domestic Violence Act (1998) • Employment Equity Act (1998) • Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000) • Social Assistance Act (2004) • United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007) 		

Senegal	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Confederation of Senegalese Workers (CNTS) • Democratic Union of Senegalese Workers (UDTS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge Fund for Youth Employment (CFYE) • USAID Job Training Program • Agence Nationale pour la Promotion de l'Emploi des Jeunes (ANPEJ) • MIJA Platforms: The MIJA platforms model, supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) • Réseau Africain pour la promotion de l'entrepreneuriat agricole (RAPEA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fédération Sénégalaise des Associations de Personnes Handicapées (FSAPH) (1988) - Umbrella organization for disability associations in Senegal. • Association Sénégalaise des Paralysés (ASP) (1974) - Supports people with physical disabilities. • Fédération Sénégalaise des Sourds (FSS) (1985) - Advocates for the rights of deaf and hard of hearing people. • Association Sénégalaise pour la Promotion des Personnes Handicapées (ASPPH) (1995) - Works to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. • Organisation Sénégalaise des Personnes Handicapées (OSPH) (2001) - Aims to improve the living conditions of people with disabilities. • Association pour la Promotion de l'Emploi des Personnes Handicapées (APEPH) (2005) - Focuses on promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities. • Fédération Sénégalaise des Associations de Personnes Aveugles (FSAPA) (2010) - Supports people who are blind or have low vision.

<p>ACTS/ LAWS/INI- TIATIVES</p>	<p>Laws Protecting Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Code (1972): Regulates marriage, divorce, and inheritance. • Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1999): Prohibits domestic violence and provides protection for victims. • Law on Parity and Equal Opportunities (2010): Promotes gender equality in politics and public life. 	<p>Laws Protecting Children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children’s Code (1972): Regulates child protection, adoption, and juvenile justice. • Law on the Protection of Children Against Abuse and Exploitation (1996): Prohibits child abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. • Law on Free and Compulsory Education (2004): Ensures access to education for all children. 	<p>Laws Protecting People with Disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010): Promotes accessibility, education, and employment for people with disabilities. • Law on the Accessibility of Buildings and Public Spaces (2011): Ensures accessibility for people with disabilities in public spaces. <p>Laws Protecting Refugees and Migrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law on the Status of Refugees (2001): Regulates refugee status and protection. • Law on the Entry and Stay of Foreigners (2001): Regulates migration and provides protection for migrants. <p>Laws Protecting Older Persons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Law on the Protection of Older Persons (2014): Promotes social protection, healthcare, and social services for older persons.
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Namibia	National Centres/Key Stakeholders	Youth & Women Structures	Persons With Disabilities Structures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Union of Namibian Workers (NUNW) • Trade Union Congress of Namibia (TUCNA) • Metal and Allied Namibia Workers' Union (MANWU) • Namibia Domestic and Allied Workers' Union (NDAWU) • Namibia Nurses' Union (NANU) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Namibia Youth Credit Scheme • National Youth Service Program • Expanded Public Works Program • Youth Entrepreneurship Training Program • Retail Readiness Programme (RRP) • Youth Employment Services (YES) initiative • Mondesa Community Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (NF-PDN) • Namibia Association of the Deaf (NAD) • Namibian Paralympic Committee (NPC) • Association for Children with Disabilities (ACD) • Namibia Disabled Drivers Association (NDDA) • Namibian Federation of Organisations of People with Disabilities (NASOPD) • Centre for People with Disabilities (CPD) • Namibia National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders with Disabilities (NA-CROD)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combating of Rape Act, 2000: Protects women from rape and provides for severe penalties for perpetrators. • Domestic Violence Act, 2003: Protects women from domestic violence and provides for protection orders and penalties for perpetrators. • Labour Act, 2007: Prohibits discrimination against women in the workplace and provides for equal pay for equal work. • Married Persons Equality Act, 1996: Gives married women equal rights to property and decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child Care and Protection Act, 2015: Protects children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. • Juvenile Justice Act, 2018: Provides for the care and rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law. • National Youth Service Act, 2005: Provides for the establishment of a national youth service program to promote youth development. • Labour Act, 2007: Prohibits child labor and provides for the protection of young workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persons with Disabilities Act, 2004: Promotes the rights and dignity of people with disabilities and provides for their equal access to education, employment, and healthcare. • Education Act, 2001: Provides for the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education. • Labour Act, 2007: Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the workplace and provides for reasonable accommodation. • National Disability Council Act, 2004: Establishes a national disability council to promote the rights and interests of people with disabilities.
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6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Insights

