

Regional Migration Governance: A Comparative View

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Draft paper prepared for the UNRISD Conference
Regional Governance of Migration and Socio-Political Rights:
Institutions, Actors and Processes
14-15 January 2013, Geneva, Switzerland





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The conference organisers would like to acknowledge the financial support received by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

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Introduction

In the context of international migration governance, the regional level has gradually gained prominence in recent decades. Intra-regional migration has constantly grown and existing historical, institutional and cultural links make cooperation at the regional level easier than on a global stage. Consequently, multiple regional organizations around the globe have adopted legal instruments in order to facilitate the movement of persons across the borders of their member states. Yet, too little is known about what regional migration governance is about, why the movement of people should be governed at the regional level and how it currently looks like from a comparative perspective.

The purpose of this paper is threefold: First, to open the discussion about the meaning(s), dimensions and forms of *regional migration governance* (What is regional migration governance?), which has rarely been defined as compared to related notions such as global migration governance. Second, theoretical and practical arguments are presented to make a case for regional migration governance, while outlining also some of the major challenges when comparing such regional schemes (Why is the regional level suitable to govern the movement of people?). The third part will provide the reader with an overview on how the movement of people is governed in different world regions.¹ A focus is placed here on intra-regional movements of people (How does regional migration governance look like across different world regions?). The last section concludes and raises questions for further research and study.

What is Regional Migration Governance?

Regional migration governance has become a frequently used term in both academic and policy circles, although its meaning and reach have rarely been defined. One possible clarifying approach is to focus on its two distinctive components. The meaning of *migration governance* has mostly been discussed in the context of an emerging *global* governance of migration (Betts 2010 and 2011; Koser 2010; Koslowski 2011). As indicated by Betts “governance relates to rules, norms and practices, that constrain or constitute behaviour, and it is generally distinguished from ‘government’ by the absence of a single overarching authority. By definition, it is something that goes beyond a purely State-led form of regulation” (Betts 2010:6). In this sense, it relates to all possible governance *levels* and *actors* (state and non-state) involved in the process of negotiation, implementation, enforcement and monitoring of regulations (*Idem*). In the field of migration, this basic definition is however exposed to certain pitfalls. First of all, the distinction between migration and non-migration governance is not always straightforward. Many rules and regulations impact the movement of people without being officially labelled migration governance. They are rather “embedded” in related policy fields such as trade, human rights or international maritime law (Betts 2011:14). The same is true for actors whose mandate does not include migration issues *per se*, though their actions may well impact cross-border movements. Second, it is disputable whether certain aspects such as security, development or international travel should be included at all under the heading of international migration.

While much has been written about the *global* character of migration governance (both descriptive and normative), the attribute “*regional*” has received less attention. This is all the

¹ The data referred to in this paper was collected as of December 2012.

more surprising as the concept of “region” is polysemous and needs to be “unpacked” (Langenhove 2012) along different conceptual dimensions.

In the field of international migration, the regional governance level is perceived as being situated between national policy-making and global attempts to closer inter-state cooperation. As indicated by the Global Commission of International Migration “the governance of international migration should be enhanced by improved coherence and strengthened capacity at the *national* level; greater consultation and cooperation between states at the *regional* level, and more effective dialogue and cooperation among governments and between international organizations at the *global* level” (GCIM 2005:65, emphasis added). Moreover, policies addressing the movement of people can be unilateral, bilateral, regional, inter-regional (or trans-regional) or multilateral. Within this spectrum, the term “regional” may refer to the sub-national, supra-national, inter-regional or transregional level.² The sub-national level can for instance include efforts at the level of communities (local) or regional entities such as the *Länder* in Germany. This becomes most visible in the field of integration policies where the contribution of local or regional authorities refers almost entirely to this governance level. The same is valid for certain types of migration data and population statistics which when referring to the term “regional” often mean the sub-national level (e.g. Eurostat data etc.). In contrast, the supra-national level embraces all forms of cooperation beyond/above the state-level. As it will be discussed in more detail below, supra-national governance can refer to regional integration in the sense of delegation or sharing of power or to purely intergovernmental cooperation, while including both formal and informal processes. Last but not least, there is also an emerging layer of inter-regional or trans-regional migration governance.

