

Women as actors of transnational organized crime in Africa

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ANALYTICAL REPORT



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Executive Summary

In the last two decades the percentage of women offenders is growing globally, at a faster rate than male offenders. Such global increase raises the question as to whether the same can be observed on the African continent and the reasons behind gender differences in criminal behaviours in Africa.

Information suggests that transnational organized crime (TOC) affects African women and girls differently than African men and boys. Analyzing the African gender gap in TOC, its evolution and identifying its main determinants are important for effectively fighting crime. It is crucial to learn how and if men and women behave differently in TOC in Africa to uncover the main drivers of these differences and adapt policing methodology accordingly.

While gendered data continues to be insufficiently reported upon by law enforcement authorities in Africa, traditional or stereotyped gender norms are believed to play an important part in the gender gap observed in TOC for several reasons. First, due to the gender influenced lens, African law enforcement authorities likely fail to investigate women as offenders and continue to perceive them as victims or accomplices only. They are rarely seen as the criminals themselves and less so as being the organizers, leaders, traffickers or recruiters. Second, African women are possibly less interested in turning to criminal activities. Under the social gender roles, TOC is perceived to be a male matter exclusively. Third, the African gender parity gap (gap in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access, rights, remuneration or benefits for example) scores the lowest in the world. African women have less opportunities than their male counterparts on the whole and therefore, similarly, less prospects even in TOC activities.

The assessment concludes that African law enforcement authorities are possibly under-investigating and under-estimating the presence of African women in TOC, notably due to the gender bias. It draws attention to the common features of African female offenders based on available data to share insights and encourage police forces to reconsider their approach. As an example, women are often believed to be less attracted by violent criminal activities. Yet, the report shows that African women are very probably mainly driven by business opportunities, like their male counterparts. Avoiding violent environments is not a driving factor.

Key findings

- ❖ Available data suggests that African women offenders continue to represent on average 10 per cent of all TOCs committed in Africa or by African nationals regardless of legal labour market opportunities, entrepreneurship behaviours or new social trends.
- ❖ The participation gap in TOCs, meaning the difference between criminal male and female participation in TOCs, remains the same in Africa where it has diminished almost everywhere else in the world according to available data.
- ❖ The gender parity gap on the African continent is wide compared to other regions of the world. It reflects the difference of opportunities between men and women. African women can be considered to have less opportunities as a whole and even in participating in organized crime. This gap is also an indicator of the sociological and cultural mindsets on the African continent, where gender stereotypes and norms are still deeply rooted.
- ❖ Available data shows that female criminals are on average between 34 and 36 years old at the time they have committed or were convicted for their illicit activities.
- ❖ African women are more likely to take part in TOC when they are facing poverty and unemployment as well as when they are the sole providers for their family or have to compensate for the absence of revenue by their male counterpart.
- ❖ The stereotyped subordinated role or push factor for African women entering in TOC has to be reconsidered.
- ❖ African women are driven by business opportunities or their social context when entering into criminal activities, much like their male counterparts.
- ❖ The length of convictions are relatively similar for African men and women in the TOC fields studied. It is likely that women have become increasingly more involved in high responsibility or active roles and no longer hold only subordinate roles, although available data has to be interpreted with precaution.
- ❖ Organized Crime Groups (OCGs) may rely on African women for various tasks such as communicating, handling money, recruiting, selling products or transporting.

- ❖ Gender-related data are very rarely collected and produced by African member countries to assess the gender dimensions of TOCs. The lack of data relevant to gender can lead to misguided law enforcement measures or missed impacts.

Introduction

Traditionally, through the lens of gender dynamics, TOC is seen as a form of criminality perpetrated by men. Shaped by rigid social and cultural expectations and according to traditional gender stereotypes, women are expected, globally, to behave in ways that are consistent with the conception of traditional femininity and men with the conception of traditional masculinity. African countries are not spared by these gendered expectations.

The African criminal landscape is characterized, like any other criminal environment, by its adaptability and its flexibility to new opportunities, technologies, trends, overcoming almost immediately any new obstacles. Criminals and OCGs rely heavily on civil society, for example to determine possible new markets or market interests but also to conduct their activities.

Women in Africa are economically more active than anywhere else in the world, yet, they face important barriers to achieving their full potential as a result of cultural practices or discriminatory national laws and regulations¹. Many local, regional and continental initiatives supporting and encouraging gender equality to achieve Africa's development ambitions have seen the light in recent years. As a result, significant progress has been made across the continent in achieving gender equality and closing gender gaps.

Based on the above assumptions, one would wonder whether recent efforts to offer equal opportunities to women in Africa are also mirrored in their activities and role in TOC. Although overall data on gender equality across the continent seems to be available, notably on economic opportunities, social and political representation as well as empowerment, very little official data seems to be available on women's involvement in criminal activities. Existing data on the involvement of women remains basic and proceeds on the assumption of gender-neutrality or the implied male composition of OCGs. There is a lacuna in the literature on the role of African women in TOC with a notable exception for their role in human trafficking networks.

By extension, understanding women's roles as perpetrators, their behaviour, their motivations and stories in all forms of TOC could challenge ideas about perpetrators and provide valuable insights to law enforcement agencies in Africa. Studies and research have demonstrated that the use of a gender lens would allow law enforcement agencies to better fight TOC.

To counter current and emerging crime threats effectively, law enforcement agencies must be capable of anticipating criminal groups' activities. Too often, the gender

perspective is left out of the predictions when it is very possible that women play an increasing role on the transnational crime scene. This report aims at demonstrating that law enforcement agencies in Africa would benefit from adopting a more systemic gender approach in order to fight organized crime groups effectively.

The analysis will look at existing research and data to assess the level of responsibility, different roles and evolving participation of women in organized crime in Africa.

1. STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

1.1. Scope and objectives

The aim of this threat assessment is to raise awareness among African countries on the suspected role and involvement of women in TOC in Africa, in order to potentially reassign resources, reassess targets or operational methods. The findings can inform regional and national agencies, institutional practices and support the development of policies and strategies. The assessment details specific roles and specific areas of TOC to identify and disrupt criminal networks. The assessment draws upon an analysis of available data and presents the current nature, scope, dynamics, and activities of women in TOC.

The assessment will mainly focus on the time period between January 2017 to January 2021, however some of the data integrated, notably when extracted from INTERPOL databases, are older. This analysis should be seen as a starting point for deeper insight and discussion on this topic.

The analysis looks first at the gender norms and parity in the African society to find out how it may influence African women's participation in TOC. It then attempts to identify profiles of African women offenders, new trends or changes of behaviours in recent years. Finally, the report tries to assess the different roles African women are playing in the structure of OCGs.

1.2. Methodology

This assessment follows an all-source intelligence analysis methodology. It is the result of integrating multiple data sources, including INTERPOL databases, countries' national law enforcement, INTERPOL Gender Experts and open sources. African law enforcement input was sought via a questionnaire sent to all African countries, requesting information on the role of women in TOC in their respective countries, as well as the impact of these crimes and their countries' response to combat them. A limited number of the countries surveyed provided feedback to the questionnaire, which constitutes a limitation for this analytical report.

African regions are defined by INTERPOL on the basis of countries' participation in regional chiefs of police organizations. Some countries participate in more than one regional chiefs of police organization. In such cases, they are counted in each of the regional organizations in which they participate. Some of them may therefore be counted on more than one occasion. North African countries are member of the INTERPOL Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. For the purpose of this report, which only covers the African continent, they were regrouped in a category named North Africa. This category includes the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia. The other INTERPOL African regions and their member countries are grouped as follows:

CAPCCO: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe.

EAPCCO: Burundi, Comoros, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.

SARPCCO: Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

WAPCCO: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Guinea.

Open sources used in the framework of this report include news articles and reports from various private entities, international organizations and think tanks. Whenever identified, official statistics and data were used and given preference over other sources.

Information from the aforementioned sources was aggregated together in order to identify consistencies across all data, patterns and trends, and any identifiable convergences. A regional approach was retained when drafting this report. Therefore, when national examples are quoted, it is done for illustrative purposes, in order to put forward regional dynamics.

The concept of gender is applied throughout this document to convey a binary understanding of men and women because this is where research can support the findings. The data collected for this assessment are mostly quantitative rather than qualitative. It does not, by any means, intend to dilute the many other genders represented by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. Also, the terms “woman” and “female” or “men” and “male” are used interchangeably as an editorial choice to make the text more readable.

