

Five pathways for advancing Austria's Africa engagement through the WPS Agenda

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All three authors are founding members of the **African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies**. Since 2022, they have worked together to articulate African feminist perspectives in the wake of the multiple adoptions of Feminist Foreign Policy. Bringing together expertise and many years of experiences from academia, media and the civil society space, they have also worked in various African countries, diaspora and feminist communities. The goal of the collective is to nurture a space for African feminists to collaborate and harness African feminist knowledge to respond to historic and contemporary injustices and challenges that stem from within and without so that Africans can thrive.

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CONTEXT

In 2025, Austria has announced to publish its Africa Strategy 2026-2029. Key elements of its strategy are: Stability, Resilience and Security; Economic Partnerships; Migration and Mobility; Education, Science, Culture and Environment. This position paper sets out five action areas that define a forward-facing strategy for Austria's continued engagement in Africa **centring the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda** at its core. Presently, most African countries spend more on debt service than on social services such as education or health. Structural economic entrapment continues to impact African economies with trade deficits, currency depreciation, and external debt.¹ Economic models steeped in coloniality persist and subject Africa, and most of the Global South, to economic structures that are extractive, undemocratic, and designed to serve foreign interests. At the same time, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), transitional justice policies², and the African Union (AU) Decade of Reparations are all providing potential avenues to end historic and current patterns of harm that undermine thriving and peaceful societies. These initiatives indicate a **commitment to structural transformation, accountability and a shared vision** for prosperity across the continent. Austria's engagement with these, would be essential to the objectives of its Africa strategy.

Today's **multilateral system faces challenges** with widening global inequalities and hard-won gains eroding nowhere more visibly than in the domain of the WPS agenda. Yet, this moment offers an opportunity to confront structural inequalities and advance international cooperation grounded in feminist agency, equality and multilateralism.

Austria's foreign policy commitments, together with its role within the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU), positions itself to champion renewed leadership on WPS, and to anchor a bold Africa-Austria Strategy that strengthens gender-responsive peacebuilding and supports feminist movements across the continent. African feminists call for systematic change, which requires confronting systems of oppression that built and shaped the present world like militarisation, patriarchy, oppressive systems of governance and climate insecurity. Only in challenging these, can the aspirations of the WPS agenda for Africa and Austria, which advance national priorities as well as regional and international commitments, be met.

Austria is already engaged in WPS through a range of activities originating in embassies and government departments including the Ministry for European and International Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. Notable are programmes like the training courses in Humanitarian Assistance and the WPS agenda offered in West Africa through the **Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre** (KAIPTC).^{*} Furthermore, Austria has contributed to direct and flexible and long-term funding to African feminist organisations and, in some cases, local women peacebuilding organisations through the **Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund**, and the Capacity Development for Humanitarian Assistance in West Africa.^{*} This Action Paper sets out five areas that define an actionable, forward-facing agenda Austria's continued engagement in Africa: Women's Rights, Regional Institutions, Migration, Climate, and Militarisation.

1 Memory Pamela Kadau, "Decolonising Feminist Foreign Policy, Trade and Women's Empowerment," *African Feminism (AF)*, September 10, 2025, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://africanfeminism.com/decolonising-feminist-foreign-policy-trade-and-womens-empowerment/>

2 Fadhel Kaboub, "Africa's Path towards Resilience and Sovereignty: the Real Wakanda is within Reach," *Tax Justice Network*, March 30, 2021, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://taxjustice.net/2021/03/30/africas-path-towards-resilience-and-sovereignty-the-real-wakanda-is-within-reach/>

* see Austrian Centre for Peace

* see Austrian Development Agency

Area 1: Securing Women's Rights

Problem addressed: Regression on women's human rights and anti-gender mobilisations

Solution proposed: Increased resourcing where gaps have emerged

Eradicating gender-based violence (GBV) is perhaps the most prominent of the goals of the WPS agenda over the last 25 years. In Africa, Austria has supported programs aimed at combatting GBV, for example, strengthening criminal justice responses to GBV in Uganda.⁵ Austria has made it a priority to combat female genital mutilation (FGM), especially in conflict affected settings. Unfortunately, it is still the case that across Africa, in both conflict affected and non-conflict settings, GB continues to proliferate significantly affecting the lives of African women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people. Femicide is on the rise⁶ in most African countries, and Africa recorded the highest rates of intimate partner and family-related femicide globally in 2023. Across various sites of WPS practice however, interventions have tended to focus on conflict affected settings only. This engenders a very narrow understanding of the issue and is a disservice to the ambitions of WPS, and the women affected. In addition, the protection and prevention pillars of the WPS agenda have received less funding compared to the participation pillars. As such, a change in approach is required, and it must be a bold, intersectional, and survivor-centred agenda rooted in solidarity - not paternalism and beyond conflict only.

