

A new report from UNECA titled “ [Existential priorities for the African Continental Free Trade Area](#) ” analyses the exogenous and endogenous threats to the effective and beneficial operation of the AfCFTA. The report tries to draw some lessons from the regional integration processes launched by Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa, especially for what concerns the dismantling of the current barriers to the movement of persons and migration policies. It concludes that smaller groupings are those that move forward more easily, especially when their interests are aligned. The EAC, for instance, started with only three members (now seven, after the recent [accession](#) of the Democratic Republic of Congo), and was able to move forward rapidly, evolving from a free trade area to a customs union and is now in the process of consolidating its single market by removing any obstacle to the free movement of goods, services and persons.

Also the progress in IGAD is judged as a result, at least in part, of its small size. This suggests that it is easier for smaller subsets of countries to advance the integration process in Africa, especially for what concerns the free movement of people. In this regard, the report also notes that regional hegemons, i.e. larger countries in Africa, in many cases drive the integration process: Nigeria for instance has been influential in the development of ECOWAS, while Kenya and Ethiopia have carried IGAD forward and South Africa has dampened progress towards freer movement in and beyond SADC. The conclusion is that in order to move forward, migration reformers need to strategically win the support of regional hegemons.

The report finally notes that in Africa, upper middle-income countries are more reluctant to liberalize their immigration systems, while low-income countries and small islands are those more inclined to liberalize.