2. AFRICAN WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME IN LIGHT OF GENDER STEREOTYPED NORMS

Traditionally and globally, men are considered to be more inclined to take part in criminal activities, in particular as it responds to the gender stereotypes that men have to be powerful in order to be masculine, implying that they should suppress their emotions, show no distress or appear to be tough, dominant and even violent. Comparatively, women are brought up to be gentle, caring, non-violent and to resolve conflict pacifically and therefore are considered less likely to enter into criminal activities².

Available data corroborates this traditional conception. Men represent an overwhelming percentage of TOC perpetrators on the African continent (Figures 1 & 2) according to all INTERPOL data holding.

NB: In this report, when analyzing and referring to data extracted from the INTERPOL databases the ENACT-INTERPOL team looked at crime related specifically to TOC: Organized Crime/Transnational Crime; Computer and information technology crimes; High Tech Crime, Maritime piracy/Robbery on the high seas; Drugs related crimes; People smuggling, trafficking and illegal immigration; Sexual exploitation/Prostitution; Crimes against Children; Banking/Fraud; Bribery/Corruption; Environmental Crime; Counterfeiting/Forgery; Intellectual Property Crime; Pharmaceutical crime.

The data was extracted for all the African member countries.

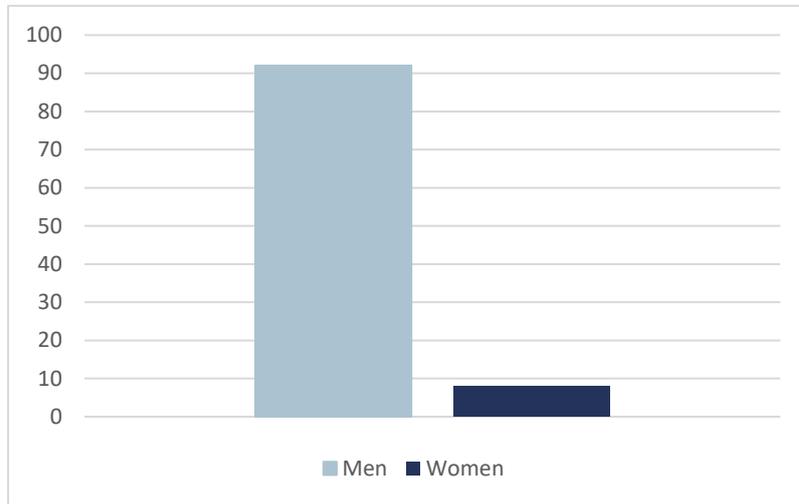


FIGURE 1 – PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL INTERPOL DATA ENTRIES BY GENDER

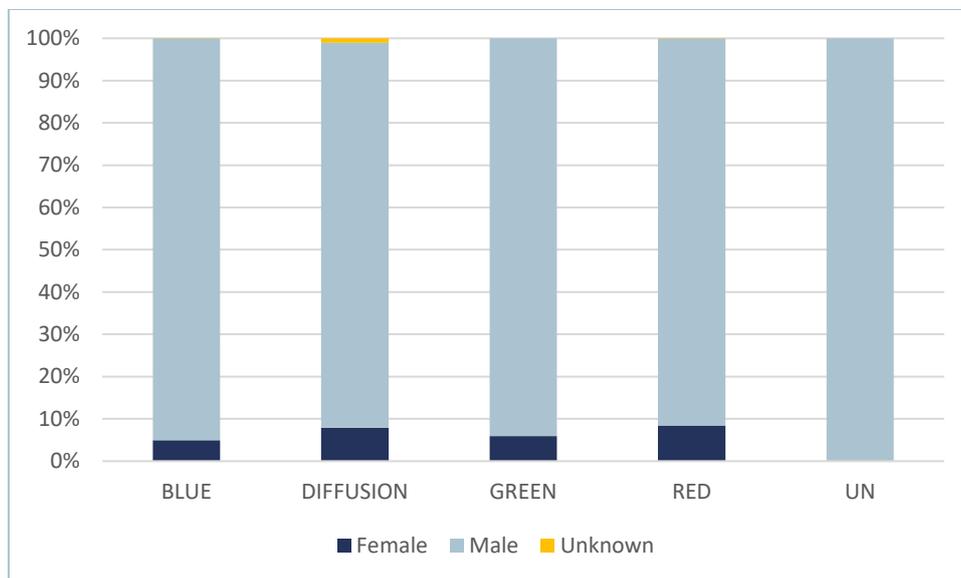


FIGURE 2 - TYPE OF NOTICES³ BY GENDER

The above figures (Figure 1 & 2) seem to contrast with the well-known active role that African women play in their communities, the economy and the national leadership. Women in Africa are more economically active as farmers and entrepreneurs than women in any other region of the world. It is the women who grow most of Africa’s food, and who

own one-third of all businesses⁴. Open source information suggests that entrepreneurship and criminal organizations are very much linked. Criminal entrepreneurship is found in organized crime, where criminals choose to organize a criminal business enterprise in order to exploit illegal market opportunities⁵. On the African continent, women are known to have entrepreneurship skills and willpower, yet by contrast they do not seem to enter much in criminal entrepreneurship.

In addition, African women are also known to be more likely to find themselves in informal, low paid and vulnerable employment or to be less educated than men⁶. These factors are well known to be grounds for entering into criminal activities where the prospect of quick and profitable crime is highly likely. Previous studies show that low socioeconomic status individuals are more likely to become involved in crime. A similar pattern of findings has been obtained in relation to studies of unemployment or lower education level.⁷ Again, by contrast African women do not seem more inclined to enter into criminal activities.

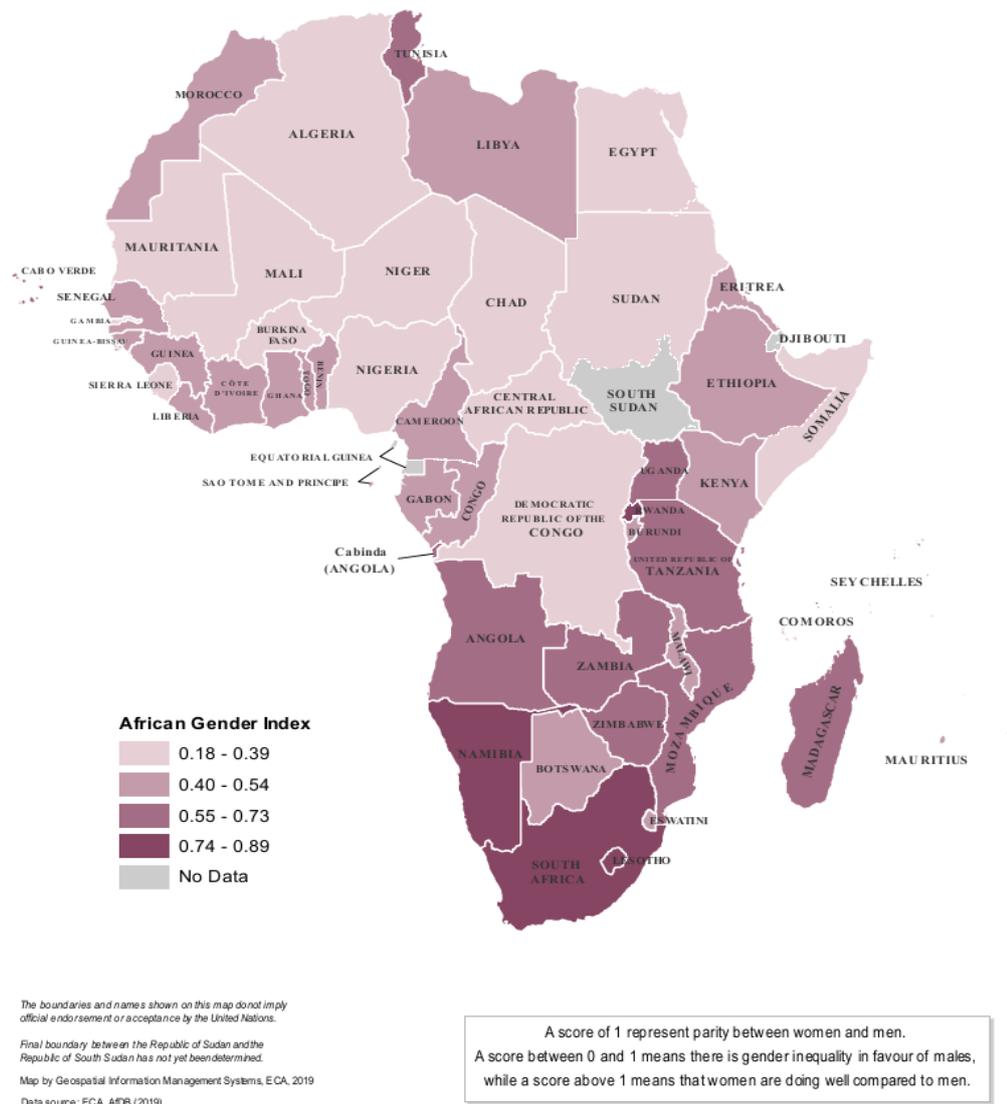
Analysis of all sources indicates that women are then less inclined and able to enter into criminal activities as it is not seen as a woman's matter. Women's involvement in crime is seen as 'doubly deviant': not just a violation of broad social norms against offending but also specific violations of appropriate behaviour for women as women⁸. Such discrepancies can be explained by different considerations.

