

MAINSTREAMING SOCIAL WORK INTO THE AFRICAN UNION'S PEACE AND SECURITY FRAMEWORK: A HUMAN-CENTRED POLICY APPROACH TO CONFLICT PREVENTION

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Abstract

The changing character of conflict in Africa increasingly exposes the limitations of security approaches that concentrate predominantly on military responses, while insufficiently addressing the social conditions that generate vulnerability, exclusion, displacement, mistrust and recurrent violence. Social work, with its professional emphasis on human dignity, social justice, community participation, protection, psychosocial wellbeing and institutional inclusion, possesses capabilities that are relevant to conflict prevention but remain insufficiently integrated into continental peace and security policy. This paper examines the rationale for mainstreaming social work into the African Union's peace and security framework as a human-centred policy approach to conflict prevention. It adopts a qualitative documentary research design based on African Union, United Nations, Economic Community of West African States, International Federation of Social Workers and other institutional and scholarly sources published between 2021 and 2026. The study is guided by the Human Security Approach and Ecological Systems Theory. It examines the relationship between social conditions and conflict prevention, reviews European and African experiences, and considers the relevance of social work to the African Peace and Security Architecture and regional mechanisms. The analysis indicates that social workers can contribute to early identification of community-level tensions, social cohesion, protection of vulnerable populations, psychosocial recovery, mediation, reintegration and locally grounded prevention. The paper proposes an African Social Work and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming Framework centred on policy recognition, professional capacity, early-warning integration and community-based peacebuilding. It recommends institutionalising social work within relevant African Union peace and security mechanisms while strengthening regional and national implementation capacities.

Keywords: Social Work; African Union; Peace and Security; Conflict Prevention; Human Security; Peacebuilding

1.0 Background to the Study

Peace and security policy has increasingly moved beyond the exclusive management of armed violence towards approaches that recognise the social, political, economic and institutional conditions in which insecurity develops. Contemporary conflicts are frequently interconnected with displacement, exclusion, inequality, weak institutions, competition over resources, identity-based grievances and diminished access to essential services. Consequently, prevention requires more than responding after violence has become visible; it requires identifying social vulnerabilities and strengthening relationships and institutions before tensions escalate (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2024; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2024).

The human-centred character of prevention has also gained attention in international peace and security thinking. The Human Security Approach places individuals and communities at the centre of security analysis and connects protection from violence with livelihood, dignity, social inclusion and access to essential services. Recent work on African Union (AU) peace support operations similarly argues for stronger attention to civilian realities, local actors and the social dimensions of insecurity (Kukkuk & Debebe, 2024; United Nations Human Security Unit, 2024).

Social work is relevant to this policy transition because the profession operates at the intersection of individuals, families, communities and institutions. Contemporary social work scholarship associates professional practice in conflict settings with protection, psychosocial support, advocacy, community engagement, reconciliation and the restoration of social relationships. Recent international literature further demonstrates that social workers operate in environments affected by war, political conflict, displacement and structural violence, although their role is not always incorporated into formal peace and security architecture (Ioakimidis et al., 2024; Zaviršek, 2024; Ramon & Zaviršek, 2025).

European experiences provide useful illustrations. In divided Cyprus, social workers have been examined as actors capable of contributing to peacebuilding and reconciliation across politically separated communities, particularly through social services, professional dialogue and engagement with communities affected by long-term division (Ioakimidis et al., 2024). In Ukraine, social workers and professional associations have operated within a context of displacement, destruction and prolonged conflict, demonstrating the relevance of social work to humanitarian response, community resilience and the protection of vulnerable populations during war (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2025).

The European experience also illustrates that social work can encounter tensions when prevention activities become excessively securitised. Research involving Norwegian social workers, for example, identifies professional dilemmas arising when social workers participate in multi-agency efforts to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. Such experiences suggest that mainstreaming social work into security policy should preserve professional ethics, human rights, confidentiality and a welfare-oriented understanding of vulnerability rather than transform social workers into security agents (Haugstvedt & Gunnarsdottir, 2023).

Within Africa, the relationship between social conditions and peace and security is particularly significant. Agenda 2063 connects peace and security with governance, social protection, human development, youth empowerment, gender equality and participatory development. Its peace and security aspiration also envisages dialogue-centred conflict prevention and functional continental mechanisms for preventing and resolving conflicts (African Union [AU], 2024a).