The findings of this study underscore that while the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has begun to stimulate intra-African trade, its immediate effects have been modest and uneven. The quantitative results, notably from the Interrupted Time-Series (ITS) analysis, show a slight uptick in trade following AfCFTA's enforcement in 2021. South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya have made notable gains, particularly in export diversification. However, infrastructural barriers, weaker institutional capacities in certain regions (especially Central and Northern Africa), and the persistence of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) highlight structural hurdles that continue to obstruct seamless intra-African commerce. Consequently, the benefits of AfCFTA have not been distributed evenly across the continent, revealing the need for targeted interventions – such as improved transport corridors, digital connectivity, and efficient customs procedures – to ensure that all regions can participate meaningfully in trade-driven growth.

From a labour perspective, the research reveals the crucial importance of protecting workers' rights amid the continent's shifting trade and industrial landscapes. While sectors such as manufacturing and services are poised to reap considerable gains under AfCFTA, actual improvements in wages, job security, and social protection hinge on policy coordination and robust trade union engagement. The study points to the particularly vulnerable positions of women, youth, and people with disabilities – groups often excluded from formal decision-making processes, yet vital to inclusive economic expansion. Evidence from multiple countries shows that these groups face unequal pay scales, precarious employment, and insufficient access to capital or training. Addressing these gaps will require gender-responsive policies, strategic investments in skills development, and harmonisation of social-protection laws.

The research also highlights the potential for industrial upgrading and diversification. As AfCFTA promises to reduce tariffs and consolidate rules of origin, there is scope for African economies to move beyond raw material exports toward higher-value industries such as agro-processing, automotive manufacturing, and digital services. In this regard, complementary measures – ranging from infrastructural investment to financial instruments like blended finance – are essential. Moreover, the emergence of new industrial technologies and e-commerce platforms, as documented in the literature, signals an untapped avenue for economic transformation. Nonetheless, the study's findings emphasise that these opportunities will go unrealised

without concurrent improvements in education, innovation ecosystems, and institutional capacity, which can support a continent-wide push towards higher productivity and greater competitive advantage.

Throughout this analysis, the role of trade unions emerges as pivotal. Unions are uniquely positioned to advocate fair wages, decent working conditions, and social protections – factors that not only secure workers’ livelihoods but also stabilise economies in times of external shocks. Their engagement at national and regional levels can ensure that the rising trade volumes do not come at the expense of labour standards. Indeed, the table of trade union organisations and stakeholder networks demonstrates that many African countries already possess established bodies capable of contributing substantively to AfCFTA’s policy discourse. Strengthening these networks – through training, collaboration with state actors, and inclusion in platforms such as town-hall discussions or AfCFTA implementation committees – would enhance their ability to shape trade policies that promote long-term, inclusive development.

In sum, this study confirms that AfCFTA holds considerable promise for spurring intra-African commerce and fostering socioeconomic advancement. Yet the realisation of its full potential depends on mitigating structural barriers, promoting equitable labour standards, and deliberately involving all stakeholders, especially marginalised groups, in policy formulation and implementation. Governments must invest more robustly in infrastructure and human capital, while trade unions and civil society continue their advocacy for stronger social protections and inclusive trade provisions. Through sustained collaboration among governments, unions, and private-sector actors, AfCFTA can move beyond mere policy aspirations to become a cornerstone of Africa’s industrial renaissance and a catalyst for economic justice for all.