Supra-national approaches to migration

When considering the supra-national level only, one can identify two main types of cooperation. The first type includes (formal) regional organizations, which by pursuing different economic, political or security-related objectives have included the movement of people into their integration agenda. As will be illustrated below, a substantial number of regional organizations have already developed common mechanisms to govern the movement of people. Here one always needs to differentiate between instruments that govern *intra-regional* migration flows, and those who target flows from *outside* the respective region. In the majority of cases the first is part of a larger integration agenda, often with the ultimate goal of establishing a common or internal market comprising the free movement of goods, people, services and capital. Few organizations have so far managed to develop also an approach towards migration from outside their region. As in the case of the European Union, the attempt to develop a common immigration policy has followed from the establishment of international free movement (to be refined).

Apart from formal regional arrangements, a second type of cooperation has emerged during the past 20 years through the establishment of so-called Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs).³ RCPs are inter-governmental fora promoting dialogue and cooperation on

² Note that for example the WTO includes in their compilation of “Regional Trade Agreements” (RTAs) also bilateral agreements, see http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/region_e/region_e.htm.

³ For further reading see Klekowski von Koppenfels (2001), Thouez and Channac (2005 and 2006), IOM (2005), Hansen (2010).

international migration.⁴ Despite considerable differences in history, purpose, organizational structure and composition, RCPs do share some essential characteristics distinguishing them from classical regional or international institutions. First of all, RCPs are *informal* and *non-binding*. According to Hansen (2010), informality refers to a depoliticized space in which participants can openly discuss issues of common interest without defending national positions in the first place. However, informality is not to be confused with the absence of (formal) procedures, which are vital for the smooth functioning of such processes. They are non-binding in that participating states do not negotiate binding (legal) rules and are not obliged to follow the conclusions adopted during a meeting. Second, RCPs are *processes*, meaning that they are neither one-time events nor are they comparable to formal regional institutions. They are repeated, regional meetings of government officials, technical experts and representatives of different international and regional organizations. Finally, RCPs are characterized by a minimum administrative structure, their secretariat being often hosted by an international organization. The overall aim common to all RCPs is to create networks of information exchange between participating governments, to build trust between all actors involved and thereby facilitating a common understanding of migration issues which can ultimately lead to convergence in migration policies and practices.

Linkages between different governance levels

While for analytical reasons we aim to separate all the different forms of migration governance, in reality they tend to overlap and intersect creating a complex and interrelated tapestry of actors, institutions, policies and practices.

A good example for this is the governance of migration within the Atlantic Area. As a first broad distinction we can look at governance instruments targeting different migration flows such as North-North, South-North, South-South and, although to a lesser extent, North-South. As illustrated by a current MPI-EUI research initiative on “Improving US and EU immigration systems”, cooperation in the field of human mobility between the US and the EU has, despite similar challenges on both sides of the Atlantic, not yet been fully exhausted (Papademetriou and Sumption 2011). Collaboration has been most intense in the field of border security (e.g. agreements with Europol, Frontex or transfer of passenger name records), yet issues of information sharing and passengers’ data remain sensitive (De Hert and Bellanova 2011). Labour migration of highly skilled is substantial in both directions (mainly businesspeople, scientists and other professionals), being supported by visa facilitation (e.g. US Visa Waiver Program) and bilateral agreements allowing for the portability of social security and pension rights (Xiaochu Hu and Sumption 2011). However, the latter is still being far from comprehensive and along with the mutual recognition of skills and qualifications represents one major barrier to transatlantic labour migration between the US and Europe. While the symmetric nature of US-EU relations allows for enhanced migration cooperation on an equal footing, this is usually not the case for South-North migration, where different interests and priorities of sending and receiving countries (as well as countries of transit) collide. US-Mexican relations are a case in point, where collaborative (bilateral) approaches to managing migration have been limited to the Bracero Programme (Rosenblum and Brick 2011) or the recent cooperation on security and border management following 9/11 (Rosenblum 2011). Regional approaches seem rather exceptional, although not impossible as illustrated by Chapter 16 of NAFTA (temporary entry of high skilled