The AU Peace and Security Council (PSC), Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), Panel of the Wise and related mechanisms constitute important components of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). The AU's conflict prevention arrangements emphasise early warning, dialogue, mediation and preventive action. However, the institutional architecture has traditionally relied heavily on political, diplomatic, security and military actors, leaving scope for a more systematic incorporation of social-work knowledge concerning households, communities, vulnerable groups and local social dynamics (AU, 2025a).

Recent African experiences demonstrate why this additional professional perspective matters. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), social workers have been identified as actors involved in protecting women, children and older persons, facilitating community dialogue and supporting recovery in conflict-affected communities (IFSW, 2024). In Cameroon, research

on internally displaced persons identifies social work as relevant to addressing human-rights needs and supporting affected populations in conflict-affected regions (Acha-Anyi, 2024).

Nigeria provides another relevant illustration. Recent Nigerian studies have identified social workers as potential contributors to peaceful coexistence, conflict management, psychosocial support and the protection of persons affected by insurgency and political violence (Atere et al., 2024; Onalu et al., 2023). Research on social work education in Nigeria has also identified the need to strengthen conflict-management content and incorporate indigenous approaches into professional preparation (Onalu et al., 2023).

In West Africa, the case for a stronger social dimension to conflict prevention is reinforced by the interaction between violent extremism, political instability, displacement, poverty, social exclusion and community-level insecurity. ECOWAS has developed early-warning, humanitarian, peace and security mechanisms, while recent AU–ECOWAS cooperation has sought to strengthen information sharing and coordination between CEWS and the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) (Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS], 2026a).

The ECOWAS experience also explicitly incorporates human security and protection within its regional security arrangements, including attention to women, children and vulnerable groups. This creates a policy space within which social work could complement existing early-warning, humanitarian, mediation and peacebuilding mechanisms without creating a parallel security structure (ECOWAS, 2024).

The central policy issue is therefore not whether social work can replace diplomacy, policing, military operations or political mediation. Rather, it is whether the AU can systematically incorporate the profession's human-centred knowledge into existing peace and security mechanisms. This study addresses that question by examining how social work can be mainstreamed into the AU's peace and security framework as a preventive, community-sensitive and rights-based policy resource.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Africa continues to face complex peace and security challenges in which armed violence interacts with displacement, poverty, social exclusion, weak institutional trust, youth vulnerability and disruption of essential services. Contemporary prevention mechanisms have expanded their emphasis on early warning and mediation, yet the social conditions experienced by individuals and communities are not always systematically integrated into security decision-making (AU, 2025a; UNDP, 2024).

The problem is particularly important because conflict often develops through gradual deterioration in social relationships, community trust, access to services and perceptions of exclusion before reaching the threshold of organised violence. Recent evidence from Nigeria demonstrates the value of local early-warning and early-response arrangements that bring communities and institutions together to identify and address emerging tensions (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2024).

Social workers possess professional competencies that are relevant to these preventive spaces, including social assessment, community engagement, psychosocial intervention, child and family protection, advocacy, referral, mediation and work with vulnerable populations. Nevertheless, their contribution remains more visible in humanitarian and social-service responses than in formal continental peace and security policy. Recent social work literature has similarly called attention to the profession's role in peacebuilding while recognising the limited institutional integration of that role within conventional security structures (Uchegbu, 2025; IFSW, 2025).

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the policy gap between the capabilities of social work and its limited institutional recognition within the AU peace and security architecture. The study examines how social work can be incorporated into existing continental and regional mechanisms, what professional functions are most relevant to prevention, what institutional constraints may arise, and what policy framework could facilitate effective mainstreaming.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the mainstreaming of social work into the African Union's peace and security framework as a human-centred approach to conflict prevention.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine the conceptual and policy relationship between social work, human security and conflict prevention within the African Union framework.
- ii. Assess the potential contributions of social work to early warning, social cohesion, protection, mediation and community-based peacebuilding in Africa.
- iii. Analyse the institutional opportunities and constraints associated with mainstreaming social work into African peace and security mechanisms.
- iv. Propose a strategic policy framework for integrating social work into the African Union's conflict-prevention architecture.

4.0 Research Questions

- i. What is the conceptual and policy relationship between social work, human security and conflict prevention within the African Union framework?
- ii. How can social work contribute to early warning, social cohesion, protection, mediation and community-based peacebuilding in Africa?
- iii. What institutional opportunities and constraints affect the mainstreaming of social work into African peace and security mechanisms?
- iv. What strategic policy framework can facilitate the integration of social work into the African Union's conflict-prevention architecture?

