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RSCAS 2019/33  
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Global but not regional?  
The role of African regional migration regimes in the  
international governance architecture

Eva Dick and Benjamin Schraven



European University Institute

**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**

Global Governance Programme

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EUI Working Paper **RSCAS** 2019/33

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ISSN 1028-3625

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Printed in Italy, May 2019

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I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)

Italy

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## **Abstract**

Regional organisations and migration regimes are increasingly being acknowledged in global migration policies. The global compacts for migration and on refugees adopted in December 2018 recognise the migration-related expertise and important function of regional organisations in the implementation of international guidelines and policies. But the compacts' wording is vague on the division of labour between global and regional migration regimes, and important questions remain unanswered regarding the added value and ideal role of regional migration regimes in the international system. This is particularly true for regions of the global South, whose institutional arrangements, substantive focus and performance in migration-related norm setting and implementation remain understudied. The authors contribute to filling this knowledge gap by considering two migration policy processes in the context of their overall (regional) migration governance systems and regimes – the ECOWAS Protocol for the Free Movement of Persons and the IGAD Regional Framework for Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees. Based on a qualitative research design, they find that regional migration regimes possess some comparative advantages compared with global ones, which enhance their agency. However, depending on institutional path dependencies, the degree of legalisation and the interests of powerful internal and external actors, levels of agency with regards to different migration types might show significant variation.

## **Keywords**

Regional and global governance, migration, forced displacement, Africa, IGAD, ECOWAS.





## 1. Introduction

Migration within the African continent is much more prevalent than migration from Africa to Europe or other parts of the world. About two-thirds of African international migrants are living in another African country (Dick & Schraven 2018: 3). The reasons behind this migration range from labour mobility to forced displacement and the migration may take place over shorter or longer distances. Against this background, the African Union has defined norms and strategic guidelines regulating migration and forced displacement, and sub-regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the South African Development Community (SADC) have established migration governance structures.

Regional organisations and migration regimes are also becoming increasingly acknowledged players in global migration policy agendas. This is evident, for example, in the fact that the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), both adopted by UN member states in December 2018, highlight the relevance of regional mobility systems and regional regulation mechanisms in the context of the international migration governance architecture.

Although the compacts are rather vague on the relationship between global and regional migration regimes, their wording suggests verticality. This means that regional activities contribute to global ones by fulfilling complementary functions (Söderbaum & Hettne 2009: 16) such as implementing norms formulated at a superior (global) level. However, the institutional arrangements, substantive focus and performance of regional regimes of the global South have not been well studied (Börzel & Risse 2016: 5). This is why, on the one hand, the ability of regional regimes to fulfil a contributing role in global migration policies must be questioned. On the other hand, against the backdrop of identified weaknesses of the global migration governance (Geiger & Pécoud 2015: 4, Angenendt & Koch 2017: 26 – 27, Lavenex et al. 2016: 459), one may also enquire whether these can be effectively addressed at regional level.

While nation states possess full sovereignty in regulating migrants' right to entry, exit and integration (de Haas et al. 2015: 4), there are at least three broad areas that, by definition and substance, call for international cooperation in migration norm-setting and implementation: liberalisation of (cross-border) movement, the protection of (alien) migrants' and refugees' rights, and border management. Up to now, African continental and regional initiatives have focused on liberalising internal mobility and enhancing migrants' (and refugees') rights, and these priorities are also discernible in migration regimes in other regions of the global South (Rahim et al. 2018: 5–6; Brumat & Acosta 2019; Kijewski 2017, Rother & Piper 2014).

Our selection of policy processes in two African regions mirrors these priorities. It also reflects our intention to analyse the agency of regional, as opposed to global, migration regimes in addressing context-specific types of migration and mobility needs. It comprises the ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons (ECOWAS 1979) and the IGAD Framework for Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees (IGAD 2017). For each policy process we ask: In what institutional form and against the background of what broader policy processes and interests (from inside or outside the region) has it emerged? How effective and sovereign is the regional migration governance framework as a whole? Which comparative advantages with respect to the global level in the respective migration policy area are discernible – and what disadvantages? And, how could these be accounted for in international migration policies? Empirical methods applied include reviewing policy documents and conducting expert interviews and (participant) observation, for example of intergovernmental dialogues in the two regions.

The paper grows out of a three-year research project (2017–2019) on regional migration governance funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), using the

Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Horn of Africa as case study regions. The two regions are home to more than half of Africa's population and account for more than one-third of the continent's economic output. Moreover, they epitomise the importance of regional migration systems and policy approaches. Also, migration-related policy engagement has intensified in both regions in recent years.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the subsequent, second, section we provide a background on international migration policies and the relevance of regions in the current international policy discourse. The third section is a systematic review of institutional and topical features of regional migration regimes, as well as factors driving them, based on a framework of analysis of migration governance developed by the authors. The fourth section discusses features and contributions of regional regimes in international migration norm setting and policy implementation and their comparative (dis-)advantages with respect to global initiatives, using the examples of the ECOWAS and IGAD regions. The fifth section provides a short summary and reflects on needed adjustments in the international migration governance architecture.