First of all, the traditional conception of gender is prevalent in Africa where the gender gap is very high and barriers for women to obtain equality are numerous. They limit disproportionately women. The gender gap is the difference between women and men as reflected in social, political, intellectual, cultural, or economic attainments or attitudes. The gap indexes aim to measure this gap in four key areas: health, education, economics and politics. It usually reflects the difference of

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opportunities between men and women or the lack of parity.

The African Gender Index Report 2019⁹, prepared by the African Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, scored the overall gender gap in Africa of 51.4 per cent (100 per cent being parity between men and women). A global study carried out by the World Economic Forum in 2017, found that gender parity in the African region rated among the lowest in the world¹⁰.



MAP 1 - OVERALL GENDER INDEX 2019¹¹

It is important to note that some countries in Africa are also rated among the highest as illustrated in map 1 above. Rwanda, for example, ranked fourth in the Global Gender Gap Index 2017¹². The gender gap is also an indicator of sociological and cultural set of mind on the African continent, where gender stereotypes and norms are still very rooted¹³.

In light of the gender gap, the difference between the participation of African men and women in TOC can be explained by the lack of prospects created for women as a whole, even in participating in organized crime. The discrepancy can also be explained as a consequence of a lack of reporting and data recording by the police authorities or a severe lacuna in investigating women as criminal perpetrators: *“The clandestine nature of Serious and Organized Crime [SOC] means that much of the empirical research is based on court documents or interviews with prisoners, so only covers those captured by authorities”*¹⁴.

Similar to the fact that African women will not enter in criminal activities, which are stereotypically viewed as masculine activities, law enforcement may fail to target or investigate women as actors in TOC. Authorities are therefore dismissing their presence among criminals or assuming their subordinate or victim role. This lacuna in police investigation due to societal gender expectations is indeed known to be exploited to the benefit of organized crime as women are more likely to go under the radar¹⁵.

Finally, the above figures might also suggest that African women are not targeted by OCGs on the African continent as of today, possibly because of the same gendered social norms.

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3. COMMON FEATURES AND PUSH FACTORS OF AFRICAN WOMEN AS CRIMINAL ACTORS

This section examines the common features of women as criminal actors based on the data collected from the African law enforcement and from INTERPOL databases. Women enter into different criminal market and have different roles as explored later on in this assessment. However, they tend to present similar characteristic in terms of age, social background or even the push factors leading them to participate in criminal activities.

3.1. African female offenders' age

Available data show that criminal women are on average 36 years old at the time they have committed or were convicted for their illicit activities. The below table 1 indicates that age may vary slightly depending on the region from which they are coming. A correlation can be found between the gender gap index and the women's age per region. Referring to the African gender index map (Map 1) as established by the African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa¹⁶, regions with a higher gender gap rate, meaning with more gender parity, can expect to see women entering into criminal activities at a younger age. This finding can likely be interpreted in light of the prospects created for women. Countries where gender stereotypes have eased in recent years have created equal opportunities for women in the legitimate economy as much as in the underground one.

Regions	Average of women's age at the time of the offence
CAPCCO	37
EAPCCO	38
EAPCCO/CAPCCO	37
North Africa	33
SARPCCO	35
SARPCCO/EAPCCO	36
WAPCCO	37
Grand Total	36

TABLE 1 - WOMEN'S AGE PER REGION AT THE TIME OF THEIR CONVICTION ACCORDING TO INTERPOL DATA

The average age of African female criminals remains fairly constant across the different TOC markets (table 2). Women are notably younger when linked to cybercrime activities most certainly because younger generations are IT literate while the older generation had little access to informatics and web-based knowledge. A further age difference is to be

noted in financial crimes and illicit goods markets where women are older. Typically these crimes require a certain amount of notoriety and authority or already established resources and finances. Some of them are sometimes referred to as “white-collars” crimes. Younger women would rarely have the assets required to enter into such criminal activities.

Criminal markets	Youngest Age	Oldest Age	Average
Cybercrime	27	30	28
Crime against Children	23	63	34
Intellectual Property	21	42	34
Maritime Crime	23	60	34
Illicit Drugs	18	75	35
Environmental Crime	20	66	35
THB and People Smuggling	21	63	36
Illicit Goods	19	65	41
Financial crime	19	84	42
Grand Total	20	60	34

TABLE 2 - WOMEN'S AGE PER TYPE OF CRIMINAL MARKETS AT THE TIME OF THEIR CONVICTION ACCORDING TO INTERPOL DATA

NB1: The difference in the grand total age averages in the two above tables are due to the fact that some countries pertain to more than one region as explained in the methodology section.

NB2: Due to limited resources in judicial systems, convictions may take place several years after arrests, therefore, women might be younger at the time of committing the offense.

3.2. Push factors

Globally, crimes are predominantly a male phenomenon as previously illustrated in this report. Decades of studies have demonstrated that they are more likely to commit homicides, abuses or violent crimes compared to women across all ages and geographic regions¹⁷. As a result, women are treated almost systematically as victims or passive actors of TOC. Their gendered role is predominant according to the criminal justice system and they are considered to be involved only as wives, mothers or romantic partners.

Therefore, women are often considered to enter into criminal activities only as secondary actors pushed by their loved ones.

In line with the below graphic (figure 3), this section explores some of the push factors for women entering into criminal activities as stated by African law enforcement authorities when surveyed for this assessment. The assessment focuses on the reasons leading African women to participate in TOC in light of their social and economic status. Although some general tendencies are drawn upon in this assessment, one should be mindful of the wide variety of profiles, reasons, social context, roles, etc. that women can represent.

Previous studies have showed that *“the decision to commit a crime depends, among other things, on the probability of being caught and the probable length and severity of the sentence if the perpetrator is caught; the disutility of going to jail; the expected earnings from the illegal activity; work opportunities in the legal labor market; and risk aversion.”*¹⁸ These studies focused exclusively on men’s behaviours and did not take into consideration the many motivational differences between men and women.

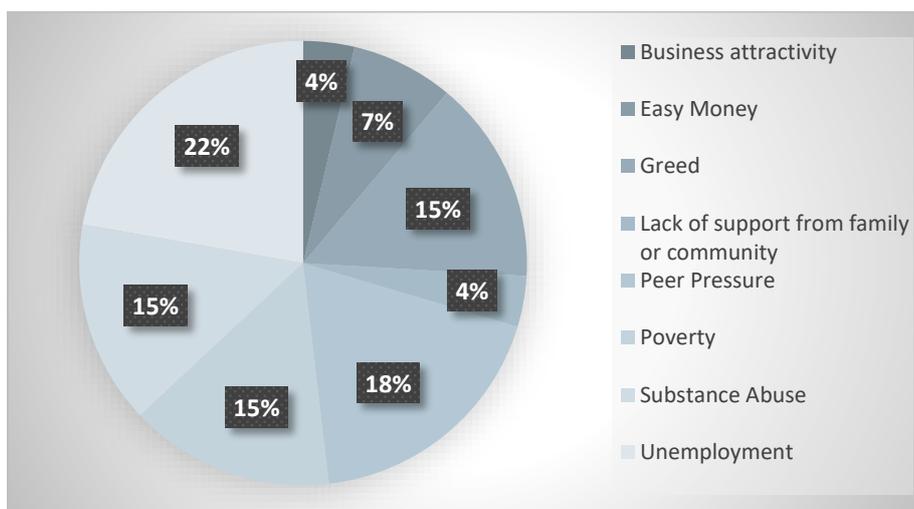


FIGURE 3 - PUSH FACTORS ACCORDING TO AFRICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

3.2.1. Lack of education and unemployment

Through study of the responses provided by African law enforcement, it is established that women entering into criminal activities have often not been able to access education beyond secondary school (Figure 4).

