



Government of Rwanda  
Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning



Economic Commission for Africa  
Commission économique pour l'Afrique  
1958 - 2018

22<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts  
Sub-regional Office for Eastern Africa (SRO-EA)

## Implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area in Eastern Africa: From Vision to Action

Concept Note for the Plenary Session:  
**Beyond Trade: The Protocol on the Free Movement of  
People**

20 – 22 November 2018

Kigali Convention Centre

Rwanda

## I. Background

It is not sufficiently appreciated that migration in Africa is largely intra-regional, with 80 per cent of the migration taking place within Africa and only 20 per cent being outward-bound. Intra-African migration has increased by 36 percent to 19.4 million in 2017 from 12.5 million in 2000 (UNCTAD, 2018). The establishment of the AfCFTA offers a crucial platform towards integrating the African countries and the free movement of persons will be an essential ingredient in delivering the gains. However, only 27 countries have signed the Protocol to the Abuja Treaty on the Free Movement of people compared to 49 signatories for the AfCFTA, highlighting the fact that some African countries are still grappling with opening up of their borders. Nonetheless, this is not an isolated instance - most regional economic communities in Africa have also adopted such protocols, yet the rate of ratification of the protocols has been highly uneven and progressed only slowly (UNCTAD, 2018). Moreover, the implementation phase tends to be marred by country-specific hurdles. This is largely because the economic development of countries varies and high unemployment rates heighten fears about foreign workers competing with nationals for similar positions. As a result, some member states put in place stringent measures and fees that make it difficult for the free movement of both skilled and unskilled labour.

The free movement of persons is fundamental to facilitating labour mobility to areas where it can be more productive and thus enhance structural transformation. Highly skilled migrants also aid in the transfer of knowledge and know-how to local employees. Studies show that lack of appropriate skills and capabilities actually slow structural transformation processes as investment in education does not correlate with the development of all types of knowledge (Khan, 2018). As a matter of fact, employers in 41 per cent and 30 per cent of all firms in Tanzania and Kenya respectively, identify inadequately skilled workforces as major constraints for their businesses (WEF, 2017). To fill this gap, countries need to look beyond their borders to attract required skills. Indeed, a survey by EY (2014) revealed that the demand for expatriate skills has grown the strongest in Eastern Africa<sup>1</sup>, with firms expecting to recruit more expatriate executives, managers, professional and technical skills, even though some respondents (about 62 percent) believe that the governments are making it difficult to employ expatriates. The survey also indicated that local talent, Africans and returning African diaspora were considered favorably to fill executive vacancies.

Having said that, progress has been made by some countries in facilitating the free movement of people. The 2016 Visa Openness Index shows that Eastern Africa hosts nine out of the 20 visa open countries. Rwanda and Uganda do not require prior obtaining of visa

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<sup>1</sup> Comprises Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

for anyone, and allow entry using a dual system of no visa or visa on arrival. Comoros, Djibouti, Madagascar and Somalia are the only 4 countries in Africa which still do not grant visa on arrival. While Kenya and Tanzania grant visa on arrival, they still make concessions for citizens of some countries and require visa for some citizens. The EAC citizens of Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda move freely between the 3 countries using either their ID cards of the EAC passport<sup>2</sup>. This is a result of removal of mobility restrictions enacted by Heads of State in 2013. Furthermore, the EAC has made progress towards the mutual recognition of accountants and architects.

## II. Objectives of the Session

On the basis of the aforementioned issues, this session will delve into the following questions:

- What are the potential consequences of the Protocol of the Free Movement of Persons on Eastern Africa?
- Why are some countries apparently so concerned about the implementation of the Free Movement Protocol? How can their fears be assuaged?
- Should only skilled workers be allowed to work in other member states? Or should the freedom be extended to all citizens?

## III. Provisional Programme

**Wednesday 21st November 2018**

**Moderator:** Lerato Mbele Roberts, Presenter, Africa Business Report at BBC World News

**Presentation:** Emelang Leteane, Social Affairs Officer, UNECA

**Panel Discussion:**

- Regis Gatarayiha, Director General of Immigration and Emigration, Rwanda.
- Linda Oucho, African Migration and Development Policy Centre, Kenya
- Richard Ssewakiryanga, ECOSOCC, African Union

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<sup>2</sup> EAC passport is currently applicable in and issued by the 3 member countries.

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## IV. Participation

The plenary session will gather experts from Eastern African countries, as well as representatives of the private sector, civil society organizations, and other relevant institutions. For further information and clarification, please contact, Ms. Emelang Leteane, [leteane.uneca@un.org](mailto:leteane.uneca@un.org)

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## References

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