## **2. Regional regimes in the international migration governance architecture**

Until today, nation states maintain full sovereignty in defining conditions and strategies for migrants' entry and exit as well as integration (Angenendt & Koch 2017, p. 17, de Haas et al. 2015: 4). At international level, responsibilities are fragmented in that different organisations "target only subsets of migrants" (Lavenex et al. 2016: 459): The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) focuses on the protection of refugees and implementation of the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees, the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the rights of migrant workers and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on migration management, consultancy and repatriation services (Newland 2017: 8).<sup>1</sup>

Institutional fragmentation notwithstanding, in the last two decades, the global policy debate on migration has gradually gained momentum (Rother & Piper 2014, Maru, 2012, p. 25). This took place against the backdrop of increased and diversified international migration flows, and a resulting demand for regulation, particularly in transit and destination countries. The consequence was a pluralisation of migration platforms and policy actors – amongst them regional organisations, but also players from other levels of government and outside the state (Angenendt & Koch 2017: 19).

The sharp increase in international refugee flows and the European refugee crisis of 2015 have lifted the topics of migration and forced displacement even higher up the international agenda. In this context, in September 2016, a High Level Summit on Migrants and Refugees was held at UN Headquarters, with the intention of intensifying and enhancing the effectiveness of international cooperation on both issues. UN member states decided that by the end of 2018, two global compacts would be formulated, one for migration and the other one on refugees.

At the time of writing, after almost two years of intensive negotiations and topical discussions involving actors from state and non-state organisations, UN member states have approved the two compacts.<sup>2</sup> Both UN agreements explicitly point to the importance of regionalised patterns of migration and forced displacement and highlight the resulting relevance of regional regulation structures and mechanisms. For example, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regulated Migration (GCM) considers Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) as key platforms "to exchange experiences on the implementation of the Compact" (UN 2018a: § 47). Moreover, still to-be-developed Regional Migration

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the continued lack of a mandate as to international law, this fact has not changed with the IOM becoming a related organisation of the UN in 2016.

<sup>2</sup> The Global Compact for Migration was agreed upon by UN member states in a specialised summit on 10 December 2018, while the UN Assembly adopted the Global Compact on Refugees a week later on 17 December.

Review Forums shall serve as primary platforms for member states to assess progress on the implementation of the compact. And the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) recognises the potential relevance of regional or sub-regional norms and implementation in providing comprehensive responses to refugee situations (§ 28).

It is worth noting that while the GCM does not explicitly refer to the role of regional organisations, the GCR does mention them amongst actors contributing to “predictable and equitable burden- and responsibility-sharing” (§ 3).

While the two compacts do not elaborate in detail on the division of labour between global and regional migration regimes, their wording indicates a vertical relationship, suggesting that regional regimes are subordinate to, and fulfil primarily contributing functions towards UN frameworks on migration and forced displacement. In that vein and echoing dominant scholarly and political views on the relationship between global and regional action in the multilateral system (for security, see Söderbaum & Hettne 2009: 15), both compacts highlight that regional approaches have an important role in implementing and monitoring global migration norms and guidelines (GCR, §62, GCM, §21a).

This view of a vertical relationship is disputed, however, with critics pointing to legitimacy and agency gaps in UN- multilateralism which regional approaches may partly be able to fill. The reason is that, by their very nature, they promote the interests of a smaller number of parties, which often share historical experiences and interests. In addition, the position of weaker parties may be articulated more effectively at regional level,<sup>3</sup> In the field of migration, weaker parties are, for example, migrants’ countries of origin or transnational advocacy groups (Rother & Piper 2014: 37, Nita 2014: 7, Dick et al. 2018: 3, Angenendt & Koch 2017: 26, 30). In addition, regional approaches have earned increasing recognition for their agency in a number of policy fields (Lavenex et al. 2016: 466 – 457. Söderbaum & Hettne 2009: 6, Söderbaum 2016: 27). To a limited extent, the compacts also pay tribute to these views, acknowledging the distinct expertise (and potential for international knowledge-sharing) of regional approaches in areas such as labour mobility (GCM, §22b).

In what follows, we attempt to provide empirically informed answers on programmatic and institutional features and the agency of regional regimes in the global South. Underlying assumptions are that, on the one hand, recurrent areas of engagement reflect an inherent comparative advantage of the regional level in certain migration-related areas. We further assume, on the other hand, that, depending on regional histories and interest constellations (of actors inside and outside the region), these in-principle strengths may play out very differently.

### **3. Assessing capacity and agency of regional migration regimes**

Regional regimes are processes of cooperation between geographically proximate states and a result of either formal, or more informal, structures and patterns of exchange (Geddes et al. 2019, Börzel & Risse 2016: 7). While non-state actors and networks have become increasingly involved in region-building (Geddes et al. 2019), on the African continent regional organisations and other platforms are largely decoupled from civic organisation or other non-state patterns of regionalisation such as trade-related population flows (Börzel & Risse 2016: 8, Hartmann 2016: 267).