6.2 Recommendations and Way Forward

In order to fully harness the transformative potential of the AfCFTA while safeguarding labour rights and promoting inclusive economic growth, national governments must adopt a multi-pronged policy approach that integrates trade and social policies. First, governments should prioritise substantial investments in critical infrastructure—such as transport corridors, energy systems, and digital connectivity—to reduce transaction costs and facilitate the seamless movement of goods, services, and people across borders. They must also establish robust regulatory frameworks that harmonise customs procedures and eliminate non-tariff barriers, thereby creating a conducive environment for trade diversification and industrial

upgrading. Importantly, national governments should ensure the inclusion of trade unions in the formulation and implementation of AfCFTA policies, for instance, by mandating their representation on National Implementation Committees (NICs). Heads of state are urged to demonstrate political commitment by endorsing gender-sensitive policies and social protection measures that address the unique challenges faced by women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Such leadership is critical to realigning domestic economic policies with AfCFTA's objectives and ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed across all segments of society.

The AfCFTA Secretariat and the AU's Department of Trade must take proactive steps to embed labour rights into the core of the agreement's protocols and operational instruments. This includes ensuring that investment, digital trade, and intellectual property protocols incorporate enforceable labour and social protection provisions, as well as developing transparent dispute resolution mechanisms that address non-compliance with these standards. The Secretariat should enhance stakeholder engagement through regular town-hall meetings and public consultations, inviting inputs from trade unions, civil society, and workers' organisations. Capacity-building initiatives and technical assistance programmes, ideally supported by partners such as the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and ITUC-Africa, should be expanded to improve member states' institutional capabilities. By fostering greater collaboration among AU member states and harmonising policy frameworks, the Secretariat and AU can help to bridge regional disparities and support the effective implementation of AfCFTA measures.

For trade unions across the continent, the path forward involves strengthening internal capacity and expanding their engagement in the policy-making process at both national and regional levels. Unions should invest in training programmes and knowledge-sharing initiatives that enable them to interpret complex trade protocols and effectively negotiate labour clauses. They must actively advocate for the incorporation of enforceable labour standards in trade agreements, and work to raise awareness among workers—especially those in the informal sector—of their rights and the potential benefits of AfCFTA. In addition, forming strategic alliances with civil society organisations, women's groups, and youth networks will amplify their voice and enhance their bargaining power. Trade unions should also leverage digital platforms and innovative communication channels to mobilise grassroots support and disseminate policy recommendations, ensuring that the interests of marginalized groups are well represented in all stages of AfCFTA's implementation.

Looking ahead, all stakeholders must commit to a process of continuous monitoring, evaluation, and dialogue. National governments and the AfCFTA Secretariat should establish regular review mechanisms to assess progress

on trade integration and the socio-economic impacts of the agreement. This would include periodic impact assessments, stakeholder consultations, and the adaptation of policies based on emerging data and best practices. Such a dynamic, collaborative approach will not only help to address current structural and operational challenges but also ensure that the AfCFTA evolves as a platform for sustainable development, job creation, and industrial diversification—thereby making it a cornerstone for Africa’s long-term economic renaissance and social justice.

The following recommendations outline specific actions for national governments, the AfCFTA Secretariat and AU Department of Trade, and trade unions, to ensure that the trade integration process fosters sustainable and inclusive economic development across the continent.