⁴ For a detailed view on Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) and their membership, see <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/policy-research/regional-consultative-processes/lang/en>.

workers) or the Mérida initiative, involving Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. In comparison, the EU has much more engaged into bi-regional or transregional migration dialogues and agreements, although the number of migrant workers admitted from third countries (quotas) stays within the realm of the Member States. The EU's cooperation with third countries or regions in Latin America or Africa takes place within the framework of the Global Approach to Migration, recently revised and further developed into the Global Approach on Migration and Mobility (GAMM 2011). Continental EU-Africa cooperation on migration is dealt with in the "EU-Africa Strategic Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment" (MME), one of the eight priority areas of the Africa EU Strategic Partnership. This is complemented by sub-regional initiatives such as the Rabat Process (for Western Africa) or specific instruments targeting Northern Africa, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (Carrera 2011). EU cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) ranges from interregional dialogues (EU-LAC Structured Dialogue on Migration) through agreements between the EU and different sub-regions (e.g. EU-Central America cooperation on migration) to bilateral agreements between individual EU Member States and LAC countries (e.g. Spain-Colombia or Brazil-Portugal). Finally, there is also the dialogue on migration between the EU and ACP countries (EU-ACP dialogue) focusing on the strengthening of the operational aspects of implementation of Article 13 of the Cotonou Cooperation Agreement. Finally, the most under-researched dimension is South-South migration, both at the intra- and inter-regional level. While recent numbers estimate South-South migration to be larger than migration from the South to the high-income OECD countries (World Bank 2011) its causes, effects and consequences are still largely overlooked in research and policy circles. As recent research by the ACP Observatory on Migration shows (Melde 2011), governance instruments exist at national level (e.g. cooperation on irregular migration between Brazil and Cape Verde), regional level (intra-regional migration governance within MERCOSUR, CAN, CARICOM, ECOWAS, EAC etc.), bi-regional within Africa (e.g. ECCAS-ECOWAS cooperation), but less at the inter-regional level between Africa and Latin America.

Why the Regional Level to Govern the Movement of People?

Three generations of regionalism

Against the background of globalization and a (still) fragmented multilateral system, the regional level has emerged as an intermediate layer of governance. Although there has been a significant growth in both the number and scope of regional organizations and agreements in recent years, the idea of regional integration and cooperation is certainly not new (Fawcett 2005). Different unions, associations, leagues and the like have existed throughout history with a first major wave of initiatives in the nineteenth century (Mattli 1999). Today, a multitude of regional organizations, associations and agreements exist, differing considerably in their scope, range of activities, institutional set-up, decision-making procedures and membership.⁵

In order to distinguish these different forms of regional integration processes, two dimensions are usually brought forward: (1) a chronological view and (2) a qualitative view (Van

⁵ For a comprehensive list of regional arrangements worldwide see the Regional Integration Knowledge System (RIKS) at: <http://www.cris.unu.edu/riks/web/>.