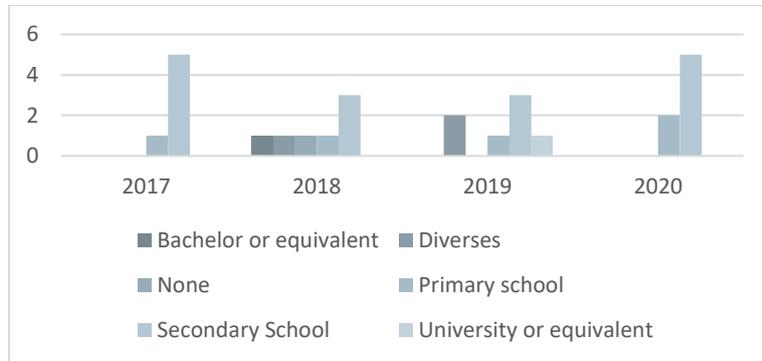


FIGURE 4 - EDUCATION LEVEL OF ARRESTED WOMEN

The African Gender Gap Index¹⁹ rates access to basic education at 96.2 per cent, implying that women and men have almost the same level of primary education across the African continent. At secondary school, the gender gap increases to 86.5 per cent and again slightly, to 85.8 per cent, at tertiary graduation. Although these figures show that African women continue to be disadvantaged in education across the continent, they also imply that criminal men and women, on the whole, have the same level of education. It further indicates that the educational level cannot be used as the sole determining factor for entering in TOC activities. Women have long been less educated than men in Africa, yet they are not more likely to become criminal actors as they continue to represent a small portions of criminals.

According to the responses collected from the African law enforcement, the vast majority of women convicted were unemployed/ “non-working” (figure 5). Poverty, unemployment and the lack of support from the family or community are clearly defined as the main reasons why women will become criminal actors (see graphic above – figure 3).

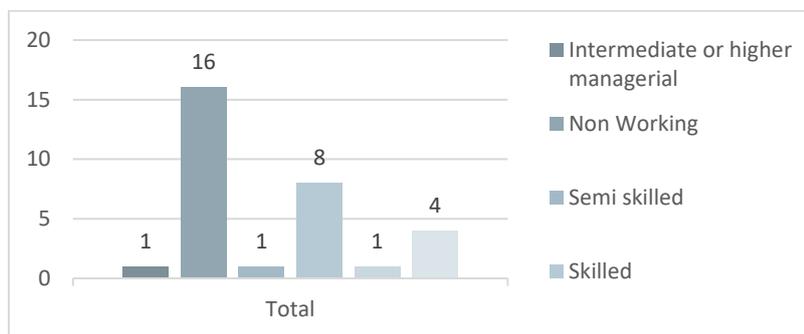


FIGURE 5 – WORKING BACKGROUND OF ARRESTED WOMEN

Although African women may have been participating in TOC predominantly due to their relationship as wives, mothers or romantic partners, it is no longer the case. Such relationships may facilitate involvement in TOC but should no longer be considered the main reason.

3.2.2. Peer pressures and social context

According to the data collected from African law enforcement (Figure 3), although peer pressure is mentioned as one of the reasons for entering into criminal activities, it is important to note that the subordination, *love* or *romantic* link, to their male counterpart was only mentioned once in the returned questionnaires. When consulting law enforcement, the response field was deliberately left open not to influence responses and law enforcement had to write in free text. Consequently, it can reasonably be considered that although African women may have been participating in TOC predominantly due to their relationship as wives, mothers or romantic partners, it is no longer the case. Such relationships may facilitate involvement in TOC but should no longer be considered the main reason.

In addition, although the peer pressure factor is predominant as illustrated in *Figure 3*, this factor is to be considered equally for male and female criminals. Many studies have already explored that peer pressure and social context are reoccurring phenomenon in criminal or deviant behaviour²⁰. Major features of the peer pressure process are identified in delinquent groups' dynamics and behaviours as well as sanctions for non-conformity. Peer pressure exists for conformity to a specific social context and in particular criminal context regardless of gender.

3.2.3. Gendered family responsibilities

A global study conducted in drug trafficking²¹, exploring how women become involved and focusing on the lived experiences of women as drug mules, clearly highlighted that women worldwide felt compelled by their caretaker responsibilities rather than being compelled by their social environment. While being interviewed, they expressed the financial difficulties of making a life as the family provider:

mothers, daughters, girlfriends or wives. Due to the lack of alternative options, women will turn to illicit and illegal opportunities.

The gender responsibility, where African women are the providers for their family is often mentioned as one of the main reasons for their participation in criminal activities (Figure 4). African women are guardians of their children's welfare and wellbeing. The African gender expectation places explicit responsibility on African women to provide for them materially. They are the household managers, providing food, water, health or even education.

Similarly, according to data collected among African law enforcement, the majority of African women convicted for criminal activities were single and a significant number of them had children (Figure 6 & 7). Although the latest information seems to be only occasionally collected by law enforcement, from the available data, it is very probable that the majority of women arrested are the main and sole providers for their family. Alternatively, these women may have had to compensate the absence of revenue of sufficient revenue of their African male counterpart.

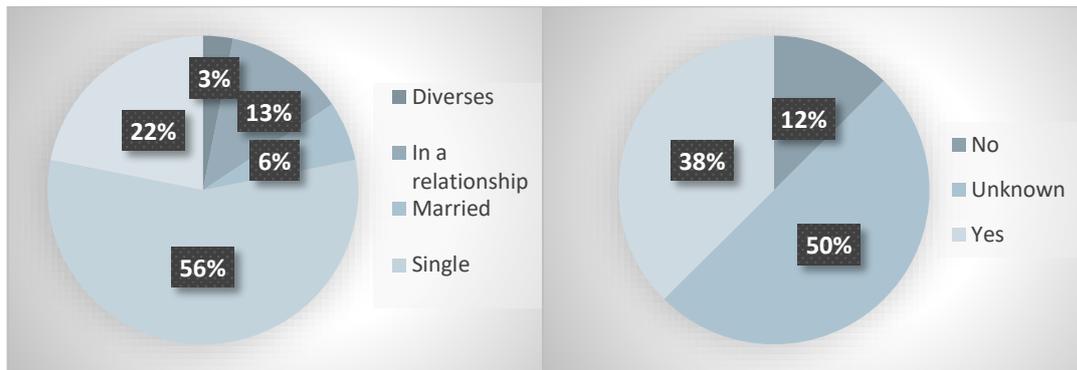


FIGURE 6 - MARITAL STATUS OF ARRESTED AFRICAN WOMEN

FIGURE 7 - CHILDREN STATUS OF ARRESTED AFRICAN WOMEN

4. AFRICAN WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Available information across the world has shown - the African continent being no exception - that women are no longer passive actors, as once believed or perceived; yet the question remains as to the extent of their role and involvement in criminal activities. These questions remain partly because of the limited access to reliable data focusing on women in the field of organized crime in Africa.

African women are not driven by considerations such as avoiding violent environments when entering into criminal activities but rather, like their male counterpart, by the business opportunities or their social context.

This section explores women's involvement in the different type of illicit activities in order to establish which illicit activities they are more likely to turn to, to later focus on the predominant role they play in TOC.

4.1. African women's involvement by type of transnational organized crime

Male identity is undeniably linked with violence. Statistics invariably show that men and boys are much more likely to take part in violent activities than women and girls. While available information has demonstrated that biology is one of the driver of men's violence, more recent data has also highlighted a *"complex web of intersecting elements, including biology alongside social conditions, life circumstances, childhood experiences, political economy, gender attitudes, and more."*²²

As previously mentioned, according to traditional or stereotyped gender norms, in order to be considered *masculine*, men are educated to be tough and even violent when women are educated to be gentle and non-violent in order to be considered feminine. Through this gendered lens, available documentation has considered that women would then turn to less violent illegal businesses and criminal activities. Studies have attempted to explain the correlation between violence and women's participation in some specific fields of TOC. It is suggested that on one hand women are more attracted to less violent criminal activities and on the other hand that TOC is becoming less violent and as such becoming more accessible to women. For example, women are believed to be more involved in human trafficking and people smuggling compared to other forms of TOC due to the limited place of violence in all features of the trade²³.

The below graphic (figure 8) is the result of data extracted from INTERPOL databases. Figures for African men and women were compared proportionally in order to bring forward any difference

between the types of activities in which one or the other sex would be more likely to participate. As clearly highlighted below, proportionally African women and men enter into the same type of activities.

