The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) became operational on January 1, 2021, with all its expectations for increased cross-border trade, investment volumes, technology transfers, and income for next African generations.

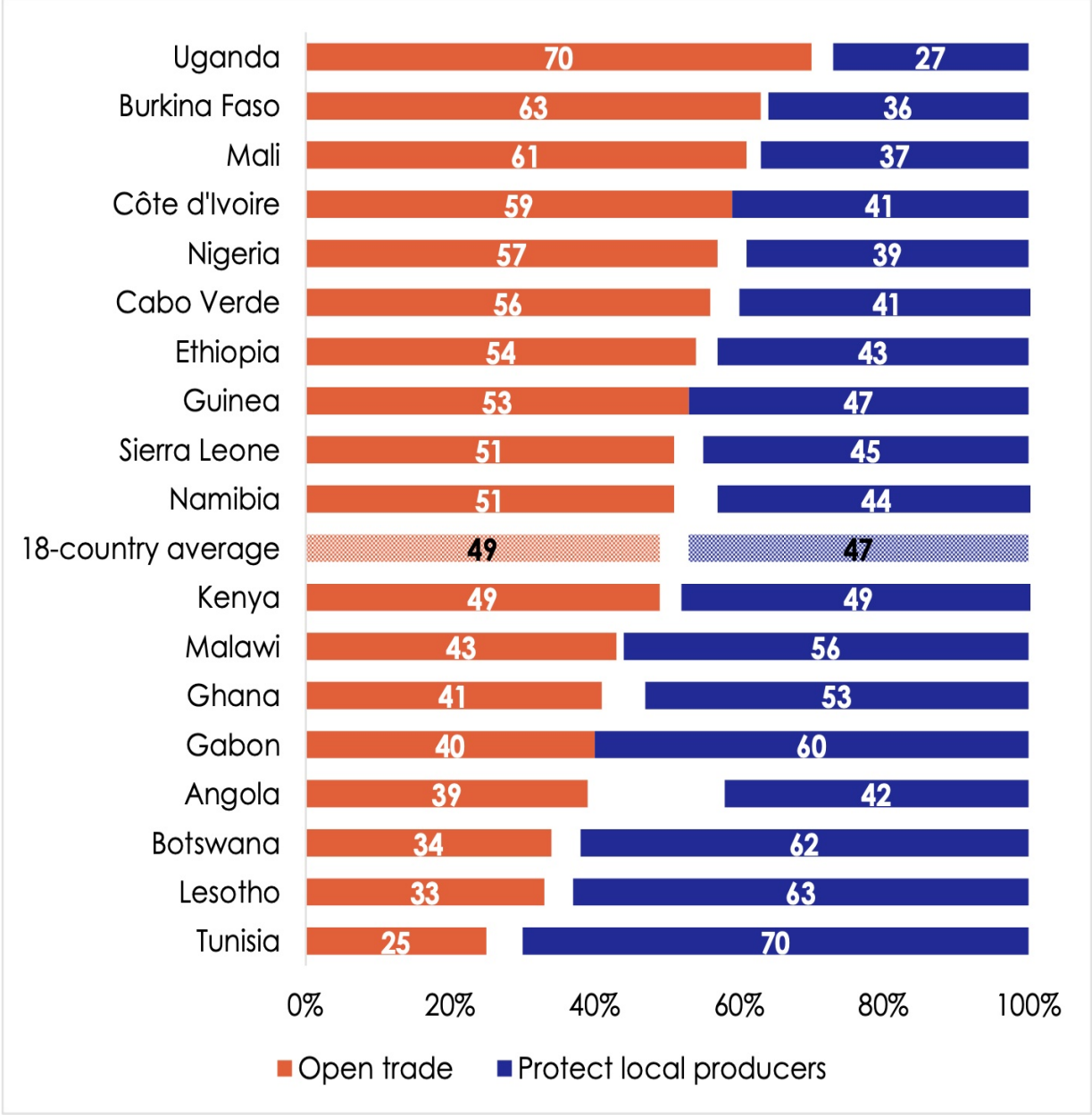
But the AfCFTA implementing process is still long and full of obstacles, ranging from weaknesses in trade infrastructure to inadequate human capital , low use of ICT solutions in trade and customs clearing processes, and lack of harmonized rules and standards in the transport sector.

