

## REPORT

### Youth Workshop on Illicit Trade and Trafficking and its Impact on the AfCFTA, Peace and Security in Southern Africa

October 9–10, 2024 | African Union, APRM | Johannesburg, South Africa

Prepared by: Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on AfCFTA (ICOYACA), APRM, UNODC

#### Executive Summary

The "Youth Workshop on Illicit Trade and Trafficking and its Impact on the AfCFTA, Peace and Security in Southern Africa" convened 55 dynamic young leaders—youth traders, youth-led NGOs, grassroots mobilizers, and representatives of cross-border trader groups—from ten Southern African countries and South Africa on October 9-10, 2024, at the African Union, APRM in Johannesburg. Co-hosted by ICOYACA, APRM, and UNODC, the event empowered youth with strategic knowledge, advocacy tools, and networks needed to champion collective efforts against illicit trade. Through expert-led sessions, group exercises, and actionable outcomes, participants developed country-specific plans and strong partnerships, marking a significant step forward toward safer, legal, and more inclusive cross-border trade under AfCFTA.

#### Introduction and Background

Illicit trade—including trafficking of goods, corruption, money laundering, and counterfeit products—remains a substantial barrier to economic stability, regional integration and sustainable development in Southern Africa. While the AfCFTA opens unprecedented trade and business opportunities for young Africans, the persistence of these illegal activities threatens peace, undermines public trust, and diverts resources away from youth livelihoods and national progress. Recognizing youth as both at-risk and as critical agents of change, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), African Union's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and ICOYACA collaborated to deliver this high-impact, capacity-building workshop to transform youth engagement on this vital issue.

#### Methodology

The workshop employed an interactive, participatory format designed to maximize learning and impact. Delegates were selected for their leadership in youth trading, civil society and grassroots mobilization, ensuring diverse perspectives and contexts. The event combined plenary sessions, expert lectures, panel discussions, breakout group activities, case studies, and country-level action planning. Representatives from UNODC, APRM, ICOYACA, cross-border trader associations, and academic partners provided technical facilitation. Immediate feedback and evaluation were incorporated to further tailor content and capture participant experiences.

#### Event Highlights (Photo Gallery)



#### Detailed Description of Workshop Proceedings

Over two days, participants engaged in eight thematic modules anchored in real-world scenarios:

- Welcome & Opening:** Opening remarks by representatives of ICOYACA, APRM, UNODC, AU Southern Africa Regional Office, and South Africa's National Youth Development Agency outlined the workshop's significance and established expected outcomes.
- Illicit Trade Concepts:** Expert-led sessions covered definitions, trends, and the impact of illicit trade, trafficking, money laundering, and informal trade, with special focus on risks facing youth participants in the AfCFTA era.
- The Dark Side of Trade:** Plenaries explored how organized crime and smuggling destabilize economies and erode peace, including country case studies and risk-mapping exercises led by UNODC, UNCTAD, and Institute for Security Studies.
- Corruption and Financial Crime:** Presentations highlighted the mechanisms of corruption perpetuating illicit trade and demonstrated tools for tracking and reporting trade-based money laundering and terrorist financing.
- Township Economies and Cross-border Trade:** Panel discussions featured youth experiences from Malawi, Zambia, Eswatini, and South Africa, sharing grassroots innovations and local challenges in the township context.
- Action Planning:** Youth worked in mixed-country groups to analyze local challenges and devise country-specific action plans aimed at raising awareness, preventing illicit trade, and empowering their networks on solutions.
- Plenary Presentation & Feedback:** Groups presented their plans, received feedback from facilitators, and refined their approaches for real-world implementation.
- Awards & Closure:** Certificates were presented to all participants; final evaluations and group photographs concluded the workshop.

#### Key Discussions and Insights

- The critical role of youth as bridge-builders between trade policy and community action in curbing illicit trade.
- Dangers of informal border trade being infiltrated by organized crime, and the need for vigilance, accurate data, and advocacy by youth leaders.
- The often-overlooked intersection of gender, youth, and vulnerability to cross-border crime.
- The effectiveness of practical tools (e.g., reporting mechanisms, anti-corruption platforms) and the power of country-driven grassroots campaigns.
- Importance of pan-African and global partnerships for capacity building and joint advocacy, especially in border regions.