What can Austria do better?

The Austrian Foreign Ministry can intensify coordination with African institutions implementing the Maputo Protocol, and collaborate on education, public awareness, and survivor-centred justice. A second approach would be gendering legal and normative systems that support ending GBV and justice for victims.

This is consistent with Austria's obligations under international conventions such as the **Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Istanbul Convention, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. Such interventions would signal Austria's aim for systemic change that centers accountability and justice. In Kenya and South Africa for example, feminists and women's civil society organisations spearhead the campaign to end femicide. The extent to which international partners, like Austria, respond to this Indigenous-led demand, signals true commitments to eradicating GBV. We propose a two-pronged approach. It is essential to provide direct support to survivors and victims as a matter of urgency. In many African countries, prevention campaigns, crisis centres or trauma informed care is not available. Yet, as feminists have consistently shown, only systems rooted in care will make a difference to the lives of women, and LGBTQIA+ people.

Area 2: Support to Regional Institutions

Problem addressed: Limited funding and institutional inertia

Solution proposed: Supporting regional institutions ambitions and designs for WPS implementation on the continent

Engaging with African regional institutions on WPS presents a strategic opportunity to move beyond traditional donor-recipient dynamics toward genuine partnership that respects African agency and feminist principles. The **African Union's Continental Results Framework on WPS and the African Regional Economic Communities (RECs)** have clear articulated aspirations for advancing women's participation in peace and security through the development of WPS national and regional action plans. Yet, what they need is support that strengthens rather than supplants their leadership.

⁵ ADA, accessed November 24, 2025, <http://www.entwicklung.at/en/projects/detail-en/strengthening-criminal-justice-responses-to-gbv-in-uganda-justice4her>

⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UN Women, Femicide Brief 2024: Global Estimates of Intimate Partner/Familymember Femicides (2023 data) (Vienna/New York: UNODC & UN Women, 2024), accessed November 24, 2025, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/briefs/Femicide_Brief_2024.pdf

What can Austria do better?

Austria can support the **African Union (AU), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) like ECOWAS and IGAD**, by providing flexible, predictable funding that responds to their priorities rather than imposing external templates. This means supporting initiatives like the AU's Silencing the Guns Initiative and FemWise-Africa that work to transform how peace is negotiated across the continent, with resources that enable African institutions to operationalise their own WPS commitments according to contextual realities. Too often, well-intentioned support comes with conditions that **reflect European rather than African understandings of conflict, security, and empowerment**. Austria brings valuable experience in mediation and gender mainstreaming that can be shared through co-operation frameworks. Rather than positioning itself as the expert, Austria can facilitate peer-learning exchanges and strengthen regional early warning systems that integrate gender perspectives. This includes supporting African-led research and knowledge production on WPS implementation, ensuring that evidence-based research reflects African women's experiences and analytical frameworks rather than relying solely on Western academic paradigms. Effective support requires multi-year funding commitments that allow African institutions to plan strategically rather than surviving on short-term project cycles. Austria should work through African institutions rather than parallel structures, report on how its development cooperation advances WPS goals, and create accountability mechanisms that centre African women's assessment of what constitutes meaningful progress. This includes supporting regional monitoring frameworks and ensuring that Austrian diplomatic engagement consistently elevates WPS implementation in bilateral and multilateral forums. Ultimately, **Austria's support should be measured not by how much it does for African institutions, but by how effectively it enables them to realize their own WPS aspirations**, guided by African feminist principles of collective liberation, contextual knowledge, and transformative rather than performative change. The focus must therefore move past technocratic 'capacity building' to transformative accompaniment, facilitating genuine co-creation, transparent resource management, and public accountability.