In the international relations literature, at least two perspectives tend to be distinguished to explain the institutional and programmatic features of international organisations of which regional regimes form a sub-set. The first, rationalist, perspective focuses on the role and interests of (strong) member states as principal factors driving institutional forms and policies. The second, constructivist, angle sees

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<sup>3</sup> This said, the legitimacy of regional institutions and decision-making structures has also been recurrently interrogated (Rittberger & Schroeder 2016: 579). For example, in the context of ASEAN, the scope for civil society to become engaged is very limited (Rother & Piper 2014: 40); similar statements are made in relation to regional organisations on the African continent (Hartmann 2016: 267).

international organisations as autonomous actors and enquires about the constitution and building of regions as well as on their agency towards member states and the external environment (Peters et al. 2013: 14; Söderbaum 2016: 28, Söderbaum & Hettne 2009: 10, Hartmann 2016: 276–277, Hulse 2014).

In order to systematically address the stated knowledge gap on the features and agency of regional migration regimes of the global South, the authors developed an analytical framework (see table 1). Drawing on both rationalist and constructivist research perspectives and on the literature on the effectiveness of migration policy (de Haas et al. 2015, de Haas & Czaika 2013), it represents an eclectic approach to understanding regional migration regimes, and regional organisations (ROs) as their institutional carrier. Both are considered as “important elements in states’ strategies” (Geiger & Pécoud 2015, 6), but also as actors in their own right, whose actions are shaped by distinct identities or historical path dependencies (Hulse 2014, 550, Byiers 2016: 3) and bureaucratic entrepreneurialism e.g. ensuring institutional survival (Geiger & Pécoud 2015: 9, Dick & Schraven 2018: 5).

In the framework, we have defined four categories evidencing key differentiating features of regional migration regimes. Each category is expanded upon in sub-questions. Some of these questions are descriptive, addressing dominant institutional characteristics, policy approaches and their effects on national and sub-national migration policy implementation. Others have more explanatory value, identifying regional/institutional pathways as well as interests and agenda setting of strong actors from inside and outside the region as key drivers of regional migration agendas.

In detail, the components of the analytical framework cover the following dimensions:

**1. Foundational factors and aims:** This seeks to identify factors related to the history and social identity of a region and a regional organisation which are likely to influence the degree and kind of engagement with the topic of migration (Byiers 2016: 6-7, Hulse 2014: 551). It contributes to explaining the relevance and position of migration as one policy field among others in the regional agenda.

**2. Institutional structures and processes:** This provides evidence on key decision-making and operative organs within regional migration regimes, their respective mandates and functions as well as key actors. The relationship between formal and more informal migration governance processes is also analysed, the latter in the context of dialogue processes such as the Regional Consultative Forums (RCPs) on migration (Lavenex et al. 2016, Börzel & Risse 2016, Dick et al. 2018). Finally, the main agenda-setters, either from within or outside a given region, are identified.

**3. Normative approach:** This looks at the forms or types of migration that have been the strategic focus for cooperation. It is set against the background of different approaches to migration discernible in international discourses and also in the African context: economic, rights-based and security-related (Geiger & Pécoud 2015: 12, Lavenex et al. 2016: 460, similar Knoll & de Weijer 2016: 6).

**4. Translation into policies and practice:** This helps to identify the degree to which regional policy discourses on migration are translated into written policies at national or sub-national levels, the extent to which policies are implemented by gate-keepers “on the ground” (border officials, local bureaucrats, employers, social services providers etc.) and the degree to which policies actually affect migration and related behaviour (use of regional passports, migration numbers etc.). Lastly, the degree of harmonisation of domestic migration policies is studied.