#### Participant Demographics

The workshop hosted 55 participants: 3 youth delegates each from Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and 15 from South Africa. These young leaders represented a diverse blend of youth traders, youth-led NGOs, grassroots mobilizers, and cross-border trader organizations, ensuring regional equity and sectoral reach.

Country	No. Participants	Delegation Type Examples
Angola	3	Youth trader, grassroots NGO, cross-border trade rep
Botswana	3	Youth trader, youth-led NGO, mobilizer
Eswatini	3	Youth trader, NGO rep, border youth group
Lesotho	3	Youth trader, women's empowerment group, NGO
Malawi	3	Micro-trader, youth-led trade association, mobilizer
Mozambique	3	Market trader, NGO leader, border representative
Namibia	3	Trader, civil society, youth group
Zambia	3	Cross-border trader, mobilizer, NGO
Zimbabwe	3	Trader, innovator, grassroots rep
South Africa	15	Youth traders, youth NGOs, border youth, mobilizers
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	

#### Outcomes and Action Plans

- Country-level teams developed tailored action plans addressing awareness campaigns, reporting solutions, and capacity-building workshops to be cascaded into their communities.
- Commitments secured to continue dialogue with local authorities and security actors on border and trading area risks.
- Youth-led monitoring teams created WhatsApp/Telegram groups for rapid information exchange about suspicious border activity or criminal trends.
- Policy briefs summarizing workshop insights delivered collectively to APRM and AU regional officers for onward sharing with policymakers.
- Several grassroots participants pledged to organize follow-up peer-learning events in the first quarter of 2025, leveraging workshop toolkits.

#### Participant Testimonials

##### Nonkululeko Dlamini, Eswatini:

"Bringing together youth from across borders was a game-changer! My network grew, my perspective on trade shifted, and I left with actionable ideas I've already started implementing at home."

##### Vimbainashe Mudzimurema, Zimbabwe:

"The expert facilitation and real case studies gave us the confidence and clarity to take on cross-border crime in meaningful ways. I feel equipped—finally—to be both advocate and watchdog for safe trade."

##### Kgalemang Vivian Boza, Botswana:

"I was inspired by the passion in the room and by learning what works in different countries. This workshop has sparked stronger bonds across our region—and a commitment to fighting crime through youth leadership."

#### Impact Assessment

- Over three-quarters of participants indicated through post-workshop polls that their understanding and confidence to address illicit trade risks had "greatly improved."
- Early data from WhatsApp action group and local reporting reflect an uptick in cross-country knowledge exchange and peer-led vigilance.
- Teams reported wider local community engagement on these topics, especially for young women traders who are disproportionately at risk.
- Increased collaboration with local law enforcement and border officials reported in South Africa, Eswatini, and Malawi.

#### Challenges Encountered

- Varied access to digital reporting tools and internet connectivity hindered real-time communication for some remote participants.
- Language barriers led to a need for enhanced translation support during group exercises, but this was largely overcome through peer assistance.
- Some country teams reported insecurity or reluctance to immediately approach authorities due to prior negative experiences—trust building remains an ongoing need.

#### Recommendations for Future Events

- Expand translation and digital resources to ensure all youth can participate equitably, including those in remote border zones.
- Engage local resource persons as co-facilitators to deepen credibility and reduce language/cultural barriers.
- Formalize mentorship or peer-learning follow-up programs to maintain collaboration and skills transfer beyond the workshop.
- Continue documenting and widely sharing real-world case studies from diverse youth leaders across Africa to inspire future solutions.
- Develop government engagement toolkits outlining safe, structured protocols for youth reporting of illicit trade.

#### Conclusion

The Youth Workshop on Illicit Trade and Trafficking powerfully illustrated the collective potential of Southern African youth to move beyond awareness-raising into structured, regional action against illicit trade and associated crimes. By strengthening capacity, forging partnerships, and mobilizing diverse youth actors, the event advanced continental ambitions for dignified work, economic justice, and sustainable peace within the AfCFTA era. As these leaders implement their plans and strengthen community resilience, ICOYACA, APRM, and UNODC remain committed to supporting this dynamic, youth-driven movement against illicit trade across Africa.