Area 3:

A different direction on Migration

Problem addressed: A securitised and carceral approach to migration governance

Solution proposed: A humane and gender-responsive approach to the movement of people

Migration is now a defining arena where power, security, and rights collide, and like other European countries, Austria's Africa engagement will be judged by its approach. In much of Europe, including elements of **Austria's current approach, migration continues to be narrated primarily as a 'crisis' and a security problem**. This framing, driven by control, extraction, and deterrence, runs counter to the lived realities and aspirations of many Africans. The lack of transparency in how countries approach migration has had a direct impact in countries like Sudan or Uganda. Migration policies, laws and approaches that are rooted in othering and isolation, history has shown debilitating consequences for the marginalised. A WPS lens especially demonstrates that today's militarised and externalised migration governance is never gender-neutral: it is deeply gendered and racialised, positioning migrant men as potential threats, while casting women mainly as vulnerable dependents and erasing the agency of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ people.

What can Austria do better?

For Austria, whose foreign policy foregrounds human rights, the rule of law and multilateral cooperation, these three aspects present both a challenge and an opportunity. If these principles are to be meaningful, **the dominant crisis narrative around migration must be transformed into one that centres rights, dignity, and the positive contribution of migrants to society**. Through its WPS approach and its Africa Strategy, Austria is well placed to lead a reframing of migration away from an exclusively security-led issue towards a complex political, social and economic process shaped by intersecting inequalities. As a member of the EU, Austria can champion a shift from the mere management and policing of movement to upholding rights and agency, promoting policies that guarantee safe and regular pathways, protect the rights of all migrants and support African organisations addressing the root causes of forced

displacement. Implementing WPS in this context means rethinking how migration, security, and peace are linked. It is already the case that women flee conflicts where their security needs are ignored, they face gendered violence during migration because protection systems fail them, and are then excluded from peace processes that could address why they fled. Transformative policy must thus centre African women's collective experiences, and agency. Austria can advance the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration by **leveraging global and regional frameworks to align European economic stability with the protection of human dignity**. By prioritising evidence-based policy-making through cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the UN, Austria can replace anecdotal narratives with reliable data on labor shortages, and the critical role of migrant women in sustaining an ageing workforce, while advancing the WPS agenda through rights, protection and prevention. **Austria can address root causes of migration by directing its development assistance toward climate resilience and skills mobility partnerships, particularly in the Western Balkans and Africa**. Strengthened multilateral cooperation will ensure that national development objectives remain balanced with a coherent, human rights-based global approach to safe, orderly, and sustainable migration. **Austrian policy and political discourse can make visible the leadership and organising of migrant women and diasporic communities, not as occasional consultees but as ongoing partners in designing, implementing, and evaluating migration and integration policies**. Engaging African and other diaspora communities in Austria, and supporting transnational feminist networks, can drive more respectful and effective migration partnerships. At the same time, Austria's Africa Strategy broader objectives of its 'Migration and Mobility' agenda, including eradicating trafficking and facilitating entry into areas of shortage skills, must develop a plan of action. Such a plan would explicitly oppose exploitative labour arrangements and unethical recruitment practices, prioritising ethical mobility,

reunion, and justice for migrant workers and survivors of trafficking. The Austrian Foreign Ministry should actively shift national and EU-wide narratives and policies towards dignity, solidarity, and the transformative ambitions at the heart of WPS after 25 years. Aligning with African feminist calls, Austria can help **co-create migration frameworks that foreground care, safety and the holistic well-being of migrants**.

Area 4: **Designing Climate Justice Frameworks**

Problem addressed: Climate insecurity and inequalities

Solution proposed: An approach to climate mitigation informed by reparative justice

The lack of progress in climate negotiations and action to match the threat of global warming, and the extreme weather events forcing millions out of their homes and the standing impacts and loss of land, livelihoods, communities and economies is a major concern.⁷ The continued path of fossil fuels advances an unlivable planet with devastating ecological impacts for the majority of the World. The recent COP30 outcomes affirm these concerns. **Climate change is a global crisis, and yet in Africa its effects are very much rooted in colonialism, extractivism and the neoliberal economic model that drives land dispossession and displacement**. To achieve climate justice, it is essential to address these historical and ongoing injustices, not simply through technocratic adaptation or mitigation. But through an approach, that acknowledges the nature of the problem, particularly when the dominant challenge has also been that there is a disproportionate burden by African women and marginalised communities across the continent. Yet, **people in rural areas and Indigenous communities, women, and LGBTQIA+ people are often excluded from designing the environmental justice peace frameworks that shape their lives**. This is a policy gap, and a deficient model, for addressing climate change. In taking an African eco-feminist alternative towards the climate crisis, we contend that external interventions must reflect African knowledge to tackle root causes and serve as an early warning mechanism to achieve climate justice.