**Table 1: Framework of analysis of regional migration governance**

<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>KEY QUESTIONS (SUB-CRITERIA)</b>
<b>Foundational factors and aims of RO</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were key motivations and topics in the formation stage of the RO?</li> <li>• To what degree did migration and displacement form part of the RO's "raison d'être"?</li> <li>• If migration has played a role at the beginning, how did this manifest in respective policy initiatives?</li> <li>• If not, how and why did that change up to the present?</li> </ul>
<b>RO's institutional structures and processes, actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How formalised and centralised are the RO's decision-making and operational structures in the field of migration?</li> <li>• What is the relationship between more formal structures of cooperation and more informal ones?</li> <li>• How are the RO's migration-related activities financed?</li> <li>• Who are the dominant (internal and external) actors influencing the RO and what is their specific impact on the RO's migration agenda?</li> <li>• How advanced is the RO's data management?</li> </ul>
<b>Normative approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the ultimate aim and are the dominant migration narratives used by the organisation?</li> <li>• Has the organisation established a protocol on free movement? And, if yes, what degree of free movement does it entail?</li> <li>• Has the organisation pronounced norms on countering smuggling, trafficking and other kinds of human and labour rights violations?</li> <li>• Does the RO propose measures to promote development aspects of migration?</li> <li>• Does the RO address diverse forms of migration (internal vs. international, forced vs. voluntary), as well as their overlaps?</li> <li>• Are different migration approaches and narratives covered in more formal or informal formats of regional cooperation?</li> </ul>
<b>Translation into policies and practices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree are policy frameworks (and migration narratives) of the RO manifested in its implemented projects and programmes? What gaps/inconsistencies can be observed and why?</li> <li>• To what degree are relevant policy fields harmonised on a regional level (e.g. labour market, trade, education)?</li> <li>• To what extent are regional policy frameworks reflected in national migration policies in the member states?</li> <li>• To what degree do regional norms influence sub-national migration-related practices (administration, development planning, police, private sector etc.)?</li> <li>• How flexibly can the organisation respond to changing migration dynamics e.g. sudden mass influxes?</li> </ul>

Source: Own compilation

#### **4. Regional but not global? Capacities, agency and implications for international migration governance**

In order to make an informed statement on the present role, as well as strengths and weaknesses of regional as compared to global-level migration regimes, we selected policy processes from two African regions as case studies: the Protocol on Free Movement of the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) and the Regional Framework for Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in the Horn of Africa.

##### *The cases of IGAD and ECOWAS*

The choice of the two regions relates to their demographic and socio-economic weight within Africa on the one hand, and on the relative importance of intra-regional mobility by continental standards, on the other. While also figuring as areas of origin of many African migrants to Europe, they show particularly high proportions of intra-regional migration – 87 percent and 65 percent, respectively, compared to 52 percent for the whole of Africa (Dick & Schraven 2019: 2). In the ECOWAS region most of this intra-regional migration is driven by the need for labour and economic opportunities (Devillard et al. 2015: 28, Kabbanji 2017: 97, SWAC [Sahel and West African Club ] & OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] 2006: 19), but within the IGAD region forced displacement constitutes an important reality (Dick & Schraven 2018: 13–15). Consequently, although migration-related policy engagement has intensified in both regions, their institutional and programmatic approaches to migration are quite different.

The selection of regional as opposed to African continental regimes as case studies occurred against the following notion: although the African Union, with the recent update of its Migration Policy Framework (2018–2027, in revision of the 2006 document), has become more articulate in the area of migration, notably with regards to free movement (Triandafyllidou et al. 2019: 10), the regional level has proven more consistently active during the last two decades.

##### *IGAD*

The IGAD region comprises seven member states, namely Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda, all forming part of the larger Horn of Africa area, a large part of which is covered by arid or semi-arid lands (IGAD 2016: 8; IGAD: 2012: 57). All are Anglophone countries except Francophone Djibouti. The entire population of the region is about 230 million people (IGAD [Intergovernmental Authority on Development], 2016, 2018). Ethiopia constitutes the country in the region with the largest population, approximating 102 million.

In 1986, IGAD's predecessor organisation the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) was founded by Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda. South Sudan became part of the organisation after its independence from Sudan in 2011. While a severe drought period was experienced between 1984 and 1985, and shared environmental challenges initially triggered regional cooperation, political factors such as international pressure and expected developmental aid were further motives for its formation (Byiers, 2016: 6-7).

In 1996, the transition to IGAD in its current organisational shape took place, along with the first of several topical extensions. Since then, “peace and security” constitutes the policy field IGAD is mostly identified with, although two years later it became a Regional Economic Community (REC) and economic development was added as a further topic. Today the organisation hosts four divisions: Agriculture and Environment, Peace and Security, Economic Cooperation, and Health and Social Development. Forming part of the Health and Social Development Division, IGAD's Migration Programme was formally established in 2010 following a recommendation in the first IGAD Regional Consultative Process (RCP) on migration which took place in 2008 (IGAD 2008).

The governance structure across all thematic areas consists of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government as the key policymaking, directing and controlling body, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Committee of Ambassadors and the IGAD Secretariat. The Executive Secretary forms the Chief Executive Officer and is spokesperson of the organisation (IGAD 2018). Since 2008, this four-year term position has been held by a Kenyan, while Ethiopia has been chairing the Assembly of Heads of State – meant to annually rotate – and the Council of Ministers since the last Ordinary Summit of IGAD which took place in 2008 (Byiers, 2016: 14).

The Regional Migration Policy Framework (RMPF) adopted by the IGAD Council of Ministers in 2012 (IGAD 2012) is the organisation’s primary policy guideline on migration. The second is the IGAD Regional Migration Action Plan 2015–2020 (IGAD 2013). It was adopted in 2013 to facilitate implementation of the RMPF at the level of the member state. Both documents show a very comprehensive approach to migration in the context of which hardly any narrative is privileged over the other. However, the humanitarian background of the organisation is reflected in the intention to ensure that “migration is voluntary and legal, through methods that respect the human rights of migrants” (IGAD, 2013: 8).