5.0 Conceptual Clarification

5.1 Social Work

Social work is understood in this study as a professional field concerned with human wellbeing, social justice, rights, relationships, community participation and the interaction between individuals and their social environments. In conflict settings, contemporary scholarship associates social work with protection, psychosocial support, community engagement, advocacy, reconciliation and recovery (Acha-Anyi, 2024; Završek, 2024).

5.2 African Union Peace and Security Framework

The AU peace and security framework refers to the institutional and policy arrangements through which the Union seeks to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and promote stability. It includes the PSC, CEWS, Panel of the Wise and other elements of APSA and operates in interaction with Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms (AU, 2025a).

5.3 Mainstreaming Social Work

Mainstreaming social work refers to the systematic incorporation of social-work perspectives, professional competencies and appropriately defined roles into existing peace and security policies, institutions and programmes. It does not imply creating a separate security structure or transforming social workers into military or intelligence personnel. Rather, it involves integrating social assessment, protection, community engagement, psychosocial support and social-cohesion functions into appropriate stages of prevention and peacebuilding.

5.4 Human-Centred Policy Approach

A human-centred policy approach places people, communities, dignity, rights, livelihoods and wellbeing at the centre of policy design and implementation. The Human Security Approach similarly emphasises survival, livelihood and dignity and promotes integrated, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses to complex insecurity (United Nations Human Security Unit, 2024).

5.5 Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention refers to policies and interventions designed to identify, reduce and manage conditions that may escalate into violent conflict. Within the African context, prevention includes early warning, dialogue, mediation, community engagement and addressing structural and immediate drivers of insecurity (AU, 2025a; UNDP, 2024).

6.0 Theoretical Framework

6.1 Human Security Approach

The Human Security Approach provides the principal theoretical lens for this study because it shifts attention from the protection of institutions and territory alone towards the security and dignity of people. Recent African policy work argues that human security can provide a stronger foundation for AU peace support operations by increasing attention to civilians, local actors, social conditions and the legitimacy of peace interventions (Kukkuk & Debebe, 2024).

The approach is particularly relevant to social work because social workers routinely assess insecurity at the level of individuals, families and communities. It therefore provides a conceptual bridge between social policy and peace and security policy. Within this study, human security explains why conflict prevention should consider not only the immediate presence of violence but also social exclusion, displacement, vulnerability, inadequate services, threats to dignity and weakened community relationships.

6.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory provides a complementary social-work lens by understanding individuals as embedded within interconnected family, community, institutional and wider social environments. Contemporary social-work scholarship continues to use ecological and systems perspectives to examine how multiple levels of social conditions interact and create opportunities or vulnerabilities for individuals and communities (Lee et al., 2023).

Applied to conflict prevention, the theory suggests that violent conflict cannot always be understood exclusively at the level of the individual perpetrator or armed organisation. Household relationships, community structures, service institutions, governance arrangements and broader political and economic environments can interact to produce or reduce insecurity. The theory therefore supports the incorporation of social workers into preventive systems capable of observing and responding to these interconnected layers.

7.0 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design. It draws on AU and ECOWAS policy documents, United Nations publications, IFSW materials, recent peer-reviewed scholarship and relevant institutional reports published between 2021 and 2026. The documentary

material was thematically analysed around four areas: the relationship between social work and human-centred security; the contribution of social work to conflict prevention; institutional opportunities and constraints; and policy options for mainstreaming social work into African peace and security mechanisms.

The study uses documentary interpretation rather than primary field data. European examples are examined for transferable policy lessons, while African and West African cases provide contextual grounding for the proposed framework. Particular attention is given to recent evidence from Cyprus, Ukraine, the DRC, Cameroon, Nigeria and ECOWAS-related prevention mechanisms (Ioakimidis et al., 2024; IFSW, 2024, 2025; Acha-Anyi, 2024; ECOWAS, 2026a).

The analysis distinguishes between established institutional mandates, documented professional practice and the author's policy propositions. The proposed framework is consequently presented as a policy model derived from documentary analysis rather than as evidence of an already established AU programme.

8.0 Social Work and the African Union's Peace and Security Agenda

The AU's peace and security agenda is embedded within a broader development framework. Agenda 2063 connects peace and security with inclusive development, social protection, human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment and participatory governance. This integrated orientation creates conceptual space for professions whose work addresses social vulnerability and community wellbeing (AU, 2024a). The AU's prevention architecture is also increasingly concerned with early identification of conflict risks. CEWS and the AU's Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division are designed to provide timely information to decision-makers and support preventive action (AU, 2025a).