Langenhove and Costea 2005). The chronological approach identifies successive waves of regionalism, starting either after the Second World War (two waves of regionalism) or including also initiatives between the two World Wars (three waves of regionalism). The qualitative approach in contrast distinguishes between “old” and “new” regionalism, implying a fundamental (qualitative) difference between the two processes. While the “old approach” usually refers to early attempts of regional economic integration and cooperation in the context of the bipolar world order, “new regionalism” encompasses the development of a broader and deeper form of regionalism. New regionalism goes beyond trade liberalization of goods, services or other productive factors and also involves non-state actors such as multinational corporations, NGOs or civil society. An alternative way is to speak of “generations” instead of “waves”, hereby avoiding the strict separation of chronological clusters while circumventing the dichotomy of “old” and “new” (Van Langenhove and Costea 2005: 2).

The “first generation” of regionalism is based upon the idea of a linear process of economic integration whereby former separate (national) economies merge into larger (regional) economies. Following Balassa’s famous approach (1961), different “sequences” of economic integration can be distinguished. The process starts with a *Free Trade Area*, in which the participating states agree to abolish all internal customs on goods while keeping their own level of external custom duties. During the next stage external tariffs are harmonized leading to a so called *Customs Union*. This is followed by a *Common Market*, including the free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. *Monetary integration* furthermore implies the adoption of a common currency, a common monetary policy and a supranational authority to monitor this policy. The *Economic and Monetary Union* goes even one step further by introducing also a common fiscal policy. Within this first generation of regionalism the movement of people can be addressed very differently. Free Trade Agreements do usually contain only very limited provisions targeting high-skilled workers or persons involved in regional trade and business. A Common Market in contrast shall enable the four factors of production to move freely, with workers enjoying a right to enter, work and settle in another member state. Common to all stages of this first generation regionalism is, at least in theory, that the liberalization of movement is linked to economic activity and the integration of labour markets.

The “second generation” of regionalism is based on the idea that economic integration cannot be separated from other political, social or cultural developments and that integration may also include non-economic matters such as security, justice, education etc. Apart from just removing obstacles to economic integration, positive measures can be adopted to facilitate integration in other domains. This usually entails the establishment of a strong institutional and legal framework and also involves non-state actors such as multinational corporations, NGOs or civil society. This type of regionalism is not (anymore) limited to the European Union but includes various integration processes in other world regions too. Within this generation of regionalism one would expect the economic focus on migration to be broadened by a social (or human) dimension. In order to enhance labour mobility in a region-wide labour market, the non-discrimination of all migrant workers needs to be ensured. Apart from the removal of formal barriers, this may also require complementary policies such as the recognition of skills and qualifications or the portability of social security rights. In addition, one could also imagine the scope of liberalized movement to be broadened beyond economically active people, and allow all possible categories of people to move around freely within a region.

The “third generation” finally implies that regions are playing a role on the world stage of global politics. This is often referred to as global “actorness” as the region is performing different tasks as an actor at a global governance level. Prerequisites to speak with one voice in the international arena would include a kind of “regional identity” and a functioning institutional architecture to achieve regional coherence in how to address global issues. In contrast to the previous two generations, the “third generation” would have a clear focus on the external dimension of the region, engage in inter-regional arrangements and become more actively involved as a single entity at the UN and other world bodies (Van Langenhove and Macovei 2010: 17). This form of regionalism is still a normative idea, although the European Union is displaying certain elements of this third generation of regionalism (Van Langenhove and Costea 2005: 12.). Within this third generation one could expect a region to develop a common policy towards the entry and movement of third country nationals. This could imply a common (external) migration policy (e.g. legal migration into the region) and/or a common approach towards refugees and asylum seekers.