⁷ African Feminist Collective on Feminist Informed Policies, Position Paper, 2026, accessed March 3, 2026: <https://rewib.org/resources/towards-transformative-justice-a-position-paper-on-a-decolonial-pan-african-feminist-approach-to-reparations/>

What can Austria do better?

As a partner to Africa and a member state of the EU, Austria can act as a pioneer in this approach where external actors integrate African feminist and Indigenous knowledge in their approaches to climate change on the continent. This is a key pathway to meeting the ambitions of the WPS agenda. Taking such an approach practically means **championing African claims for direct access to climate finance, and the transfer of technology and resources to locally defined and women-driven climate solutions.** Austria should therefore increase funding for African climate movements, facilitate their leadership in global climate forums, and advocate for restitution for climate-related loss and damage. Partnerships must focus on food sovereignty, community renewable energy, and structural reform **by centring African agency, not perpetuating dependency.** This holistic approach to climate aligns Austria with Africa's most visionary feminists while fulfilling growing international climate justice commitments. To meet these commitments, it also requires policy coherence that ensures Austria's climate action, development cooperation, and migration management genuinely advance rather than undermine African women's security and self-determination as they themselves define it.

Area 5: Challenging Militarisation

Problem addressed: Increased militarisation

Solution proposed: Champion alternative and non-violence forms of conflict transformation

In 2025, there were 59 active state-based conflicts in Africa, the most since the end of WW II, and three more than the prior year.⁸ From Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burkina Faso, Niger, Ethiopia, Somalia to Mozambique unrelenting

militarism has impacted lives. The profound impacts of increased reliance on military means as a default to resolve conflicts or challenge existing inequalities is evident. **The military industry has thrived as many more countries plunge into protracted conflicts and mass violence with military technologies being tested and deployed on many war fronts.** As of January 2026, nearly 12 million Sudanese people have been displaced⁹, making it the largest humanitarian crisis. The layers of local, regional and international actors fueling and committing genocide and crimes against humanity are tied by a long thread of militarism. In DRC, the minerals for peace constitute extractive deals that undermine communities. Sexual violence has been weaponised, and with militarism reinforcing hegemonic masculinities, leaving women and children trapped in cycles of targeted violence with no, or little, response mechanism and justice for these crimes against humanity. International responses have often reinforced rather than challenged this militarisation. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending reached a staggering \$2.7 trillion in 2024, marking a 9% increase which is trillion in 2024, marking a 9% increase which is the sharpest rise since the Cold War, and a decade of consecutive growth.¹⁰ Militarisation reflects patriarchal logics that normalise violence, particularly against women and other marginalised groups, while reallocating financial and human capital away from care, prevention, and sustainable peace. It enables extractivism facilitated by domestic elites and external actors making societies less secure.¹¹ Militarisation often obscures the call for dialogue as alternatives for peace and development. Consequently, African feminists in their advocacy on WPS have consistently challenged the overreliance on militarised responses to peace and security.

8 Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), *Global Peace Index 2025: Identifying and Measuring the Factors that Drive Peace* Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, June 2025), accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Global>

9 UNHCR, "Sudan Situation," *Operational Data Portal*, updated regularly, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sudansituation>

10 The Security We Need Rebalancing Military Spending for a Sustainable and Peaceful Future, Report of the Secretary-General

11 Toni Hastrup, "Resisting the Tide: Reclaiming the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda," *Politics & Gender* 21, no. 3 (2025): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X25100317>, accessed November 24, 2025; Rosebell Kagumire, "Glamourized Militarism and Africa's Elusive Liberation," *African Feminism (AF)*, July 1, 2025, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://africanfeminism.com/glamourized-militarism-and-africas-elusive-liberation/>.

The negative impact of militarisation is reinforced by the most recent UN Secretary General's report on WPS, which notes that there is a growth in violent conflict around the world even as military spending has risen to unprecedented levels. Women and girls especially are vulnerable to the activities of armed groups including in areas where UN peacekeeping has left a security vacuum.¹²

In particular, Austria's history and experiences as a neutral country makes it a credible convener for restorative peace processes. Austria's leadership in the Humanitarian Initiative paved the way for the **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)**, which the nation ratified in 2018 as a historic milestone in as multilateral disarmament. In the face of today's heightened international threats, including nuclear irresponsible rhetoric, a renewed global arms race, this treaty is more urgent than ever. By fulfilling the disarmament obligations of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Austria demonstrates that the TPNW is an essential security instrument that challenges the dangerous paradigm of nuclear deterrence, and a key response to humanitarian risks posed by these weapons is their total delegitimisation and elimination under international law, ensuring a more a more stable future for global cooperation.

