

TOWARD A BORDERLESS AFRICA: LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS FOR IMPLEMENTING A PAN-AFRICAN FREE VISA REGIME TO REDUCE IRREGULAR MIGRATION AND PROMOTE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Thomas Sheku Marah

Nusa Putra University

thomas.sheku_hk23@nusaputra.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Africa is a continent of diverse cultures and enormous potential, but is still fragmented by visa and immigration policies that restrict free movement. This paper attempts to analyze the legal and policy considerations for the implementation of a visa-free system at the continental level and its attempts to address issues articulated in the African Union Agenda 2063. The central objective is to assess how a regime can be designed to deter irregular migration and promote youth empowerment by fostering intra-African mobility. Taking a qualitative methodology underpinned by doctrinal legal analysis, socio-legal analysis, and comparative case studies, this study employs primary legal documents, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. The study notes that although there are considerable legal frameworks in place, the political will, national security issues, and uncoordinated immigration laws create implementation challenges. Still, the cases of Rwanda, The Gambia, and Seychelles show that the liberalization of visas increases youth mobility, decreases irregular migration, and promotes trade and cooperation in the continent. It explains how despite the challenges, the prospects of a continent-wide visa-free regime is achievable and legally tenable with greater political commitment, institutional alignment, and the meaningful participation of the continent's youth. The findings strengthen the claim that the removal of intra-African visa restrictions can greatly enhance youth empowerment, accelerate the process of regional integration, and development in line with the objectives of Agenda 2063.

Keywords: Pan-Africanism, Free Visa Regime, Irregular Migration, Youth Empowerment, African Union, ECOWAS, Borderless Africa, Regional Integration, Intra-African Mobility, AfCFTA

INTRODUCTION

Africa, which is home to more than 1.4 billion people, with almost seventy percent of its population aged below 30 years old, is faced with both a demographic challenge and a transformative opportunity (African Union, 2025). Nonetheless, possibilities in mind, many of the continent's youth continue to be mired in cycles of unemployment, insecurity, and socio-economic marginalization. This reality, combined with rigid visa policies and fragmented regional co-operation, has pushed thousands into dangerous migration trails through deserts and seas in search of a better life. Irregular human migration of individuals from Africa to Europe is taking lives, disrupting families, and robbing the continent of its most valuable resource—its young people (IOM, 2021).

Existing research supports the theory that visa control fuels the evolution of irregular migration patterns, particularly among young Africans (Hassan & Mensah, 2023). The authors contend that the absence of intra-African mobility frameworks compels qualified youth to find opportunities abroad and, in most cases, they utilize dangerous routes. Similarly, Ngugi (2022) offers an observation that administrative obstacles and

financial costs imposed by strict visa policies discourage legitimate movement, as well as exacerbating African nations' disparity.

I am a scholar of Sierra Leonean origin in human rights law, and I have personally seen the dreams of young Africans like my very self who do not wish to leave their home continent but to live in Africa with dignity, opportunity, and freedom — the Africa they call home. This article aims to investigate the prospects of a Pan-African free visa regime as a strategic policy instrument meant to promote youth empowerment, prevent irregular migration, and entrench regional integration. This dream is in line with the aspirations of Agenda 2063: "An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena" (African Union, 2015; ILO, 2019).

Several researchers have examined the legal complexities involved in implementing a continental visa-free regime. For instance, Tadesse & Ouedraogo (2023) point out that political will and the harmonization of laws remain essential bottlenecks despite the presence of instruments such as the AfCFTA and the AU Free Movement Protocol. Furthermore, studies by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2021) and the African Development Bank (2023) show that countries with liberal visa regimes report increases in tourism, trade, and regional cooperation — reinforcing the economic viability of mobility reforms.

National security fears, political mistrust, and lack of coordination (African Union, 2018; AUCIL, 2025) have hampered the slow and uneven implementation of promising initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. This article explores key legal, institutional, and socio-political challenges which stand in the way of continental free movement and outlines frameworks that could expedite integration. It contends that free movement across African borders cannot be detached from law or policy; it is a human right and a strategic imperative for sustainable development, regional peace, and youth inclusion.

In the long run, the research argues that uprooting intra-African visa requirements will not just help reduce irregular migration but also open the floodgates of young human potential to promote innovation, trade, and growth from within the continent. The work contributes to a growing body of legal scholarship that positions a borderless Africa as a path toward justice, opportunity, and renaissance on the continent.

Background and Context

Like many regions in the world, mobility across borders in Africa has often been defined by colonial-era borders that still shape immigration policies and national identity. Unlike the EU Schengen Area, allowing designated individuals (those with EU passports) to move across borders within a collection of countries without restrictions, Africa is still an African continent where Africans need visas to visit other countries in Africa (UNECA, 2019). This reality betrays the very nature of the Pan-Africanism espoused by the founding fathers of the African Union (AU), such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, who envisioned a united continent built on integrated economies, policies, and peoples (Nkrumah, 1963; AU, 2013).

In spite of notable policies and efforts towards integration with the establishment of Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the launch of the African Continental Free

Trade Area (AfCFTA), the movement of persons remains very limited (UNECA, 2021). So, for example, only a meagre 24% of African countries provide visa-less access to all African citizens, whereas 51% still require African visitors to apply before arrival for a visa (AfDB, 2023) Such limitations also directly go against the objectives of Agenda 2063 and the Free Movement Protocol, which was adopted in 2018 but ratified by only a fraction of states as of 2025 (African Union, 2018).

The effects of limited mobility is widespread. They consist, for example, of irregular migration, human trafficking, and brain drain—specifically youth brain drains (IOM, 2021; UNHCR, 2020). Young Africans find themselves estranged in their own continent, leading to dangerous pathways through the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea, putting themselves at a higher risk of being victims of extortion, abuse, or death (IOM, 2023).