### *ECOWAS*

The ECOWAS region consists of 15 member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo), virtually covering the entire geographical area of West Africa. The region is divided into an Anglophone country group (Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Gambia), a Francophone cluster (Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Guinea) and a smaller Lusophone group (Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau). Founding member Mauretania left ECOWAS in 2000<sup>4</sup> and Morocco has applied for an ECOWAS membership but whether this application would be successful is not yet decided.

The social, economic, political and ecological situation in the ECOWAS region, which is inhabited by about 350 million people, is highly diverse. The region ranges from arid desert landscapes in the Northern parts of Mali and Niger, and several savannah types in the West-African interior, to forest-savannah transition zones and tropical rainforest areas in the southern coastlands of the sub-region. Economically, the region consists of both fast-growing lower middle-income countries such as Ghana, and some of the poorest countries in the world, such as Niger and Burkina Faso.

ECOWAS, which is chaired by the head of a member state in a currently one-year term, was founded in 1975 following the Treaty of Lagos. It consists of an executive, legislative and judicial branch. The executive, the ECOWAS Commission, is headed by a president and has 13 departments, covering areas such as finance, agriculture, peace and security, and energy and mines. The Community Parliament of ECOWAS consists of 115 members, proportionally distributed based on the population size of the member countries. The ECOWAS Community Court of Justice officially started operation in 1996. The court is intended to decide disputes between states over interpretations of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty in 1993, and also has jurisdiction over fundamental human rights violations.

ECOWAS adopted the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment as far back as 1979 (see below). This is the migration-related topic the organisation has, to date, been most identified with. Besides economic integration and free movement (see below), security cooperation is also one of the major focal areas of ECOWAS (ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], 2015). The exchange of security-related information and issues like biometrics is likely to become more crucial – not least due to European pressure (ECOWAS 2015). Although refugees were formally added to ECOWAS’s internal policy on free movement in 2008

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<sup>4</sup> Mauretania left ECOWAS in order to join the Maghreb union together with Libya, Morocco and Algeria (Africanews: 2017).

(Fioaramonti & Nshimbi 2016: 22), relatively little action followed – not surprisingly as (cross-border) forced displacement has generally decreased since then.

Table (2) summarises the key descriptive and explanatory attributes of the IGAD and ECOWAS regions according to the framework’s categories of analysis:



**Table 2: Principal characteristics and drivers of IGAD and ECOWAS migration regimes**

	<b>IGAD</b>	<b>ECOWAS</b>
<b>Foundational factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recent formal cooperation on migration, starting (2010)</li> <li>• Historical focus on drought and development, later conflict and peace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobility liberalisation related to economic integration agenda from the start (1979)</li> <li>• Historical importance of cross-border trade and migration</li> </ul>
<b>Institutional structures, actors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak formal structures and decision-making competencies (inter-governmentalism); RCP as most important regional policy platform on migration</li> <li>• Limited preference conversion; Ethiopia as driver and barrier to regional integration</li> <li>• Externally driven migration agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong formal structures and decision-making powers (supra-nationalism); also manifests in migration policy agenda</li> <li>• Strong Nigerian leadership; higher preference conversion</li> <li>• Limited influence of external (European) migration policy agenda</li> </ul>
<b>Normative approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive, main policy frameworks addressing all aspects of migration</li> <li>• Member states' focus on prevention of humanitarian shocks and crises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While historical focus is on free movement, also attends to other issues of migration</li> <li>• Underlying regional concern for linking migration with development</li> </ul>
<b>Translation into policies and practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak transfer of regional frameworks into National Migration Policies</li> <li>• National (e.g. encampment) policies partly at odds with regional norms and policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free Movement Protocol partly implemented</li> <li>• Limited harmonisation of immigration forms and practices; free movement conflicting with EU-migration control focus</li> </ul>

### ***The cases of ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol and IGAD Regional Declaration for Durable Solutions of Somali Refugees***

African continental and regional migration initiatives have prioritised policies and strategies for liberalising mobility and enhancing the rights of migrants and refugees (Bisong 2019, own interviews with IGAD and ECOWAS officials). These priorities are also discernible in state- and non-state driven migration regimes in other regions of the global South (Rahim et al. 2018; Brumat & Acosta 2019; Kijewski 2017, Piper & Rother 2014). Against this background, this paper analyses two policy processes mirroring the mentioned (African) priorities, also reflecting dominant migration types and needs in the two selected regions.

#### *ECOWAS Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons*

In the wake of increasing global recognition of political and economic cooperation as pathways to sustainable economic development among nation states, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) evolved as a regional economic and political union in 1975. The ECOWAS Treaty, which served as the basis for the formation of a regional economic community, sought to promote regional integration and economic cooperation in order to accelerate the economic and social development of its member states. In particular, Article 3(1) of the 1993 Revised Treaty emphasises “cooperation and integration, leading to the formation of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its people, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations – among Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent” (ECOWAS 2010: 5). It was envisioned that the removal of inter-state barriers would enhance economic stability, improve the standard of living of people, and foster good and peaceful relations among member states.

