



POLICY BRIEF
THE AFRICAN UNION
CONVENTION ON ENDING
VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND
GIRLS

AU-CEVAWG
Toward Comprehensive African
Ratification

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Ganoubia Hora Foundation | June 2026

Target Audience: Civil Society and Human Rights Organizations

I. Executive Summary

In February 2025, the African Union Summit adopted the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG) — the first legally binding continental instrument dedicated exclusively to combating all forms of gender-based violence across Africa. Ganoubia Hora Foundation endorses this Convention as a historic achievement that enshrines Africa's commitment to protecting the dignity of women and girls. This brief examines the Convention's substantive gains, the conditions required for its effective implementation, and offers concrete recommendations to civil society organizations and human rights bodies to maximize its impact and advance broad, urgent ratification by Member States.

II. Introduction and Background

Overview of the Convention

The negotiations leading to the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls were launched in February 2023 by decision of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. In February 2025, the Convention was formally adopted at the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly, making it the first dedicated continental treaty to address violence against women and girls in Africa.

The Convention is organized around four principal objectives: establishing appropriate legislative and institutional environments to end violence; adopting comprehensive preventive measures that engage men, women, and communities in confronting harmful norms; providing integrated support services for survivors and their families; and strengthening enforcement mechanisms in the health and justice sectors.

Why Ganoubia Hora Foundation Acts Now

In May 2026, the African Union launched a strategic roadmap for signature, ratification, domestication, and implementation — making the current moment a critical window of opportunity for civil society to move governments toward immediate ratification. In this same context, Egypt is hosting the 49th Session of the AU Executive Council in El Alamein in June 2026, a landmark event that places Egypt — which has yet to sign the Convention — at the centre of continental affairs. Ganoubia Hora Foundation holds that silence now is complicity, and that the Convention will remain ink on paper unless Egyptian civil society mobilizes to hold its government accountable and accelerate the path to ratification.

III. Key Definitions Established by the Convention

A defining feature of AU-CEVAWG is that it enshrines, for the first time within a binding African continental framework, a set of precise legal definitions that close the door on interpretive ambiguity and bind States to uniform standards. Among the most consequential are:

Violence Against Women and Girls: Any act committed against a woman or girl that causes or may cause her verbal, emotional, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm, including threats of such acts or the arbitrary restriction of fundamental freedoms — whether in public, private, or digital spaces, and in times of peace, armed conflict, or disaster alike.

Femicide: The killing of women and girls on the basis of their gender, including killings by intimate partners, family members, or the community. This marks the first time femicide has been accorded a binding legal definition in an African instrument.

Cyberspace: A digital medium for communication and interaction through globally interconnected systems. The Convention's explicit inclusion of cyberspace criminalizes digital violence against women and obliges States to ensure protection in online environments.

Positive Masculinity: A community-based approach aimed at transforming the mindsets and behaviors of men and boys toward respect for women's rights, equality, non-violence, conflict resolution, and healthy relationships. The inclusion of this concept in a binding instrument represents a paradigm shift — moving beyond the notion of women as victims to be protected, and repositioning men as active partners in the architecture of protection.

Survivor-Centred Approach: Placing the rights and dignity of survivors — including their safety and well-being — at the heart of all efforts to prevent and respond to violence, without discrimination. This definition obligates States to make the survivor, rather than bureaucratic procedure, the axis of every intervention.

Women and Girls' Human Rights Defender: Any citizen of a State Party who, individually or in solidarity with others, seeks to promote and protect human rights at the local, national, regional, or international level. By incorporating this definition, the Convention compels States to protect women human rights defenders — not to prosecute them.

Analytical Note: The Convention's expansion of the definition of violence to encompass economic harm and cyberspace, and its inclusion of femicide and positive masculinity as binding legal concepts, renders it more comprehensive than the Maputo Protocol and CEDAW in these specific respects — and it is precisely this that equips Egyptian civil society with new legal tools previously unavailable.

IV. Analytical Assessment — Gains and Opportunities

Pillar One: A Binding and Comprehensive Legal Framework

For the first time in the continent's history, Africa possesses a legally binding instrument that addresses all forms of violence against women and girls without exception. This all-encompassing character differs fundamentally from prior frameworks, which were either voluntary or too narrow to cover the full spectrum of violence. Under the Convention, States assume explicit legal obligations in the areas of legislation and public policy — obligations that give civil society an effective monitoring and accountability lever.