Arguments in favour of a regional approach towards migration

A significant part of today’s cross-border movements take place within regional spaces. Starting from a broad, quasi-continental, definition of a region, the World Bank has estimated the levels of intra-regional mobility as a percentage of total emigration (World Bank 2011). As recent numbers show, Sub-Saharan Africa displays 63 per cent of intra-regional flows (World Bank 2011:33). The numbers are even higher when looking at sub-regions such as West Africa, where around 7.5 million migrants move within the region, accounting for 86 per cent of total emigration (OECD-SWAC 2008). Europe and Central Asia taken together account for 55.1 per cent of intra-regional flows, followed by the Middle East and North Africa with 31.5 per cent, and South Asia with 28.2 per cent. In contrast, East Asia and the Pacific do not have comparable levels of intra-regional flows (15.1 per cent) as most of the movements are directed towards high-income countries both within and outside the OECD (World Bank 2011: 23). The same is true for Latin America and the Caribbean (intra-regional migration amounts to 12.9 per cent) where 84.8 per cent of all emigrants head towards high-income OECD countries (World Bank 2011: 27). Another important observation in this regard is that South-South migration (understood as migration between developing countries) is larger than migration from the South to high-income countries belonging to the OECD.⁶ According to calculations by Ratha and Shaw (2007) 80 per cent of South-South migration for which there is statistical evidence takes place between countries that share a common border, as compared to 20 per cent of South-North migration. It seems therefore reasonable to consider regional migration governance to account for this presumed reality and also to foster cooperation between countries from different regions in the Global South. In order to develop effective policies, more research will however be needed to fully understand South-South migration patterns.⁷

A second important argument is that regional agreements are usually easier to reach as compared to *multilateral* (global) frameworks. Due to the smaller number of states, comprehensive agreements are more likely, especially if countries show similar levels of

⁶ According to the World Bank “South” refers to low- and middle-income countries (“developing countries”) as defined by the World Bank’s country classification.

⁷ One current example of such an undertaking is the ACP Observatory on Migration which has been officially launched in October 2010 to produce data on South-South ACP migration flows and enhance research capacities in ACP countries for the improvement of the migrants’ situation and the strengthening of the migration-development nexus. More details can be found at: <http://www.acpmigration-obs.org/>.

socio-economic development. Countries of the same region may share common interests with regard to specific migration challenges and cooperation may be easier due to existing personal links and mutual trust. This is the more relevant in transnational spaces, which often were created by migrants long before the erection of international borders. If these transnational areas are divided by (artificial) boundaries, people will continue to cross borders no matter whether they are allowed to do so by law. Under this condition, sovereign states may act in a legitimate way if they transfer some of their decision-making powers to a regional (supranational) institution to organize cross-border movements of people within a regional space (Kleinschmidt 2006:3). Regional organizations can facilitate such agreements by providing necessary infrastructure and by pooling limited human and financial resources.

Regional arrangements might also have certain advantages vis-à-vis *bilateral* agreements. Generally speaking, the bargaining power of sending countries might be weaker in a bilateral agreement (e.g. labour migration) as receiving countries usually dictate the conditions, in terms of defining the sector, type of occupation, length of stay, renewability, conditions of employment etc. More importantly, bilateral agreements usually do not envisage free movement but rather aim at managing certain migration flows.

Nevertheless, regional migration agreements may also display certain weaknesses. One downside is certainly that by abolishing *internal* borders within a region, new *external* borders are created towards countries not belonging to the regional organization. As in the case of the European Union, intra-regional free movement (“Europe without borders”) has been accompanied by enhanced control and security of EU external borders (“Fortress Europe”). Whether these two trends do however go generally together, remains to be seen with other regional free movement schemes emerging around the globe.

One general challenge of regional integration schemes is furthermore the issue of overlapping membership. Captured in the famous image of a “spaghetti bowl”, countries sometimes belong to different regional organizations at the same time. In the worst case scenario this can lead to incoherence and poor implementation of policies, considerable economic costs and an overall lack of commitment. Last but not least, migration is not only a transnational but also a truly global phenomenon. As pointed out by Gosh (2007) major countries of origin and destination may not always be located in the same region. Regional and (future) global schemes shall therefore be complementary in order to ensure a certain degree of policy coherence.