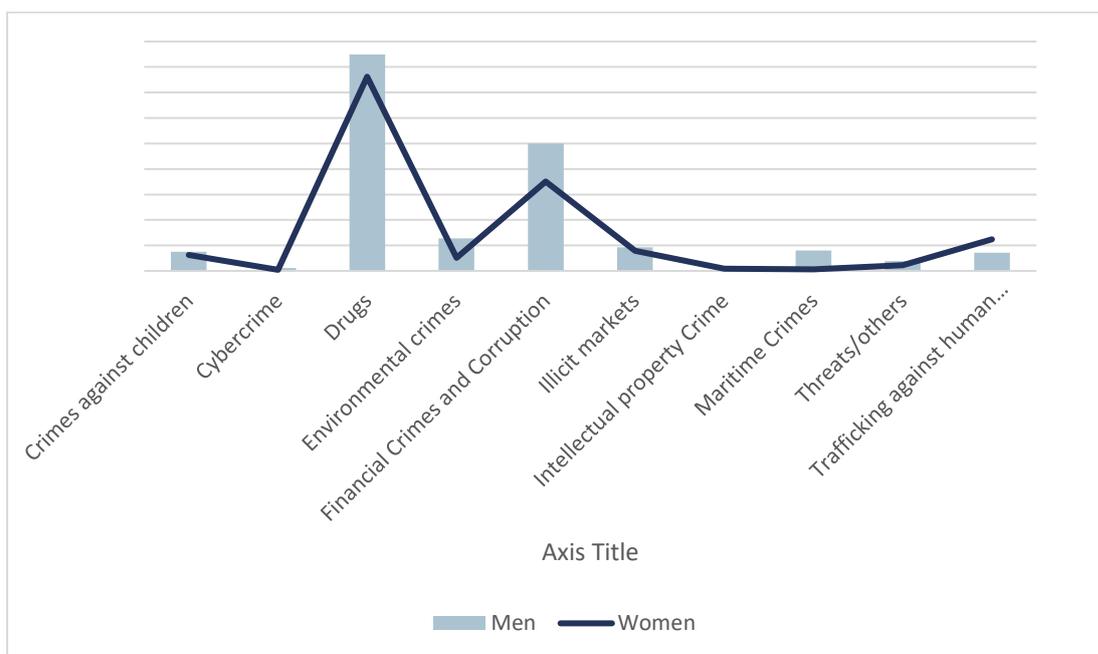


FIGURE 8 – COMPARATIVE PARTICIPATION OF AFRICAN MEN AND WOMEN PER TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

African women are not driven by considerations such as avoiding violent environments when entering into criminal activities but rather, like their male counterpart, by the business opportunities or their social context. Information indicates that law enforcement authorities are very likely misled when considering violent environment as an off-putting factor for African women. It can be further noticed from the above graphic that African women involved in organized crime will mainly turn to four major illicit activities in order of presence: Drugs, Trafficking in Human Beings and People Smuggling, Crime against Children as well as Financial Crimes and Corruption. African women’s specific roles in all four illicit fields will be detailed later in this assessment (section 5).

4.2. African women’s increasing involvement in transnational organized crime

The data collected from African law enforcement covering the period from 2017 to 2020, show that the gap between the number of arrests for African men and women is becoming

smaller and arrests of African women are even higher in some areas of criminality (THB and People Smuggling) as illustrated in the graphics below (figure 9 & 10).

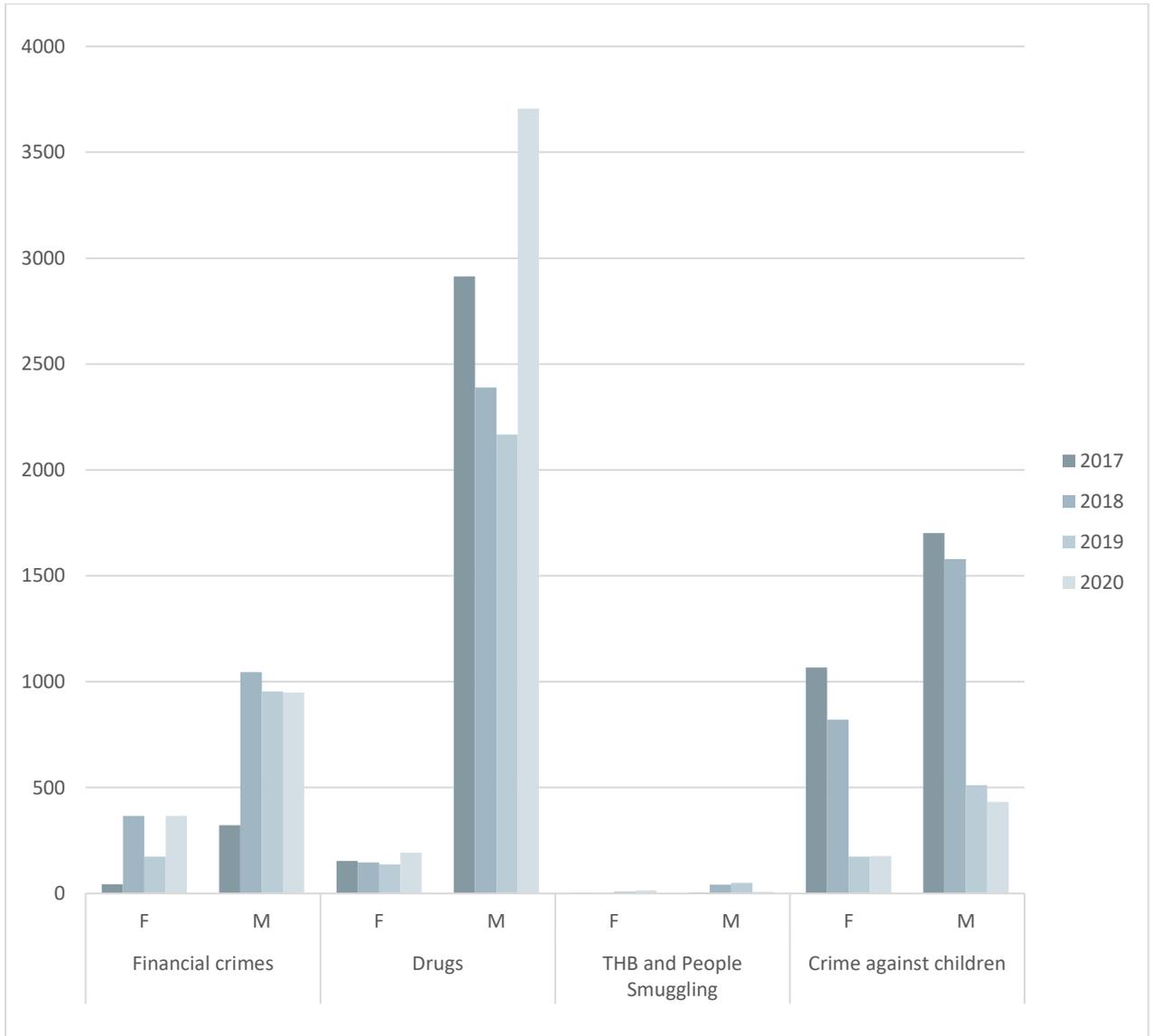


FIGURE 9 - COMPARED NUMBER OF ARRESTS PER TYPE OF CRIMES BETWEEN MALE (M) AND FEMALE (F) AS PER THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY AFRICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