What can Austria do better?

Austria should leverage the WPS agenda to support gender-responsive peace and security practices by countering the escalating militarisation that defines many Africa's current conflicts. It can set a precedent by using its voice within the UN, the EU and other multilateral platforms to challenge global reliance on military interventions and advocate instead for inclusive political dialogue, prevention mechanisms, and demilitarised pathways to peace, including calling for stronger oversight of arms transfer. **Austria's role as a champion of multilateralism with clear commitments to institutions, like the UN SC and UN Women, provides leverage to invest in peace infrastructures.** For example, the work of women peacebuilding organisations and Women's

Mediation Networks (WMNs) have been shown support to the increased participation of women in peace processes and also, it can help to amplify leadership as has been seen in the African context. By supporting women mediation networks, leadership, and participation of women and minority groups in peace processes, Austria can help strengthen the institutional foundation for gender responsive peace building. Furthermore, adding to the portfolio of fund recipients by focusing direct support to survivor-led groups at the frontline of conflict transformation. Evidence shows that these groups use approaches grounded in early warning, mediation, community resilience and social cohesion that offer more sustainable alternatives to militarised approaches.

An Austrian approach must be intersectional, accountable, and aimed at structural change. The WPS framework demands more than protecting women from militarised violence: it requires transforming the militarised structures themselves. Austria's commitment to **disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR)** programs to actively promote progress towards increased disarmament at the multilateral level, is much needed. Where many countries in the Global North have reduced their commitments to gender responsive security practices in general, directly diverting resources towards war preparedness in Europe, Austria has the opportunity to break the mold to directly impact peace by committing further resources to intersectional, locally-led peace initiatives thus increasing the likelihood of their sustainability. That engagement should fund feminist movements directly over Global North NGOs to ensure more direct investments in communities while mitigating the hierarchies inherent between the Global North and Global South. Such support will further align Austria with citizens whose lives and livelihoods are challenged daily by the ubiquitousness of arms transfers and surveillance exports that reinforce militarised harm. Austria could put an emphasis on championing justice and accountability for atrocities associated with militarisation, including conflict related sexual violence, genocide, forced displacement, and exploitation linked to extractive industries.

¹² United Nations Security Council, Women and Peace and Security: Report of the Secretary-General, UN Doc. S/2025/556. (5 September 2025), accessed November 24, 2025, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2025/556>.

CONCLUSION

In the face of current and future challenges, African feminist movements, communities and governments continue to put forward bold frameworks and transformative visions of the future. As a global framework for integrating gender and feminist perspectives into peace and security, **the WPS agenda is under strain from rising anti-gender movements, shrinking civic space, cuts to women's rights organisations, and conflicts involving diverse foreign actors.** For feminists, including in Africa, these dynamics undermine gender justice, and place women, girls, and gender minorities at heightened risk.¹³

In a rapidly shifting geopolitical and economic context, Austria is uniquely positioned to model a progressive, principled approach to engagement with Africa. **A truly transformative strategy that engenders partnership in Africa must take WPS seriously.** Such an approach must be rooted in feminist principles and the priorities of the women's movement on the continent. This means being led by African expertise, co-developing policies with feminist and community movements, resourcing transformative work, and insisting that a just, peaceful, and sustainable future for Africa is inseparable from realising the same for Austria and Europe.

Despite being less burdened by a massive colonial industrial complex in the past in comparison to other EU member states, Austria needs to be mindful of its present international obligations to build a reparative, solidarity-based foreign policy in its Africa policies. This bold approach is **strategically necessary for Austria's credibility, influence, and capacity to shape a safer, more just world.**

13 Abigael Baldoumas, Anila Noor, Duncan Knox, Fionna Smyth, Helen Kezie-Nwoha, Maria Alabdeh, and Marie Sophie Pettersson, *Beyond Rhetoric: Feminist Leadership for a Transformative Women, Peace and Security Agenda at 25: Case Studies from Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and South Sudan* (Oxfam Research Reports; Oxfam and Researchers Without Borders, October 2025), accessed November 24, 2025, <https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-10/Beyond%20Rhetoric%20WPS%20at%2025.pdf>.

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