Social workers could complement these mechanisms by providing structured information concerning community-level social pressures that may not be adequately captured through conventional political or security indicators. These may include displacement, family fragmentation, youth exclusion, deterioration of community trust, protection concerns, service-access inequalities and emerging disputes. Such information would not replace intelligence or political analysis; it would provide an additional social lens for preventive assessment. This possibility is consistent with recent human-security approaches to AU peace operations, which call for stronger engagement with civil society and local actors. The relevance of such engagement arises from the fact that communities experience conflict through changes in livelihoods, relationships, safety, access to services and social identity as much as through direct physical violence (Kukkuk & Debebe, 2024).

9.0 European Experiences and Lessons for African Policy

9.1 Social Work and Peacebuilding in Divided Cyprus

The experience of Cyprus demonstrates the potential contribution of social work to peacebuilding in societies characterised by long-term political and communal division. Research involving social workers from both sides of the divide identifies professional engagement with perceptions of the 'other', reconciliation and social services within a post-conflict environment (Ioakimidis et al., 2024). The lesson for African policy is that social services can constitute spaces for rebuilding relationships where political divisions have become embedded within everyday community life. Social work can therefore contribute to peace not only through formal mediation but also through sustained engagement with families, children, communities and institutions affected by division.

9.2 Social Work, War and Community Protection in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine illustrates another dimension of social work in conflict environments. IFSW Europe has documented the continuing engagement of social workers and professional associations with communities experiencing displacement, destruction and social disruption (IFSW, 2025). Recent European social-work literature similarly demonstrates the growing significance of professional knowledge for societies experiencing war and post-war recovery (Ramon & Zaviršek, 2025).

The African lesson is not to replicate European institutional arrangements mechanically. Rather, it demonstrates that social work can remain relevant during active conflict, displacement and recovery while preserving a professional emphasis on protection, dignity, community resilience and social justice.

10.0 African Context: Social Work and Conflict Prevention

10.1 Protection and Social Recovery in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The DRC illustrates the interaction between armed violence and social vulnerability. IFSW reporting identifies social workers as contributing to the protection and empowerment of women, children and older persons while supporting dialogue, recovery and community resilience in conflict-affected areas (IFSW, 2024). The experience suggests that social work can provide an important interface between affected populations and wider peacebuilding processes. Its contribution lies particularly in identifying social needs, protecting vulnerable groups and maintaining community relationships during periods when formal institutions are under pressure.

10.2 Internally Displaced Persons and Social Work in Cameroon

Research from Cameroon demonstrates the relevance of social work to the human-rights needs of internally displaced persons affected by conflict. Displacement disrupts family structures, livelihoods, access to services and community relationships, requiring interventions that extend beyond immediate humanitarian relief (Acha-Anyi, 2024).

For the AU, this has implications for conflict prevention because displacement is both an outcome of violence and a factor that can intensify social pressure in receiving communities. Social workers can contribute to protection, referral, family support, community integration and identification of emerging tensions associated with displacement.

10.3 Nigeria and the Professionalisation of Conflict Management

Nigerian research provides direct evidence of the profession's relevance to peace and conflict management. Studies involving social workers have identified trust-building, justice, fairness and equity as areas through which social work can contribute to peaceful coexistence in contexts affected by separatist agitation (Atere et al., 2024).

Similarly, research on social work education in Nigeria identifies conflict management as an area requiring continuing professional development and stronger incorporation of indigenous approaches to conflict resolution (Onalu et al., 2023). These findings suggest that mainstreaming at the continental level should be accompanied by professional education, because policy recognition without adequate competencies could expose practitioners and communities to avoidable risks.

11.0 Social Work and Conflict Prevention in West Africa

West Africa provides a particularly important context for examining the proposed integration. The region faces interconnected challenges involving violent extremism, political instability, organised crime, displacement, poverty and social exclusion. Regional prevention mechanisms therefore increasingly require cooperation between political, security, humanitarian and community actors (ECOWAS, 2026a; UNDP, 2024).

The recent AU–ECOWAS technical engagement on CEWS and ECOWARN demonstrates a growing emphasis on coordinated early warning and conflict prevention. The process involves information sharing, joint conflict analysis and governance monitoring, illustrating the importance of connecting continental and regional prevention systems (ECOWAS, 2026a).