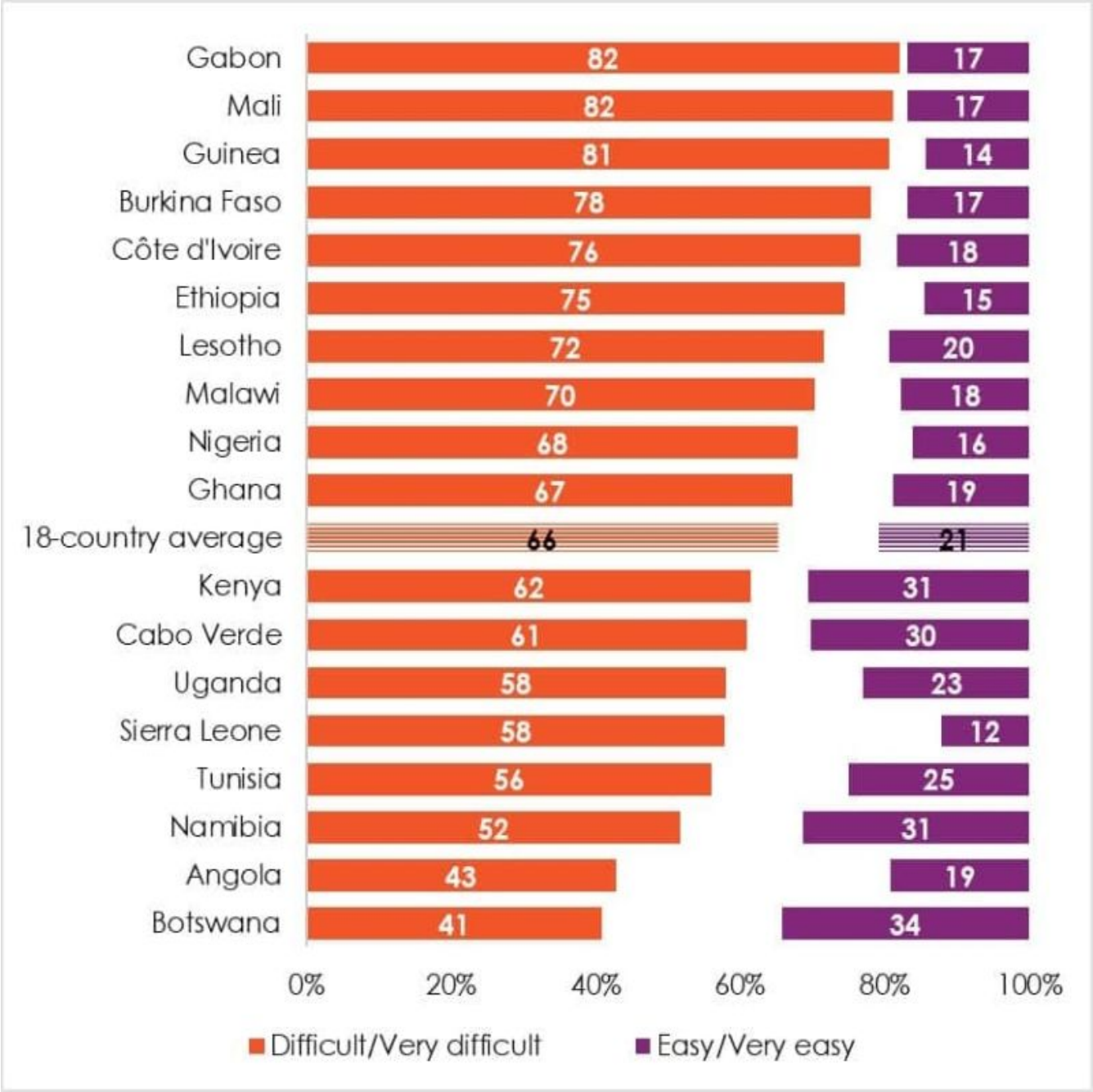
Afrobarometer, a pan-African survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations democracy, governance, and quality of life, conducted a survey in 18 African countries in late 2019 and 2020 on their perceptions regarding the AfCFTA.

The outcomes of the survey suggest that many Africans are yet to be persuaded of the benefits of free trade under the AfCFTA and that sizeable proportions of the population believe that their countries should not open their borders to businesses and products from other African countries or regions, as this would put at risk especially those economies whose manufacturing sector is less competitive and lagging behind with respect to other African markets. For what concerns the loss of revenue as a consequence of the abolition of customs duties on intra-African trade, the World Bank study " The African Continental Free Trade Area, Economic and Distributional Effects " (2020) estimates that in 49 African countries the tariff revenues will decline by less than 1.5 percent because of the liberalisation.

The Afrobarometer survey clearly shows a limited buy-in of AfCFTA from large shares of African citizens. Because of this, on average, 47% of Africans in the 18 countries analysed, believe that their governments should maintain protectionist policies in defense of domestic producers. To this end, a 41% of interviewed people declared that they are in favour of limiting the cross-border movement of people and goods between African States. This trend is particularly strong in Southern Africa, while West and East Africans are more in favour for trade openness.

Figure 1: Open trade vs. protection of local producers | 18 countries | 2019/2020




Gabon 82 17
Mali 82 17
Guinea 81 14
Burkina Faso 78 17
Côte d'Ivoire 76 18
Ethiopia 75 15
Lesotho 72 20
Malawi 70 18
Nigeria 68 16
Ghana 67 19
18-country average 66 21
Kenya 62 31
Cabo Verde 61 30
Uganda 58 23
Sierra Leone 58 12
Tunisia 56 25
Namibia 52 31
Angola 43 19
Botswana 41 34
0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%
Difficult/Very difficult
Easy/Very easy