



FIRST CONFERENCE ON

**LEVERAGING THE
AFRICAN
CONTINENTAL FREE
TRADE
AREA (AfCFTA) FOR
HIGHER EDUCATION
INTEGRATION**

YAOUNDÉ (CAMEROON, 27th and 28th of January 2025)

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FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT AND CALL FOR PAPERS

One of the defining features of African Trade Agreements has been the multiplicity of their objectives. Through them, African countries typically pursue not only trade liberalization and economic development but also several other policy objectives. One of such objectives that are commonly found in African Trade Agreements (ATAs) is the promotion of education, science, and technology. While the depth and breadth of the provisions vary, almost all ATAs contain provisions that call upon their parties to cooperate in these areas. Some of these provisions have prompted the initiation of various initiatives for higher education integration.

However, higher education integration remains at a very low level both at the continental and regional levels – with limited progress in key areas such as student and staff mobility and the recognition of qualifications. The overall poor track record of ATAs in promoting cooperation in the field of higher education is not dissimilar to their track record in the realm of intra-regional trade. The rate of formal trade among African countries remains one of the lowest intra-regional trade rates in the world despite decades of efforts and numerous agreements.

In 2018, African States adopted the agreement establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), fully operational since 2021, to overcome the challenges undermining their intra-regional trade and strengthen their continental integration process. They also adopted a Protocol to the Agreement establishing the African Economic Community relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment, even if it has not yet entered into force. These developments reaffirm the determination of African countries to deepen their economic integration and realize the objectives of Agenda 2063, the continent's strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable development. Deeper economic integration promises to create opportunities for the advancement of the continent's higher education integration agenda. However, the links and interactions between economic and higher education integration in Africa in the pursuit of sustainable development and in the promotion of a peaceful and cooperative system of international relations remain largely unexplored. The academic and policy discourse around these two key areas of African integration often takes place in different spheres with different approaches, giving rise to two unconnected epistemic communities.

Furthermore, the interaction between continental trade integration and the multilateral system has usually been explored from the perspective of non-African regions and continents, as well as that between trade and educational multilateral institutions.

Against this backdrop, the Transversal Work Area of the EU-funded HAQAA3 Initiativeⁱ, has decided to initiate a process through which African scholars, policymakers, and practitioners explore and discuss the critical interplay between economic and higher education integration in Africa and the world. The process will be steered through Biennial Conferences. The first one is launched coinciding with the African Union's 2024 Year of Education, which has the theme: *'Educate an African fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality, and Relevant Learning in Africa'*. The Biennial Conferences, and the work carried out between them, will provide a platform for sharing insights, research findings, and innovative ideas that help strengthen the role of African trade agreements in fostering higher education integration.

The Conference is organized by OBREAL Global, the lead of the HAQAA-3 Implementing Consortium, and the Association of African Universities (AAU), the African member of that Consortium, together with the Pan African University (PAU), and with the collaboration of the Cameroon WTO Chair and SIEL's African International Economic Law Network (AfIELN).

The organizers will invite the African Union Commission, the European Commission, the AfCFTA Secretariat, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the WTO Secretariat to attend the Conference.

KEY TOPICS OF INTEREST

We invite abstract submissions addressing various legal and policy issues at the intersection of regional trade agreements and higher education integration, in general and with particular reference to Africa including but not limited to:

General Topics

- The interaction between international trade and education in particular in the area of services, movement of workers and self-employed persons, and right of establishment.
- The role of AfCFTA and other African RTAs in advancing higher education integration, in particular as they concern student mobility and exchange programs.

- The role of higher education and higher education integration in fostering the achievement of the AfCFTA's objectives.

Specific Topics

- Harmonization, Quality Assurance and Accreditation across borders in Africa: the interaction between regional and continental initiatives.
- Role of Regional and Continental Trade Agreements in facilitating collaborative research and innovation initiatives.
- Innovation as a key sector in connecting higher education and economic development.
- Best practices and case studies on the interplay between economic and higher education integration.

The role of HE in building the necessary inter- and trans-disciplinary skills

- FTAs can have significant economic impacts, affecting industries and employment opportunities. How can HEIs provide the needed inter- and trans- disciplinary skills to take advantage of these opportunities?

SUBMISSION AND SELECTION OF PAPERS

Interested scholars and practitioners are invited to submit an abstract of about 400 words, in English, French, Portuguese or Arabic, by **25th June 2024** at the latest, at the following email address AfCFTA.HAQAA@obreal.org. Submissions should include a curriculum vitae (2-pages maximum), with email and institutional affiliation. Successful applicants will be notified by the **25th of July 2024**. Confirmed participants must submit a draft paper of 5000-7000 words no later than **25th November 2024**. The Conference organizers will make some contribution to the travel and accommodation expenses of participants based in African higher education institutions (applicants must indicate their wish to apply for funding when submitting their abstracts).

In conformity with the HAQAA-3 tender specifications published by the European Commission and the corresponding provisions of the contract on promoting a gender-balanced participation, the organizers encourage the submission of proposals by female scholars and practitioners, and will also consider this criterion when allocating contributions for travel and accommodation.

KEY DATES

- Abstract Submission Deadline: 25th June 2024
- Notification of Acceptance: 25th July 2024
- Full Paper Submission Deadline: 25 November 2024

PUBLICATION

The organizers guarantee the publication in open source of the whole set of proceedings of the Conference, including the contributions that will be selected by the international editorial committee that will be set up.

ⁱ HAQAA-3 (<https://haqaa3.obreal.org/>) is a component of Youth Mobility for Africa , one of the EU – Africa Flagships projects in the framework of the Africa-Europe Investment Package, one of the main priorities of the EU Global Gateway.