Social work could add value to such mechanisms by developing structured community-level social indicators. These could include changes in displacement patterns, family separation, youth vulnerability, protection concerns, service exclusion, community mistrust and local disputes. The objective would not be to convert social workers into intelligence collectors, but to establish ethical channels through which relevant social information can contribute to preventive analysis.

The Nigerian experience also demonstrates the potential value of community-level early warning. A United Nations-supported initiative in Kaduna and Katsina States recorded locally reported cases and facilitated their resolution through community collaboration, illustrating how locally anchored prevention can address tensions before escalation (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2024).

The ECOWAS human-security mechanism provides another institutional entry point. Its emphasis on protection and the rights of women, children and vulnerable groups demonstrates that regional security policy already possesses components compatible with social-work practice (ECOWAS, 2024).

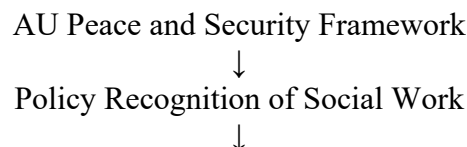
12.0 Proposed African Social Work and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming Framework

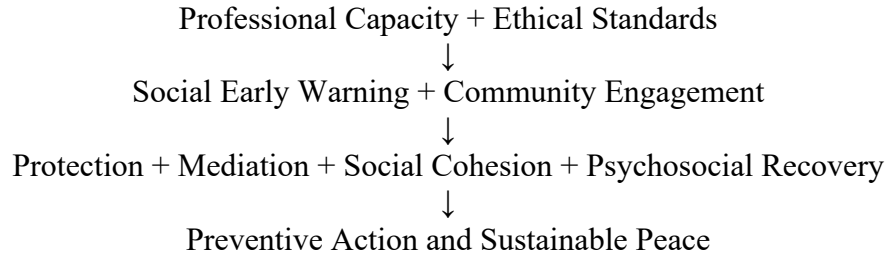
This study proposes an African Social Work and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming Framework (ASW-CPMF) to integrate social-work competencies into existing AU and regional peace and security mechanisms. The framework is not intended to create a parallel security institution. Instead, it proposes structured professional participation within existing prevention, early-warning, peacebuilding, protection and recovery arrangements.

The framework comprises four interconnected pillars:

- i. **Policy recognition and institutional integration:** The AU should formally recognise relevant social-work functions within conflict prevention and peacebuilding policies and mechanisms.
- ii. **Professional capacity and ethical preparedness:** Social workers should receive specialised preparation in conflict sensitivity, mediation, early warning, psychosocial support, protection, human rights and culturally responsive practice.
- iii. **Social early warning and community engagement:** Social-work practitioners should contribute ethically collected community-level information to existing early-warning and preventive mechanisms.
- iv. **Community peacebuilding, protection and recovery:** Social workers should be integrated into appropriate peacebuilding, displacement, reintegration, reconciliation and post-conflict recovery programmes.

Figure 1. African Social Work and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming Framework





Source: Author's conceptualisation, informed by AU (2024a, 2025a), Kukuk and Debebe (2024), ECOWAS (2024, 2026a), and IFSW (2024, 2025).

The framework should operate through existing institutions and mechanisms. At continental level, relevant AU peace and security structures could establish appropriate professional interfaces with social-work associations, universities and civil-society organisations. At regional level, Regional Economic Communities could incorporate social-work expertise within existing prevention and humanitarian mechanisms. At national level, governments could strengthen professional deployment in conflict-sensitive locations.

The framework also requires ethical safeguards. Social workers should not be required to perform intelligence or coercive security functions that conflict with professional ethics. Their role should remain centred on social assessment, protection, referral, dialogue, community engagement and wellbeing, with information-sharing governed by applicable law and professional standards.

13.0 Discussion of Findings

The documentary evidence demonstrates that social work possesses several capabilities relevant to contemporary conflict prevention. These include community engagement, protection of vulnerable populations, psychosocial intervention, social assessment, advocacy, mediation and support for social cohesion. Evidence from Europe, Africa and Nigeria indicates that these functions are already being performed in conflict and post-conflict environments, although they are not consistently incorporated into formal peace and security architecture (Ioakimidis et al., 2024; Acha-Anyi, 2024; Atere et al., 2024).

The findings also indicate that human security provides a strong conceptual bridge between social work and peace and security policy. The Human Security Approach recognises that insecurity can arise from threats to dignity, livelihood, protection and social wellbeing, thereby widening the analytical field beyond armed confrontation (United Nations Human Security Unit, 2024; Kukuk & Debebe, 2024).