A. For National Governments (including heads of states and policy makers)

1. Invest in Critical Infrastructure
 - Prioritise the development of transport corridors, energy systems, and digital connectivity to lower transaction costs and enable the seamless movement of goods, services, and people.
 - Facilitate regional industrial upgrading by supporting value addition and diversification in export sectors.
2. Harmonise Trade and Customs Regulations
 - Streamline customs procedures and work towards the elimination of non-tariff barriers (NTBs) to create a predictable and efficient trade environment.
 - Adopt and implement harmonised standards (including technical, sanitary, and phytosanitary measures) that support intra-African trade.
3. Integrate Labour Rights in Trade Policies
 - Ensure that labour standards and social protection measures are embedded within trade agreements and AfCFTA protocols to safeguard workers’ rights.
 - Mandate the inclusion of trade union representatives on National Implementation Committees (NICs) for AfCFTA, ensuring that worker voices are part of decision-making processes.
4. Implement Gender-Responsive and Inclusive Policies
 - Formulate policies that address the specific challenges faced by women, youth, and persons with disabilities, with a focus on formalising informal cross-border trade.
 - Support targeted skill development and capacity-building programmes that empower these groups to participate fully in the benefits of trade.

5. Adopt Innovative Financing Mechanisms:
 - Leverage blended finance, public–private partnerships, and other innovative funding models to support the implementation of AfCFTA-related infrastructure and capacity projects.
 - Use fiscal instruments, such as tailored tax policies, to mitigate revenue losses from tariff liberalisation while ensuring sustainable economic growth.

B. For the AfCFTA Secretariat and the AU Department of Trade

1. Embed Labour and Social Protection Provisions
 - Revise and update AfCFTA protocols—particularly those on investment, digital trade, and intellectual property—to include enforceable labour standards and social protection measures.
 - Establish clear, transparent dispute resolution mechanisms that address non-compliance with labour clauses.
2. Enhance Stakeholder Engagement and Coordination
 - Organise regular town-hall meetings, public consultations, and regional forums to facilitate dialogue between government officials, trade unions, civil society, and other stakeholders.
 - Strengthen technical assistance programmes and capacity-building initiatives (in partnership with organisations like ITUC-Africa and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs) to support member states in implementing trade policies effectively.
3. Promote Policy Harmonisation and Best Practices
 - Work with national governments to develop and disseminate best practice guidelines for the implementation of trade facilitation measures and labour standards across member states.
 - Foster inter-regional collaboration to address disparities in institutional capacities and infrastructural deficits, especially in Central and Northern Africa.
4. Increase Transparency and Monitoring
 - Implement robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress on trade integration, the reduction of NTBs, and the impact on labour outcomes.
 - Regularly publish progress reports and facilitate independent reviews to ensure accountability in the implementation of AfCFTA measures.

C. For Trade Unions and Worker Organisations

1. **Build and Strengthen Internal Capacity**
 - Invest in training and knowledge-sharing initiatives to improve union capacity in interpreting and engaging with complex trade policies and AfCFTA protocols.
 - Enhance expertise on labour rights, digital trade, and industrial policy to enable effective participation in policy dialogues.
2. **Advocate for Enforceable Labour Standards**
 - Actively campaign for the inclusion of robust, enforceable labour provisions in trade agreements to protect workers from exploitation and insecure working conditions.
 - Use data and evidence from impact analyses to highlight disparities in wage growth, job quality, and social protections across different sectors.
3. **Mobilise and Represent Marginalised Groups**
 - Prioritise the representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities by forming alliances with civil society organisations, women's groups, and youth networks.
 - Advocate for the formalisation of workers in the informal sector and push for policies that create safer, more secure working environments.
4. **Engage in National and Regional Policy Platforms**
 - Ensure active participation in National Implementation Committees and other policy platforms to contribute substantively to the formulation and revision of trade policies.
 - Leverage digital platforms and social media to disseminate information, mobilise grassroots support, and build transnational solidarity among workers.
5. **Foster Collaborative Partnerships**
 - Collaborate with government representatives and regional bodies to ensure that trade policies are aligned with broader goals of sustainable development, decent work, and social justice.
 - Pursue strategic partnerships with international organisations and donor agencies to secure technical and financial support for capacity-building initiatives.

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