Accordingly, in 1979 ECOWAS adopted the “Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment” as the centrepiece of its migration programme. It was intended to be implemented in three phases:

- **Phase 1** gives citizens of ECOWAS member states **the right of visa-free entry** into other member states. By this provision, citizens of ECOWAS member states can stay in any other state for up to 90 days without any requirements. Any ECOWAS citizen who, however, wishes to stay more than the stipulated 90 days is required to obtain permission from the appropriate authority in the respective member state.
- **Phase 2** (originally scheduled for 1985 to 1990 but only signed in 1986) refers to the right of residence. Member states are obliged to grant the right of residence to any community citizen who wishes to establish and carry out an income-earning employment. The main thrust of this protocol is that every community citizen has the right to reside and work in any member country without discrimination. However, a prerequisite for residence is hinged on the possession of an ECOWAS Residence Card or Permit.
- **Phase 3** (originally scheduled for 1990 to 1995) refers to the **right of establishment** (including the access to non-salaried activities, the creation and management of enterprises and companies, and the principle of non-discrimination). It reiterates the right of community citizens to settle and establish themselves in any member state. In line with this, any community citizen has the right to engage in an economic venture, as well as set up any business or company within the remits of the laws and conditions as stipulated by the host state for its nationals. By this, therefore, member states shall have no restrictions or quotas prescribed for community citizens in contrast to their nationals with regard to carrying out economic activities. However, up to now, Phase 3 has still not been ratified (Fioramonti & Nshimbi, 2016: 21).

In addition to these protocols, there has also been the ECOWAS decision (C/DEC.3/12/92) on the introduction of a harmonised immigration and emigration form in all the member states of ECOWAS. With the introduction of what is called the “Immigration and Emigration Forms of ECOWAS Member States”, states are required to provide harmonised forms across all ports of entry (ECOWAS 1999). It is envisaged that this will reduce unnecessary cross-border delays and formalities, while facilitating a seamless and stress-free movement within the sub-region.

Despite the difficulties regarding Phase 3 of the Protocol and a number of violations in the past (e.g. the mass expulsion of West African migrants from Nigeria in 1983), the Free Movement Protocol enjoys a high level of political acceptance. However, ECOWAS is still facing difficulties in fully implementing it. This manifests, inter alia, in ECOWAS citizens facing harassment by officials when they try to enter another ECOWAS member country.

Regarding the role of informal formats of cooperation, the region’s RCP, the Migration Dialogue for West Africa (MIDWA), launched in 2000, has focused more strongly on border management and the fight against irregular migration than ECOWAS’s own initiatives have done. Nonetheless, it has also progressively aligned itself with pre-existing regional initiatives, such as the Free Movement Protocol (Lavenex et al. 2016: 467 – 468). Similarly, in the Rabat Process, started in 2006 between the EU and West Africa, while migration control features as one out of three strategic pillars, the enhancement of (also intra-regional) legal migration opportunities is another (Reitano 2016: 6).<sup>5</sup>

The example of ECOWAS suggests that regional bodies or (more generally) the regional level is likely to be driven by strong internal motivations for the development of free movement norms and policies. This is particular the case in settings with historically developed economic and trade linkages in which fostering free movement tends to be perceived as an essential cornerstone of region-building (Lavenex et al. 2016: 470). Other regions with more recent, but similarly advanced, free-movement regimes, such as the South American MERCOSUR, the European Union’s Schengen area and the East African Community confirm the pattern (Rahim et al. 2018, Triandafyllidou et al. 2019: 7).

In contrast, at the global level, common migration interests related to (historical) economic and cultural links and political agendas are less likely to unfold. The so-far deferred vision of the African Union to promote a free movement agenda suggests that even at the continental level there may be less enthusiasm for promoting common migration agendas.

#### *IGAD Regional Framework for Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees*

The Regional Framework for Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees within Somalia, launched by the Northeast African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), was adopted in March 2017, by the organisations’ seven member states. It builds upon and applies the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), a global operational guideline to address large-scale movements of refugees and protracted refugee situations formulated in the context of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, and the so-called “Obama Summit” in September 2016. At the heart of the CRRF’s approach is the need to strengthen developmental approaches – complementary to short-term emergency responses – to forced displacement and to place a higher emphasis on “local integration” among the durable responses supported by the international community. Besides local integration, voluntary repatriation and increased resettlement opportunities for refugees continue to be promoted as durable solutions (UN, 2018b, Global Compact on Refugees).

The Road Map on the implementation of the Nairobi Declaration and Action Plan specifies commitments for its implementation at the level of regional and member states alongside four strategic objectives:

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<sup>5</sup> The third strategic or core pillar is about strengthening the synergies between migration and development in the region (Reitano 2016: 6).