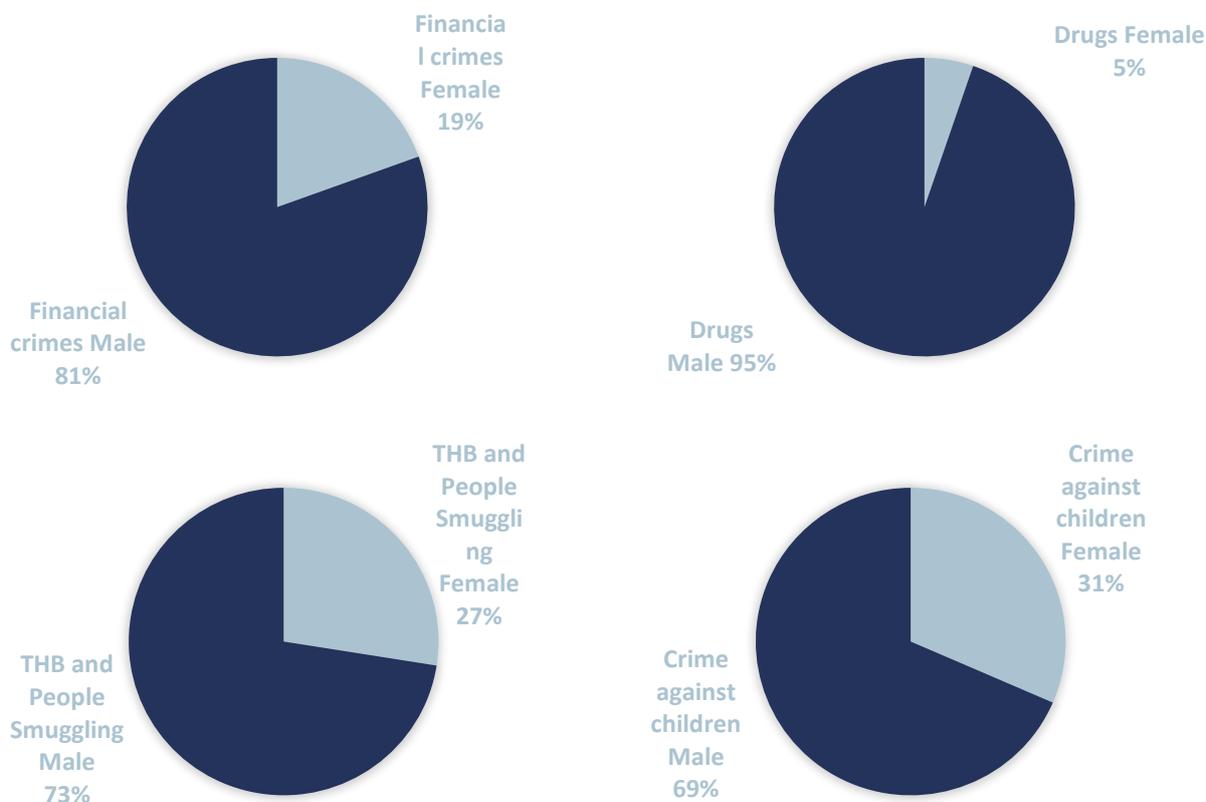


FIGURE 10- COMPARED PERCENTAGE OF ARRESTS PER TYPE OF CRIME FOR THE PERIOD 2017-2020 AS PER THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY AFRICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

The data received from African law enforcement indicates a clear increase in the presence of African women in the area of financial crime in the SARPCCO region as illustrated in the graphic below (Figure 11). As previously mentioned, financial crimes are often committed by persons of a certain level of education, notably because they often require a good understanding of technologies, while being employed and benefiting from a certain level of authority²⁴. According to the Africa Gender Index Report²⁵ (see also map 1), the SARPCCO region shows a smaller gender gap, offering more job opportunities or senior and representational positions to African women than other region on the continent. The increased presence of African women in financial crimes is very likely linked to their capacity to access the employment market. By projection, other African regions and countries seeing the gender gap closing with regards to job markets accessibility can reasonably expect to see a similar increase of African women’s presence in financial crime activities.

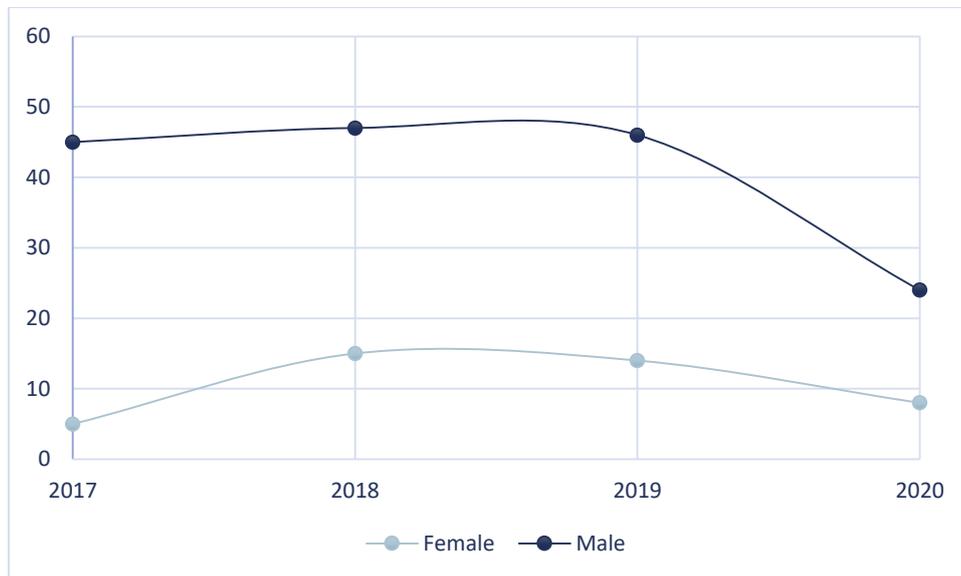


FIGURE 11 – COMPARISON OF ARRESTS FOR FINANCIAL CRIMES FOR THE SARPCCO REGION

These graphics should be interpreted with precaution as only a few countries returned extractable data when surveyed and not all criminal activities were covered by the returned questionnaires. However, it confirms a tendency observed worldwide²⁶ and noted by African law enforcement agencies over the past couple of decades that the number of African women offenders is becoming substantial and growing. One potential reason for the rising number of female criminals worldwide is that *“changes in social roles and technological progress have freed women from the home and reduced the marginal value of housekeeping”*²⁷.

The above breakdown and the global tendency is not yet verifiable from the data extracted from INTERPOL databases for the same period. INTERPOL data holding analyzed continue to show that the number of African male offenders is much higher than the number of African female offenders across all types of illicit activities. It also demonstrated that the gaps between African female and male offenders remained stable. African women continue to represent approximately 10 per cent of Africa’s overall criminals.

The latter is further corroborated by open sources information. A report on female Imprisonment around the world estimates that the female prison population has risen in all continents since 2000, except on the African continent, where “the rise has been somewhat less than the increase in the general population of the continent”. The report

pursues explaining that in “African countries the proportion of women and girls in the total prison population, at 3.4 per cent is much lower than elsewhere [6.9 per cent]”.²⁸

Several assumptions can be made from this observation:

- African women are less inclined to participate in criminal activities than anywhere else in the world. Notably, as explored earlier because the economic, social and cultural factors closing the gender gap globally are yet to be generalized in Africa. African women do not have the same incentive.
- African law enforcement agencies fail to investigate African women’s criminal activities.
- There is a lack of systematic data input on databases from African member countries or a lack of gendered data collection by African state agencies.

5. AFRICAN WOMEN’S ROLES IN SPECIFIC TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME FIELDS

Recent data indicates that women in TOC have held more active roles worldwide than what was implied by historical data²⁹. Compared data collected from the African law enforcement agencies (figure 12) with regards to the length of convictions between African women and men face in the different type of TOC shows only a slight difference. The length of convictions are relatively similar for African men and women in the TOC fields studied. As previously warned, this graphic is to be interpreted prudently as the data collected from African law enforcement may not be representative of overall continental trends, being sometimes incomplete or only rarely provided.

The length of convictions are relatively similar for African men and women in the TOC fields studied. [...].

African women are sentenced to almost comparable jail time as their male counterparts. It is likely that women have become increasingly more involved in high responsibility or active roles and no longer only hold subordinate roles.