Methodological and theoretical challenges when comparing

The attempt to compare regional integration processes is accompanied by conceptual, methodological and theoretical challenges, often leading to more confusion than enlightenment (De Lombaerde et al. 2010). From a conceptual point of view, the major problem lies in the absence of an (interdisciplinary) agreement on fundamental notions like region, regional integration, regionalism, regionalization etc. For comparative research this is especially important because the definition of a notion or concept decides upon the selection of a case and ultimately influences the conclusions or generalizations to be drawn (Idem: 5). With regard to the movement of people this is even more relevant because key notions related to migration may differ across countries and regions. This is exacerbated by the fact that

certain concepts are often not defined or further explained.⁸ The second major challenge becomes obvious when looking at the multitude of theoretical approaches aiming at explaining regional integration processes and outcomes. Some theories have developed in line with classical theories in political science and IR, while others emerged in a particular regional context (Fawcett 2005). Especially region-specific theories are said to suffer from a Eurocentric bias leading to the situation in which “progress in regional integration is defined in terms of EU-style institutionalism.”⁹ When comparing migrants’ rights, the European experience should be used as a rich case study without raising it to the one and only path to follow. Yet, it can be helpful in order to anticipate possible challenges to arise once a certain degree of integration between member states is achieved e.g. the necessity of a strong social dimension or granting of citizenship-like rights.

Thirdly, when comparing different regional approaches towards migration, a clear distinction should be made between the legal provisions and the actual implementation of a policy. It appears that existing reports on regional migration governance do not always follow this basic rule, grouping together regional organizations that in reality do not share the same level of integration (see for instance IOM 2010). Several regional arrangements aim at establishing a Common Market but only few have probably achieved it in reality. A certain instrument may grant visa free travel within a region, which in reality is ignored by border posts due to incomplete information, corruption or weak enforcement mechanisms. A particular challenge is that information on the actual situation is very difficult to obtain and there are usually no mechanisms that try to measure the degree of successful implementation.¹⁰

Current Experiences of Intra-regional Migration Governance

The following comparison is based partly on project conducted in joint cooperation between the United Nations University – Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) and UNESCO on the free movement of people within regional integration processes (De Guchteneire et al., forthcoming).

Regional organizations are selected following two main criteria: the arrangement must be a) *regional* and b) *relevant*. Here, the term regional is understood as follows: Member states belong to the same geographical sub-region or to neighbouring geographical sub-regions, and a minimum participation of three states is required, excluding therefore bilateral agreements. Second, the issue of migration must be of relevance, i.e. either the regional organization is officially mandated to become active in the field of movement of people or it has placed the topic on its agenda. Consequently, classical free trade agreements are excluded as well as inter-regional or trans-regional agreements. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) represents one exception because of its importance and relevance with regard to the movement of people.

⁸ One out of many examples can be found in the Draft Protocol of the South African Development Community (SADC), which does not clearly make a difference between “residence” and “establishment” (Williams, 2006:10).

⁹ Breslin et al. (2002) cited in De Lombaerde, P., F. Söderbaum, L. Van Langenhove and F. Baert (2009), p.13.

¹⁰ One example is the Internal Market Scoreboard of the EU. The East African Community currently follows its example.

Table 1. Macro-regions and Regional Organizations

Macro-Region	Regional Organization
The Americas and the Caribbean	CAN, CARICOM, CACM, NAFTA, MERCOSUR
Africa	AU, COMESA, CEMAC, EAC, ECCAS, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, CEN-SAD, AMU
Asia-Pacific	ASEAN, PIF, SAARC
Europe/Russia/ Central Asia	BSEC, Benelux, CIS, COE, EFTA, NORDIC, EU, EURASEC, GUAM, ECO
Middle East/Gulf Region	GCC, LAS

Source: Author's summary.

Besides, it is to be noted that the focus is on regional organizations which are characterized by a certain degree of (formal) institutionalization. As described above, Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) are closely linked to regional organizations and often develop in the broader framework of regional cooperation on migration. As they are however informal processes without binding character, they will not be analyzed in greater detail in here. Based on these criteria, the following regional arrangements were selected (listed geographically). It is considered an open list which can be changed according to current and future developments.