1. Accelerating solutions in Somalia by creating an environment conducive to voluntary and sustainable returns (for example, by enhancing state authority, the capacity of the security sector and the rule of law in the country);
2. Delivering durable solutions, whilst maintaining protection and asylum space (for example, by maintaining refugees' admission and enhancing rights of refugees and other forcibly displaced groups);
3. Promoting the self-reliance and inclusion of refugees in countries of asylum (for example, by enhancing investment and financing opportunities, freedom of movement, education and work opportunities, as well as environmental management in refugee-receiving areas);
4. Strengthening sub-regional co-operation (for example, by enhancing cross-border cooperation in implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as facilitating cross-border flows of persons and remittances at the regional level); and
5. Increasing international responsibility sharing (for example, by enhancing options for resettlement, multi-year development funding and short-term responses and finance to large refugee crises).

What is the relevance of a regional norm formulation and approach as compared to a global one a) in terms of its (formal or informal) "binding power" and b) regarding more downstream, i.e. national and sub-national, policy implementation? In this context, it needs to be stated that four countries of the IGAD region (Uganda, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya) had already formulated commitments at the global summit in 2016 and under the CRRF. These very countries reiterated their commitments under the Nairobi Declaration, attributing them to strategic objectives 2 and 3 of the regional road map and action plan (IGAD 2018). It further requires mention that without the availability of international funding and resources linked to the compliance with the CRRF (and, by implication, Regional Framework) commitments, resulting measures would be highly unlikely to materialise.<sup>6</sup>

While the reflection on "what would have happened without the formulation of a regional declaration and action plan?" remains counterfactual for obvious reasons, it is nonetheless crucial for the purposes of identifying (potential and actual) advantages of regional vs. global approaches in migration governance.

- a) Binding power of regional vs. global norm formulation: The Regional Framework for Durable Solutions as much as the New York Declaration or CRRF is a non-binding policy instrument, leaving its degree of implementation primarily at the discretion of the involved member states. With this in mind, it can nonetheless be argued that the regional interpretation or application of the global norm enhances the involved member states' political commitment. This is, first, as a result of positive incentives (Risse 2016: 89-90, Gilardi 2012: 14), since the Framework contributed to channelling even more international and donor resources to the region. This has taken place, for example, through the establishment in 2016 of the IGAD Regional Secretariat on Forced Displacement and Mixed Migration (RSFDMM). The RSFDMM forms part of the World Bank-funded Development Response to Displacement Impacts Project (DRDIP), which provides socio-economic support to refugee hosting communities in the Horn of Africa and has four intervention areas: promoting policy dialogue; research and knowledge generation; capacity enhancement and; project management (IGAD 2017b: 13). Moreover, the implementation of regional dialogue and learning platforms is promoted under the Regional Framework. Persuasion (Risse 2016: 90) of the involved actors was arguably likelier to be achieved, since the Regional Declaration's emphasis on enhancing conditions for voluntary return of Somali refugees (manifested in strategic objective 1), reflected the domestic interests of regional powers such as Kenya and Ethiopia.

Second, the Nairobi Declaration conveys context-specific relevance and competition, applying the more general CRRF to the Somali refugee crisis, which involved the highest number of refugees

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<sup>6</sup> One might also argue that implementation in the context of a policy diffusion process is unlikely to take place without the mentioned external incentives (Risse, 2016; Gilardi, 2012).

and was of the longest duration in the region. Among the five countries in the world hosting the greatest number of Somali refugees in 2016, three were IGAD member states: Kenya (top, with 32.1 percent), Ethiopia (third, with 23.9 percent) and Uganda (fourth, with 3.0 percent) (UNHCR 2017)<sup>7</sup>. According to experts of agencies based in the region, the Kenyan government's decision to return refugees to Somalia and close the Dadaab refugee camp placed high pressure on the governments of the other IGAD countries to react (interview, IGAD's Regional Secretariat on Forced Displacement and Mixed Migration, May 2018).

Third, and as a matter of both institutional history and functional spill-over (Lavenex et al. 2016: 470, Byiers 2016), IGAD(D)'s track record in managing regional humanitarian crises prompted by drought, bad governance and inter- and intra-state conflicts since its foundation in 1986 is probably evidence of its agenda-setting and convening power in refugee politics.

- b) Implementation-related effectiveness of regional norm. While it is too early to make a sound statement on levels and depths of implementation, it seems that in the countries committed to the CRRF important policy shifts are presently taking place – although to varying degrees. For example, Ethiopia and Uganda (historically with opposing approaches to refugee reception and settlement) have created “functional CRRF government-led structures” (ReDDS 2018) with representation from humanitarian agencies and NGOs.<sup>8</sup> Djibouti has formulated a new Refugee Law and a National Action Plan to guide future durable refugee solutions. Kenya established a technical training institute in Dadaab that offered skills training for Somali refugees; additionally, with the support of international humanitarian and development agencies it is developing a pilot integrated settlement (Kalobeyei), involving measures for enhancing livelihoods among both refugees and hosting communities (diverse expert interviews, Nairobi, May 2018).

