



Fact Sheet 9/2024

## CLIMATE MOBILITY, REGIONAL INTEGRATION & FREE MOVEMENT

*Agreements for the free movement of persons between states within Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) could provide opportunities for people affected by climate change and disasters to cross borders and access safety.*

### What is regional integration and free movement?

In the 2022 [Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change](#) (Kampala Ministerial Declaration), governments across Africa have pledged to strengthen cooperation on climate mobility 'in the spirit of regional integration and friendship' (para 2). Regional agreements for the free movement of persons between states are one of the primary ways that regional integration can support climate mobility, by providing opportunities for those moving across borders to access safety following disasters, or to access alternative work and livelihood opportunities that support them to adapt to the changing climate.

At both the regional and sub-regional levels, regional integration and economic development are being advanced via regional agreements for the free movement of persons between African states. Free movement agreements aim to ease the restrictions on the movement of people, goods, services and even capital. The continent-wide 2018 [Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Right of Establishment](#) (AU Free Movement Protocol), builds on the progress so far of some of Africa's Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in establishing free movement arrangements at the sub-regional level.

### How do regional integration and free movement relate to climate mobility?

Regional integration processes provide valuable opportunities for inter-State collaboration in the development and implementation of measures to address climate mobility.<sup>1</sup> The Kampala Ministerial Declaration provides one example of this. In addition, state-led Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) on Migration provide a forum for policy dialogue and information sharing on specific mobility issues, including climate mobility. For example, the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA) has a dedicated [Thematic Working Group](#) on 'Climate change, land degradation, desertification, environment and migration'.

Regional and sub-regional agreements for the free movement of persons between states provide [significant opportunities for addressing climate mobility in Africa](#), by providing access to safe havens, and to temporary (or permanent) resettlement, to people impacted by climate change within the

<sup>1</sup> For further reading on regional integration and climate mobility, see Tamara Wood, Ileana Sînziana Puşcaş, Senai Terrefe, Lisa Lim Ah Ken and Christina Daszkiewicz (with Andrew Harper and Natalie Schmidhaeusler), 'Regional Integration, Human Mobility and Climate Change', Ch 6 in IOM, [State of Migration in East and Horn of Africa Report 2022](#) (IOM, 2022)

region. The broad eligibility criteria, which generally permit entry and (at least temporary) stay to all citizens of the same REC, provide broader access to free movement when compared with other migration categories and schemes, which may preclude those moving in the context of climate change. Opportunities for access to employment, trade or business activities are also a key advantage of free movement agreements, allows people with valuable skills to contribute to the economies of hosting countries.

However, access to free movement is neither universal nor automatic. In practice, border restrictions, onerous bureaucratic requirements and limitations on work permits can act as barriers, hindering the ability of those who move to access territory or rebuild their lives in neighboring countries. In addition, implementation of free movement agreements faces significant challenges across the continent.<sup>2</sup>

## What is the IGAD Free Movement Protocol?

In eastern Africa, the [IGAD Free Movement Protocol](#) is a framework aimed at facilitating the safe, orderly, and authorized movement of people across member states of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) eastern African region. It provides an innovative example of how free movement agreements can be used to address displacement and migration in the context of disasters and climate change, and a potential example to be drawn on by other RECs.

The IGAD Free Movement Protocol:

- Grants IGAD member state citizens the right to move within the region for various reasons, including work, education, training, and research;
- Enables citizens of IGAD member states to apply for and accept job offers, conclude work contracts, and enjoy protection under the host country's labor laws and
- Acknowledges the need for member states to maintain national security measures while facilitating free movement.

Significantly, the IGAD Free Movement Protocol provides [innovative provisions for people moving as a result of disasters](#). It ensures entry and lawful stay for those who have been displaced following a disaster, and allows those at risk of displacement to move pre-emptively as a way of avoiding, or mitigating, the impacts of a disaster.

### Article 16 Movement of Persons Affected by Disasters

1. Member States shall allow citizens of another Member State who are moving in anticipation of, during or in the aftermath of disaster to enter into their territory provided that upon arrival they shall be registered in accordance with national law.
2. Member States shall take measures to facilitate the extension of stay or the exercise of other rights by citizens of other Member States who are affected by disaster in accordance with the provisions of this Protocol when return to their state of origin is not possible or reasonable.

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<sup>2</sup> See T Wood, '[The Role of Free Movement of Persons Agreements in Addressing Disaster Displacement: A Study of Africa](#)' Platform on Disaster Displacement (2019).

Climate Mobility Africa *Insights* is a publication of the Climate Mobility Africa Research Network (CMARN) – a multidisciplinary, bi-lingual (EN+FR) network of researchers and policy makers that aims to advance evidence-based law and policy responses to climate mobility in Africa. Climate Mobility Africa *Insights* is generously supported by the Robert Bosch Foundation. To find out more, visit: [www.cmarnetwork.com](http://www.cmarnetwork.com).