While in the original study the different rights and categories of migrants are analyzed in much greater detail, the following section will only give a broad overview by grouping the different regional approaches into four main categories.

Regional organizations envisaging comprehensive free movement of people within the region

A significant number of existing regional organizations aims at comprehensive free movement of people in the framework of a Common Market (or Single Economic Space) including the free circulation of goods, services, capital and labour. The most prominent example of developing a comprehensive approach to migration is certainly the European Union which has achieved free movement of EU citizens at an unprecedented scale. What is considered today a fundamental right for EU citizens has however been developed in a gradual and long-term process. The founding fathers of the European Economic Community (EEC) did not envisage a general free movement right but targeted the working population only. The rationale behind this was clearly to integrate European labour markets and to allow for labour surpluses from southern Europe to move to central Europe (Kunz and Leinonen 2007:142). Since then, the right to free movement has been constantly extended to all categories of people, notably through the introduction of Union citizenship in 1993 and the integration of the Schengen acquis into Community law in 1999. With this development it soon became clear that by abolishing internal borders, a common approach towards entry and movement of third country nationals would be needed (Elaborate further on free movement of EU citizens vs. TCNs, entry of TCNs, Global Approach and development of CEAS)

The attempt to develop a comprehensive approach towards the intra-regional movement of people is however not confined to the EU, but has taken shape in other world regions as well. As a continental organization comprising 54 Member States, the African Union (AU) has been established with the aim of promoting political and socio-economic integration and

ensuring peace and security on the African continent. In its attempt to govern people's movement it has adopted a multitude of binding and non-binding instruments. The most important are the Migration Policy Framework for Africa (MPFA), the African Common Position on Migration and Development, Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (1969 OAU Convention), and the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa ("Kampala Convention"). Furthermore, the AU has also concluded several inter-regional instruments within the broader framework of the strategic partnership between Africa and the European Union, among which the Joint Africa-EU Declaration on Migration and Development, the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership on Migration, Mobility and Employment (MME) and the Ouagadougou Action Plan to combat Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children.

The AU considers the free movement of persons as an essential component of a future common market and the Abuja Treaty (1991) states as one objective "the gradual removal, among Member States, of obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital and the right of residence and establishment"(Abuja Treaty, Art. 4(2i)). In order to gradually achieve free movement of people on the African continent, Member States are supposed to adopt respective legislation, either unilaterally, bilaterally or regionally. It is important to emphasize that the general understanding of the AU is that continental free movement can only be achieved through sub-regional free movement. Consequently, the main responsibility is given to the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) which facilitate intra-regional movement of their citizens by adopting regional migration instruments or further strengthening existing ones. The AU's role in this is to coordinate and oversee their efforts without however being able to enforce implementation.

There are currently eight RECs recognized as pillars of the African Economic Community: the Community of Sahel Saharan States (CEN-SAD), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the East African Community (EAC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU). In their founding treaties or related protocols all eight RECs have subscribed to the goal of achieving intra-regional free movement for the citizens of their member states. This is to be accomplished in the framework of a common (or single) market. While the aspiration towards regional free movement is clearly documented on paper, its translation into concrete policies differs considerably from one case to another.

Within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) free movement of nationals also constitutes a major objective to be gradually achieved on the way towards full economic integration (Babar 2010). The facilitation of people's movements is considered a crucial means to achieve greater economic unity and enhance trade and economic cooperation among member states. What makes this case particularly interesting is the fact that despite favourable political, economic and social conditions and the effective removal of barriers to free movement, intra-regional migration among GCC countries remains low. According to Babar (2010) this can be explained by the similar structure and segmentation of national labour markets, the lower significance of private sector employment as compared to the public sector as well as a special state-citizen relationship which confers favourable rights to citizens in their home countries.