While a “disconnect between political processes and operational realities” (ReDDS 2018: 2) is often stated, and policies to enhance refugees' social and economic rights essential to the CRRF meet considerable resistance in countries traditionally excluding refugees from social and economic rights, ceding from previous engagements would incur considerable political cost. According to representatives of several governmental and non-governmental agencies, it IGAD's engagement in particular that has provided “gravity to the process. (...) So the ball has basically started rolling and you have now so many actors that it is impossible for one single country to stop it” (Interview with UNHCR, Nairobi, May 2018).

## ***Discussion***

What can be taken from these examples regarding a possible comparative advantage of regional migration regimes (or, “the regional level”) with respect to global level ones?

The ECOWAS and IGAD examples confirm that both in matters of norm- or policy-framework setting, and in implementation, regional organisations possess certain inherent advantages in addressing migration and forced displacement as compared to the global institutions. In general, migration-related cooperation in the regional context seems pertinent due to the high proportion of intra-regional migration and forced displacement worldwide, implying relations of interdependence (and partly joint interests) between the concerned states. Moreover, regional organisations can often build upon an established history of cooperation in other policy fields connected to human mobility. This holds true for trade and economic integration in the case of ECOWAS, and management of drought and conflict crises in the case of IGAD.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that the third and fifth countries (Yemen and South Africa, respectively) are in the extended region or continent (UNHCR 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The steering committee in Uganda also includes representatives of displaced communities (ReDDS, 2018, p. 1).

However, our two cases also show that regional agency varies between migration policy areas. While both organisations “on paper” stand for a comprehensive approach towards migration (addressing labour mobility, migrants’ and refugees’ rights and border management and control), they have different migration-related priorities. Apart from the organisations’ foundational context, the strength of formal structures, levels of legalisation and interests of powerful internal and external actors and capabilities (view tables 1 and 2) explain migration-related agency (Dick & Schraven, 2018: 22; Hulse 2014: 549 – 552; Byiers, 2016: 2). The relative success of ECOWAS in the promotion of free movement is certainly related to the fact that this has formed part of the regional agenda and *raison d’être* since its very foundation in 1976; moreover, preference convergence could be achieved through support (albeit oscillating) of the matter by regional powers Nigeria and Ghana (Dick & Schraven 2018). The relative lack of success of IGAD in the area of free movement is likely related to its creation due to humanitarian reasons (as opposed to economic or trade integration, view Byiers 2016: 50), on the one hand, and limited preference convergence (coupled with resistance from regional power Ethiopia) among member states, on the other. Inversely, the credibility of IGAD in applying global refugee policies to the regional context is supported by its very history (its foundation as Drought and Development Agency IGADD in 1986, and extension towards Peace and Security as IGAD in 1996) on the one hand, and converging interests (or at least mutual interdependence), on the other.

With regard to implementation, our two cases suggest that regional organisations show similar advantages with respect to global actors as the ones related to norm-building (higher convening power, credibility etc.). However, capability limitations are important, and there are barriers regarding the other criteria determining actorness, too. But these remain to be systematically addressed in future research.

## **5. Conclusion and perspectives**

This paper shows that regional organisations and platforms are significantly shaping international migration governance, both through norm- or policy-framework formulation and implementation of global norms. Moreover, our case study analyses confirm statements in the international relations literature that the regional level possesses some distinct strengths or comparative advantages in migration governance as compared to the global level. While this assertion is based on the analysis of two policy processes in the ECOWAS and IGAD regions – ECOWAS free movement agreement and IGAD framework for durable solutions for Somali refugees – several aspects indicate that our findings can be generalised to a considerable degree.

This is because the regional level possesses certain inherent advantages compared to the global level when it comes to addressing migration and forced displacement. Among these are the importance of intra-regional migration systems, the existence of already established structures of cooperation (in policy fields with important links to, or repercussions for, human mobility) and the higher likelihood of regional norms and policies capturing the domestic interests of member states. However, these advantages do not play out evenly in all areas of migration governance. Achievements vary, depending on institutional histories as well as interests at play both inside and outside the region.

In recent years, a record of weak implementation (for example, in ECOWAS concerning the “on-the-ground” application of free movement rights by enforcement agents and their appropriation by citizens) looks set to continue in the context of EU-led migration policy initiatives (e.g. the Rabat Process, the Khartoum Process and the Migration Partnerships). Their very focus on reducing irregular migration and bilateral cooperation threatens to undermine regional organisations’ efforts to facilitate mobility and enhance its developmental impacts.

Since, in the analysed examples, regional organisations – as opposed to informal governance platforms such as the RCPs or transregional initiatives – seem to have a greater role in promoting innovative migration norms and policies, the strengthening of their role in global migration governance would be an important measure.

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