A further finding is that mainstreaming social work should be preventive rather than merely reactive. Existing AU and ECOWAS systems already prioritise early warning, conflict prevention and coordinated response. Integrating social-work perspectives could strengthen the social dimension of these systems by improving understanding of community vulnerabilities and emerging social tensions (AU, 2025a; ECOWAS, 2026a).

The evidence nevertheless identifies important institutional constraints. Social workers may lack specialised training for conflict environments, while security institutions may lack established procedures for using social-work expertise. There is also a risk that excessive securitisation could compromise professional ethics and community trust, as illustrated by research on social workers involved in violent-extremism prevention in Norway (Haugstvedt & Gunnarsdottir, 2023).

The findings consequently support a gradual institutional approach. Mainstreaming should not mean assigning security functions to social workers. It should mean recognising their distinct

professional contribution and establishing structured interfaces between social policy, community practice and existing peace and security institutions.

14.0 Recommendations

Recommendation One

The African Union should formally recognise social work as a relevant professional resource within its conflict-prevention and human-security policy framework.

Implementation Strategies

- i. African Union Commission to develop policy guidance defining appropriate social-work functions within APSA prevention and peacebuilding mechanisms.
- ii. African Union Peace and Security Council Secretariat to include social-work expertise in relevant policy consultations on human security, community resilience and conflict prevention.

Recommendation Two

The African Union and Regional Economic Communities should strengthen the professional capacity of social workers for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Implementation Strategies

- i. African Union Commission to collaborate with social-work professional bodies and universities to develop continental training standards on conflict-sensitive social work.
- ii. Regional Economic Communities to establish periodic capacity-building programmes for social workers working in conflict-affected and fragile communities.

Recommendation Three

The African Union should integrate appropriately trained social-work practitioners into existing early-warning, community-engagement and peacebuilding mechanisms.

Implementation Strategies

- i. African Union Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Division to develop ethical protocols for incorporating community-level social indicators into existing early-warning analysis.
- ii. ECOWAS Commission to pilot social-work participation within selected ECOWARN and community-based conflict-prevention initiatives.

Recommendation Four

African Union Member States should strengthen the use of social work in community protection, reconciliation, psychosocial recovery and post-conflict peacebuilding.

Implementation Strategies

- i. National Ministries responsible for Social Development to establish conflict-sensitive social-work deployment and referral arrangements in vulnerable communities.
- ii. National social-work regulatory and professional bodies to strengthen standards for psychosocial support, protection, mediation, community reconciliation and ethical practice in conflict settings.

15.0 Conclusion

This study examined the mainstreaming of social work into the African Union's peace and security framework as a human-centred approach to conflict prevention. The analysis demonstrates

that contemporary African security challenges increasingly require approaches capable of addressing not only armed violence but also the social conditions that generate vulnerability, exclusion, displacement, mistrust and community fragmentation.

The study established that social work possesses professional capabilities relevant to this broader prevention agenda. Evidence from Cyprus and Ukraine demonstrates the profession's relevance in divided and conflict-affected societies, while experiences from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon and Nigeria demonstrate its potential contribution to protection, community engagement, psychosocial recovery, peaceful coexistence and social cohesion (Ioakimidis et al., 2024; IFSW, 2024, 2025; Acha-Anyi, 2024).

The study further established that the AU's existing peace and security architecture provides institutional entry points for such integration. The CEWS, Panel of the Wise, PSC and regional early-warning mechanisms already operate around conflict anticipation, prevention, dialogue and response. Recent AU–ECOWAS cooperation demonstrates the continuing development of coordinated prevention mechanisms in West Africa (AU, 2025a; ECOWAS, 2026a).

The proposed African Social Work and Conflict Prevention Mainstreaming Framework therefore places policy recognition, professional capacity, social early warning, community engagement, protection and recovery at the centre of a human-centred preventive model. Its purpose is not to militarise social work or create a parallel security structure, but to connect professional social knowledge with existing continental and regional peace mechanisms.

Ultimately, mainstreaming social work would broaden the preventive capacity of African peace and security policy by bringing greater attention to the everyday social realities through which insecurity is experienced, reproduced or prevented. A more human-centred African peace and security framework would consequently treat communities not simply as populations affected by conflict, but as important sources of knowledge, participation and resilience in preventing it.

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