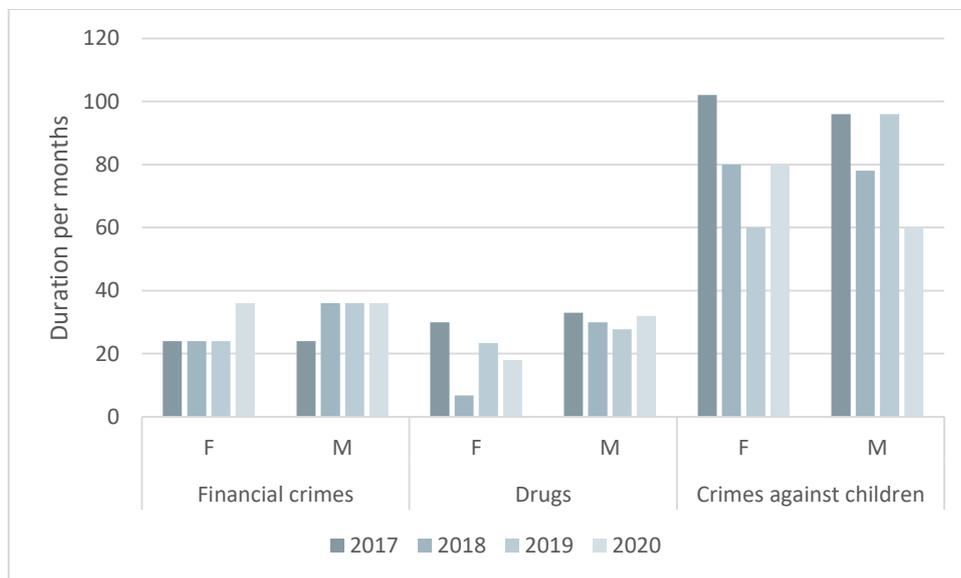


FIGURE 12 - COMPARISON OF CONVICTIONS DURATION FOR MALE (M) AND FEMALE (F)

However, it can reasonably be expected that leadership or persons playing a more predominant role in TOC would be subject to longer prison sentences by national criminal justice systems. Therefore, should women have only supportive or subordinate roles compared to their male counterparts, the length of their sentence should be significantly lower. Even more so, when it is generally believed that the judicial systems are *“more lenient with women than with men, thus giving women an advantage in the crime market³⁰”*. African women are sentenced to almost comparable jail time as their male counterparts. It is likely that women have become increasingly more involved in high responsibility or active roles and no longer only hold subordinate roles.

Available information on the role of women in TOC is fairly recent and has only been explored since the end of the twentieth century, with the role of women within the mafia and by extension their role in TOC. Globally and across specific crime markets, the role of women differs in terms of status, level of responsibility and whether they feature at all³¹. Research on the role of women in Africa in TOC is particularly difficult to find with the exception of their role in human trafficking.

According to the data collected from African law enforcement, OCGs on the African continent rely on women for varied types of tasks (Figure 13). Although they seem excluded from leadership roles as such, they hold important responsibilities in the OCGs structures.

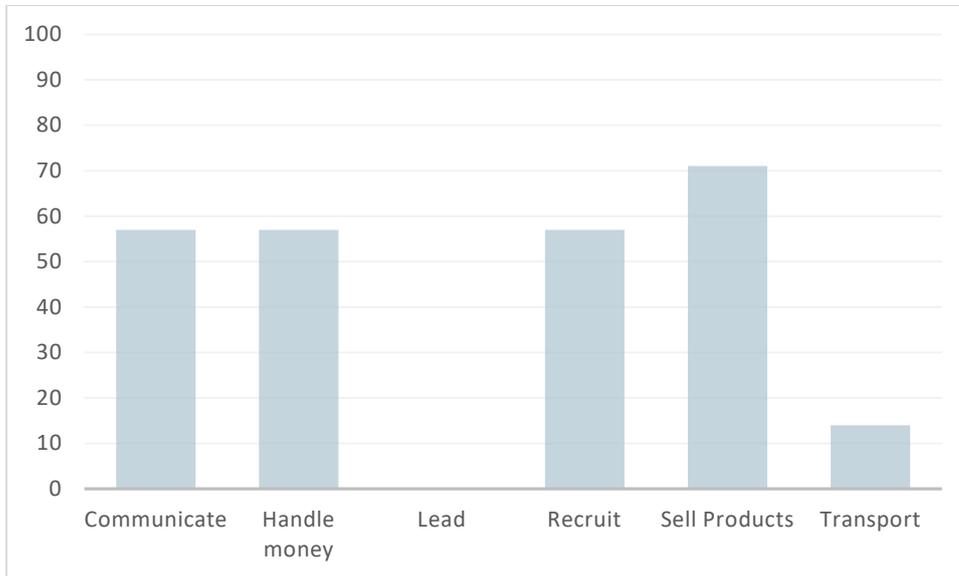


FIGURE 13 - ROLE OF AFRICAN WOMEN ACROSS ALL TOC IN AFRICA

The following sections will further explore the role of African women in specific TOC based on the activities they are more likely to turn to as illustrated under section 3: trafficking in human beings and people smuggling, drug trafficking, terrorism as well as financial crimes and corruption.

5.1. Trafficking in Human Beings, People Smuggling and Crime Against Children

African women’s involvement in trafficking in human beings and people smuggling as well as in crime against children (often related to the first two crimes) has long been known by law enforcement authorities. They are recruiters, supporters, partners-in-crime, “madams” and bosses.³²



FIGURE 14 - AFRICAN WOMEN'S MAIN ROLES IN THB AND PEOPLE SMUGGLING³³

CASE STUDY N° 1

The role of Nigerian women involved as traffickers is well known and documented. Nigerian women act as “madames” and sponsor young Nigerian victims, paying their travel fees or voodoo rituals, and then require that the women work for the “madams” to pay off their debts. In 2019, a French court sentenced 24 members of a Lyon-based sex trafficking ring to prison terms of up to seven years for forcing Nigerian women into prostitution. It included one of Europe’s most wanted women, Jessica Edosomwan, accused of acting as a France-based “madam” to women recruited mainly in Nigeria’s southern Edo State. The offenders faced up to 10 years’ imprisonment on charges including human trafficking, pimping, money laundering and helping people live illegally in France. The victims were mainly women and girls lured to Europe with false promises of jobs as hairdressers or seamstresses, only to find themselves selling sex to repay their smugglers.

Source: The Local, 30 November 2019, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20191130/nigerian-sex-traffickers-jailed-in-france/>, (accessed 3 November 2021).

5.2. Drugs Trafficking

Like any other TOC activity, it is generally considered that drug trafficking organizations are predominantly operated by men and that the role played by women in drug trafficking is relatively insignificant compared with that of their male counterparts.³⁴ The identification of women's role in drug trafficking has only recently become of interest and the data available is rarely disaggregated by gender.³⁵ It is relatively difficult to assess precisely what is the involvement of women in drug cultivation, production and trafficking worldwide and even more so for the African continent. Several case studies in Africa suggest that African women are involved in a varied range of roles along the drug supply chain³⁶.

Cooks and growers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women play managerial and supporting roles in the growing industry• Women work on the plantations• Women are involved in drug production either as a "cooker" or as a supporter
Drug mules	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women smuggle illicit drug across national borders for transnational drug networks• Women more easily evade detection by law enforcement• Easily replaceable
Drugs traffickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women are often professionals in the global transportation business and they collude with OCGs.• Women act as the "middlemen" between the growers/cookers and the dealers
Dealers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women addicts often resort to dealing drugs, particularly when they can no longer support their own addiction• Women are usually low level dealers
Queenpins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women are involved in operational and financial management of local or transnational organized network

FIGURE 15 - AFRICAN WOMEN'S MAIN ROLES IN DRUG TRAFFICKING ³⁷

CASE STUDY N° 2



IMAGE 2 - SHERYL CWELE

In 2011, Sheryl CWELE (f), South African national, was sentenced to 12 years in jail for drug trafficking. The appeal court raised the sentence up to 20 years of prison in 2012. She was found to be the recruiter of women mules to smuggle drugs into the country. She was also found guilty of facilitating the drug distribution. Her role as queen pin in drug trafficking was revealed following the arrest of a female drug mule she had recruited in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It is unusual for high ranking OCG individuals to recruit mules themselves.

Source: Mail & Guardian, “Sheryl Cwele sentence increased to 20 years”, 1 October 2012, <https://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-01-sheryl-cwele-sentence-increased>, (accessed 22 October 2021).

5.3. Financial crimes and corruption

The African Union, in a report published in 2019, recognized that “*Illicit financial flows (IFFs) and corruption have long been at the centre of discussions on development in Africa, particularly due to the existence of a wide consensus on their negative impacts on development financing in Africa*”³⁸. However, the extent of the issue is hard to quantify and obtaining reliable data is particularly challenging in general, let alone obtaining reliable data on the role of women in criminal activities.

Traditionally and globally, women are believed to be less inclined to take part in IFFs and corruption due to them being more averse to taking risks than men but also as these crimes are believed to be mainly committed by people holding position of power either in the private or public sector.³⁹ There is no evidence that women behave differently once they are in the same power position⁴⁰. African women as a group, tend to have relatively less “power” than men, most senior and representation jobs are held by men.⁴¹

Unlike the TOCs previously explored in this assessment, IFFs are not clearly and universally defined. They can include activities that are “illegitimate, while not strictly illegal, as well as activities that go against established rules and norms”⁴². Similarly, actors of financial crimes are numerous and varied as it can be anyone who has been involved with the cross-border transaction of money illegally earned, transferred or spent.