Regional organizations governing the movement of certain categories of people

A second category includes all regional arrangements which do not aim towards a general free movement of persons but rather intent to facilitate the movement of certain categories of people. The primary goal is to boost economic development by enhancing intra-regional trade in goods and services. Certain categories of high-skilled workers and service providers are granted the right to work in another member state, while low-skilled workers are usually denied access to the labour market.

NAFTA is representative for such an agreement as it only grants temporary entry for certain categories of high-skilled workers. According to Article 1608 of NAFTA, the term “businesspeople” includes persons involved in trade in goods, the provision of services and the conduct of investment activities. The agreement is limited to temporary entry which is defined as being „without the intent to establish permanent residence“(Art. 1608 NAFTA). Temporary entry is basically granted to four categories of high-skilled labour: (1) business visitors, (2) traders and investors, (3) intra-company transferees and (4) professionals. This last category requires a special visa, also known as the non-immigrant NAFTA Professional visa or TN visa (Alarcón 2007: 253). It is to be noted that the requirements for obtaining a NAFTA visa in order to work in the US differ for Canadian and Mexican citizens as well as for their family members.

Regional organizations following the GATS model

ASEAN is a clear example for this group, following to a large extent the approach of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Most initiatives within the ASEAN have focused on facilitating the movement of service providers with a view to expanding trade in services and deepening economic integration. A future ASEAN Community, to be established by 2015, is supposed to consolidate existing initiatives by building on three main pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. This may open ways to address also non-economic migration issues, as illustrated by the “ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers” signed in 2007. Most of these instruments do however not give rise to binding obligations and the issue of legal migration channels and immigration procedures remain unaddressed. The movement of semi- and low-skilled workers has also not been tackled in the current policy framework, which does largely ignore the reality of labour mobility in the region.

Concluding Remarks

As was illustrated above, a multitude of regional organizations all around the world have adopted policies to govern the movement of people within their respective region (and sometimes beyond). Their approaches vary greatly, ranging from comprehensive free movement to granting more limited rights only for certain categories of people. The myriad of different regional free movement and migration protocols can however not conceal that there are serious challenges with successfully implementing these instruments and making the rights granted on paper a reality for cross-border movers.

One major challenge is the slow or missing ratification of legislative instruments. Countries are apparently willing to sign certain agreements but afterwards lack the political will or institutional capacity to put them into practice. The underlying reasons for this may vary from region to region and a more thorough study would probably be needed to draw some final conclusions. A second major challenge consists in the weak implementation of existing instruments. Possible reasons for this could be the weak administrative capacity of implementing bodies and the general lack of financial and human resources. This can affect the regional, national and local levels alike. Key officials such as immigration or border officials must be regularly trained in order to assure that they act according to the latest legislative developments. Successful implementation also requires consultation and cooperation between and among government agencies to assure policy coherence. Another related problem is the absence of monitoring mechanisms. Hardly any regional organization monitors systematically the implementation of regional migration policies. The absence of regional enforcement mechanisms and legal remedies is another serious barrier to effective regional legislation. Multiple examples exist where migrants' rights are openly violated by member states without facing any consequences. This is especially the case in times of economic downturn when migrants are the first to suffer from discrimination and (illegal) expulsion. The role of regional courts, which exists for many regional organizations worldwide, would need to be analyzed in more detail. Last but not least, one should also look more into the role of external actors who often have self-interest in pushing for a certain design of regional migration policies.

To conclude, the study of regional migration governance is still in its infancy and more research needs to be done in order to fully grasp its different dimensions, both from a conceptual and practical point of view. One major challenge in this regard is that migration scholars are rarely experts in (comparative) regional integration and vice versa. More emphasis should be placed on comparative regional integration studies in order to understand the commonalities as well as differences in the processes. What is needed is a more in-depth comparison of two or more cases as opposed to focusing on one single case or collecting indicators on a broad level.