Pillar Two: Prevention-Centred and Social Dimensions

The Convention moves decisively beyond the classical remedial approach toward a comprehensive preventive model. States are required to engage families, communities, and cultural and religious institutions in transforming harmful social norms and promoting gender equality. This orientation implicitly recognizes that violence is not an individual phenomenon but a structural and cultural failure demanding an integrated societal response.

States are further required to collect data disaggregated by sex and age, which will produce a reliable continental knowledge base that anchors policy-making in evidence rather than conjecture.

Pillar Three: Unprecedented Political and Rights-Based Opportunities

The Convention envisions an integrated response ecosystem encompassing emergency services for survivors and their families, psychosocial support programs for both survivors and perpetrators, and reinforced judicial enforcement mechanisms. This integrated architecture enables civil society to press governments to translate every provision into nationally funded, accountable programs.

V. Conditions for Success and Challenges

Potential Obstacles

- **Slow ratification:** Only a handful of States have signed to date, while the Convention requires ratification by at least fifteen States to enter into force.
- **Implementation gaps:** The distance between the legal text and effective application remains a central concern, particularly in the absence of clear enforcement and accountability mechanisms.
- **Financing challenges:** Implementation demands significant human and financial resources that weaker States may be unable to mobilize without regional and international support.
- **Participation deficits:** A number of specialists have raised concerns about the limited engagement of African feminist movements during the drafting phase — gaps that must be addressed in the implementation process.

Pathways to Overcoming These Challenges

- Build cross-border civil society coalitions to generate coordinated pressure on governments.
- Engage with AU regional mechanisms to monitor progress on signature and ratification.
- Document individual cases that embody the necessity of the Convention and channel them to decision-makers.
- Work with international partners to link development financing to ratification and implementation commitments.

VI. Recommendations and Policy Options

As of late 2025, only seven African States had signed the Convention and none had ratified it, while ratification by fifteen States is required for entry into force. Egypt — absent thus far from the list of signatories — carries sufficient political and historical weight that its signature and ratification would send a powerful continental signal. Ganoubi Hora Foundation recalls that Egypt is hosting the 49th Session of the AU Executive Council in El Alamein in June 2026, an exceptional opportunity to announce its signature before the continent.

First: To the Egyptian Government — Core Demands

- Sign the Convention at the forthcoming AU Executive Council Session in El Alamein in June 2026, and announce a national ratification roadmap within one year.
- Undertake a review of the national legislative framework (Penal Code, Personal Status Law, Child Law) and amend provisions that conflict with the Convention's articles prior to ratification.
- Mandate the National Council for Women to develop a comprehensive national implementation plan that translates each article of the Convention into funded, measurable programs.
- Allocate dedicated budget lines for survivor support services — emergency response, psychosocial counselling, safe shelters — in the national general budget.

- Establish a joint coordination mechanism across the Ministries of Justice, Health, Social Solidarity, and Interior to ensure an integrated institutional response to cases of violence.

Second: To Egyptian Civil Society and Human Rights Organizations

- Unite efforts in a national coalition that pressures the Egyptian government to sign, while submitting formal memoranda to the National Council for Women and Parliament.
- Document cases of violence against women in Egypt and link them to Convention standards, to demonstrate the gap between prevailing realities and what the Convention requires.
- Leverage Egypt's hosting of AU meetings in El Alamein in June 2026 to organize parallel advocacy events that deliver a pressure message to the public and officials.
- Involve women survivors of violence in media campaigns and advocacy, to shift the debate from arid legal discourse to the compelling human register.

Third: To the African Union and Its Institutions

- Provide direct technical support to Egypt to facilitate the review of its national legislation and expedite the ratification process.
- Activate the strategic roadmap launched in May 2026 with binding timelines and transparent monitoring mechanisms for each Member State.
- Link continental development support to signature and ratification commitments, in order to strengthen incentives for States that remain hesitant.

VII. Conclusion

The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls represents a watershed moment in the history of women's rights on the African continent. Yet conventions do not protect by virtue of being signed; they protect through ratification, domestication, and the accountability of governments for their implementation. Ganoubia Hora Foundation calls on all civil society organizations and human rights defenders to transform this historic instrument from a legal text into real and lasting change in the lives of millions of African women and girls. Our commitment endures until every State ratifies, and until every woman is protected.

References and Sources

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- 4:** Legal Analysis of the African Union Convention, aucevawg.org, 2025.
- 5:** Full Text of the Convention, African Union Archive (au.int), 2024–2025.