In the course of this analysis, no data was found on the particular role of African women in IFFs and corruption or on the role of women in general in financial crimes⁴³. However, several case studies indicate that African women do play a part in this TOC with examples of corruption, tax evasion and other illicit acts.

CASE STUDY N° 3



IMAGE 7 - MUNACHIM ONYIA

INTERPOL National Central Bureau Abuja and the Nigeria Police Force have declared a businesswoman named Munachim ONYIA (f) as wanted in November 2021 over her involvement in a N5.3 billion (11 362 186EUR) investment fraud, as reported by the Peoples Gazette. Before going at large, Munachim ONYIA had been running MECO Enterprises, a sole proprietorship she registered in September 2018, according to companies' registration files. She also ran IBC Africa, an investment firm, and the eponymous Muna Investment, a Ponzi scheme through which she allegedly swindled unsuspecting investors.

A warrant of arrest was issued for Munachim ONYIA by the Lagos Division of the Federal High Court for obtaining money under false pretence and pretending to be a staff of the Central Bank of Nigeria.

Source: Punch, "Interpol declares businesswoman wanted over alleged N5.3bn fraud", 13 November 2021, <https://punchng.com/interpol-declares-businesswoman-wanted-over-alleged-n5-3bn-fraud-report/2021>, (accessed 15 November 2021).

Conclusions

This assessment provides an overview of women as actors of TOCs in Africa. It uses the available data to analyse whether the recent social and cultural changes observed on the African continent, notably with regard to achieving equality between men and women, are reflected in TOCs and OCGs. The report attempts to use empirical data to assess African women's activities and roles in TOCs.

The analysis examines whether the gender gap can be used to determine the likelihood of African women taking part in TOCs. It finds that although the gender gap in Africa remains one of the lowest in the world, African women are not more likely to participate in criminal activities. The assessment shows that African women are less active in criminal activities than women in any other part of the world despite being less educated and facing higher financial hardship than African men.

The assessment finds common features of African women criminals, where they are on average the same age across the continent and across all types of TOCs. They are also driven by similar motives: lack of education, financial hardship, peer pressure, social context and family responsibilities. These push factors cannot be considered independently as the sole determining factor. Unlike what the stereotyped conception envisaged, African women are not entering into criminal activities due to their relationship as wives, mothers or romantic partners.

African women are compelled by business opportunities when entering into criminal activities and are proportionally turning to the same type of TOCs than African men, regardless of whether they are considered to be violent environments. Available data show that African women offenders continue to represent on average only 10 per cent of the offences committed in TOCs. Although a raising tendency of female criminals' presence might be observed, it needs to be confirmed with additional data. A worldwide recent tendency showing that women are increasing actors of TOCs, is not verifiable for women in Africa.

However, African women may have acquired more predominant roles as illustrated by the length of jail sentences pronounced against African women. African women are sentenced to almost comparable jail times as their male counterparts despite the fact that judicial systems are known to be more lenient with women than with men. The assessment describes the roles in which African female criminals are known to be involved for specific TOCs with the exception of financial crimes and corruption where there is a clear lack of exploitable data.

INTERPOL member countries tend to report data 8 times more on male foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) than on female FTFs worldwide. Once more, women are not necessarily regarded as active or dangerous actors but rather as accomplices or victims of their male counterpart. Yet, women may in some instances receive firearms training, be permitted

to carry arms in public, be issued with suicide bomb vests, undertake roles as teachers or radicalizers and propagandists. Whichever role they partake in, female FTFs actively contribute to the running of terrorist organizations⁴⁴. As of today, specific information on the involvement of African women as terrorist is hardly available.

Similarly, although the involvement of African women in TOC is well known, the lack of gender data collection and input from member countries is highly prejudicial in tackling and preventing TOC. It is also believed that African women criminals are underreported. Law enforcement authorities in Africa lack expertise in gender related matters. Very few mechanisms and instruments to raise awareness are in place on the African continent.

¹ African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, *Africa Gender Index Report 2019, 2020*, <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, (accessed 18 August 2021).

² B. Heilman & G. Barker, *Masculine Norms and Violence: Making the Connections*, Washington, DC, Promundo-US., 2018, <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Masculine-Norms-and-Violence-Making-the-Connection-20180424.pdf>, p.20 (accessed 11 October 2021).

³ Red Notice: To seek the location and arrest of wanted persons wanted for prosecution or to serve a sentence. Blue Notice: To collect additional information about a person's identity, location or activities in relation to a crime. Green Notice: To provide warning about a person's criminal activities, where the person is considered to be a possible threat to public safety. INTERPOL–United Nations Security Council Special Notice: Issued for groups and individuals who are the targets of UN Security Council Sanctions Committees.

⁴ African Development bank group, *Africa Gender Equality Index 2015*, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf, (accessed 17 August 2021).

⁵ R. Smith, *Understanding entrepreneurial behaviour in organized criminals*, Journal of Enterprising Communities People and Places in the Global Economy, August 2009, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/46545214_Understanding_entrepreneurial_behaviour_in_organized_criminal_s, (accessed 20 August 2021).

⁶ *Africa Gender Index Report 2019*, op. cit., <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, (accessed 18 August 2021).

⁷ T.P. Thornberry & M. Farnworth, 'Social correlates of criminal involvement: further evidence on the relationship between social status and criminal behaviour', 1982, cited in D. Weatherburn, 'What causes crime?', *Crime and Justice Bulletin* n°54, February 2001, <https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/CJB/cjb54.pdf>, (accessed 20 August 2021).

⁸ K. Chin & S. Zhang, 'The Chinese heroin trade: Cross-border drug trafficking in Southeast Asia and beyond', 2016, *New York. NYU Press*, chap. 7.

⁹ *Africa Gender Index Report 2019*, op. cit., <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, (accessed 18 August 2021).

¹⁰ World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Index 2017, 2017*, p.18, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf, (accessed 15 August 2021).

¹¹ *Africa Gender Index Report 2019*, op. cit., <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, (accessed 18 August 2021).

¹² *Global Gender Gap Index 2017*, op.cit., https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf, (accessed 15 August 2021).

¹³ Ed. V. Fynn Nruey, *Patriarchy and Gender in Africa*, March 2021, <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781793638564/Patriarchy-and-Gender-in-Africa>, (accessed 10 October 2021).

¹⁴ J. Hicks, *The role of gender in Serious and Organized Crime/Transnational Crime*, March 2021, K4D, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/16554/984_Gender_and_Serious_Organised_Crim_e.pdf?sequence=1, (accessed 25 August 2021).

¹⁵ UNODC, E4J University Module Series: Organized Crime, Module 15: Gender and Organized Crime, <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/organized-crime/module-15/key-issues/gender-and-organized-crime.html>, (accessed 10 November 2021).

¹⁶ *Africa Gender Index Report 2019*, op. cit., <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, (accessed 18 August 2021).

¹⁷ B. Heilman & G. Barker, op.cit., 2018, <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Masculine-Norms-and-Violence-Making-the-Connection-20180424.pdf>, p.20 (accessed 11 October 2021).

¹⁸ N. Campaniello, *Women in Crime*, IZA World of Labor, July 2019, <https://wol.iza.org/articles/women-in-crime/long>; (accessed 19 October 2021).

¹⁹ *Africa Gender Index Report 2019*, op. cit., <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>, p.16, (accessed 25 August 2021).

²⁰ B. Costello & T.Hope, *Peer pressure, peer prevention: The role of friends in crime and conformity, 2016*, US Department of Justice, "Environmental Factors Contribute to Juvenile Crime and Violence (From Juvenile Crime: Opposing Viewpoints)", P 83-89, 1997, A E Sadler, ed. -- See NCJ-167319).

²¹ Fleetwood, J. (2014). *Drug Mules, Women in the international Cocaine Trade*, Palgrave Macmillan.

²² B. Heilman & G. Barker, op.cit., 2018, <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Masculine-Norms-and-Violence-Making-the-Connection-20180424.pdf>, p.20 (accessed 11 October 2021).

²³ Zhang, S., Chin, K. & Miller, J. (2007). Women's participation in Chinese transnational human smuggling: A gendered market perspective, *Criminology*, 45, 3, 699-733.

²⁴ KPMG, *Global profiles of fraudsters*, 2013, <https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/tr/pdf/2017/01/global-profiles-of-the-fraudster-v2.pdf>, (accessed on 10 November 2021).

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- ³¹ Hübschle, op.cit., https://www.mpifg.de/pu/mpifg_ia/TOC_17_2014_Huebschle.pdf (accessed 10 October 2021).
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