Research and advocacy have increasingly centered on, and argued for, the full implementation of the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons as a legal basis for visa-free travel among AU Member States (AUCIL, 2025; Kaaba & Namakula, 2021). This call is reinforced by the acknowledgement that managed migration, both legal and humane, promotes economic growth, cultural exchange, and regional solidarity ((OECD, 2019; UNDP, 2020).

Finally, case studies from countries such as Rwanda, The Gambia, and Seychelles—where visa-free access has been granted to all or most citizens from Africa—show that reducing travel restrictions translates into increased tourism, trade, and regional cooperation without undermining national security (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021).

This background will prepare the reader for an analysis of the necessary legal and policy instruments (herein referred to as legal-political instruments) — in the subsequent sections — that are needed to create an Africa without borders and how such reforms strive to tackle the root causes of irregular migration and achieve profound youth empowerment.

Problem Statement

The dream of a borderless Africa has remained an eternal dream despite efforts at continental integration. Millions of African youths are trapped in a system of exclusion and constrained mobility due to the chasm between policy ambition and action. In the intervening period, legal instruments such as the African Union Free Movement Protocol (2018) and the AfCFTA Agreement (2019) have taken steps to establish foundational frameworks for intra-African integration, but the socio-economic color of the legal frameworks remains unchangingly horrendous: the bureaucratic stigmas of visa reservation, national security-driven immigration legislation, and lapses of political will continue to stagnate the instrumentalities that engender the legal frameworks (African Union, 2018; UNECA, 2021; AUCIL, 2025).

And nowhere is this disparity more acute than in the lives of young Africans. With legal travel routes closed off to them, they are left with no option but to travel by irregular means in search of work, education, or dignity. More than 25,000 migrants have died crossing the Mediterranean since 2014, with the majority coming from Sub-Saharan Africa, according to notes from the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2023) It is not that these young people are fleeing Africa because they do not love home; it is because

opportunities are shut off to them in Africa. The inability to harmonize visa policies across the continent in this context is a failure to protect Africa's future.

The fragmentation of visa regimes chokes economic growth, too. Restricting the movement of entrepreneurs, students, and professionals around African countries prevents innovation, cross-border trade, and know-how exchange (AfDB, 2022; OECD, 2019). Moreover, existing policies run counter to AU goals outlined in Agenda 2063, which calls for "seamless borders" and a unified African identity (African Union, 2015; United Nations, 2018)

Thus, the study aims to tackle a key dilemma: how may the legal and policy advances be coordinated across the African continent to achieve a viable, continental free visa regime? What institutional, political, and legal obstacles remain in the way of this transformation? And how will a harmonized visa policy contribute to less irregular migration and real prospects for Africa's youth?

These questions deserve urgent answers, particularly as more African countries face rising youth unemployment, social unrest, and migration crises. Without rapid, united action, the continent faces deepening fragmentation, growing inequalities, and loss of trust in African institutions.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to provide a foundational study of the legal, political, and institutional frameworks needed to create a Pan-African free visa regime and show how this can lead to a reduction in irregular migration and a greater degree of youth empowerment for the continent.

The specific aims of this study are:

1. To interrogate the current legal and policy frameworks that govern freedom of movement in Africa, the AU Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and regional agreements under RECs (African Union, 2018; AUCIL, 2025).
2. To determine the obstacles to fully implementing a continent-wide visa-free system (UNECA, 2021; Kaaba & Namakula, 2021).
3. This paper assesses the effect of restrictive visa regimes on irregular migration, youth displacement, and socio-economic exclusion (IOM, 2023; UNDP, 2020).
4. To learn from the best practices of African countries that have successfully implemented liberal visa policies, including, but not limited to, Rwanda, The Gambia, and Seychelles (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021).
5. To make policy recommendations to harmonize African visa policies and promote legal mobility, empowering youth and regional cooperation (AfDB, 2022; OECD, 2019).

Through pursuing these and other aims, this study will contribute to the existing discussions regarding regional integration and free movement, youth mobility, and migration governance in Africa. It also aims at giving the human touch to the legal parlance by anchoring the discourse in human aspirations — such as those of the author, Thomas Sheku Marah of Sierra Leone — who dreams of an Africa where young ones have the opportunity to reach their full potential and exercise leadership on the continent, without the need to take dangerous migration routes.

Questions and Hypotheses for the Study

Guiding this exploration of the continent-wide visa-free republic and its effect on youth empowerment and migration, this study is informed by the following research questions:

Main Research Question:

How do we develop a legal, operational process of establishing a Pan-African free visa regime which can provide additional incentive for young people to interest themselves and challenge their future while actually owning it, as opposed to being drawn to irregular migration?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the main challenges — political, legal, and security-related — that have prevented their implementation?
2. How have restrictive visa regimes exacerbated irregular migration among African youth?
3. What can be learned from liberal visa policies in African states?
4. What policy recommendations could be made to apply a continental free visa framework?

Hypotheses:

1. **H1:** Individual AU member states' political will and harmonization of immigration law are the key constraints to the full realization of a pan-African visa-free regime (AUCIL, 2025).
2. **H2:** Visa-restrictive policies and irregular migration among Africans have mobilized young minds.
3. **H3:** At the key sectors with significant potential in reciprocal movement — the implementation of a comprehensive visa-free regime in Africa will make legal movement easier, raise intra-Africa trade, and strengthen the empowerment of young Africans (AfDB, 2022; OECD, 2019).
4. **H4:** More tourism and trade, and less irregular migration, in Africa with liberal visa policies.

These investigation questions and hypotheses are rooted in substantial legal doctrine and an empirical analytical framework, and they are intended to be concrete pathways for facilitating the African Union's quest for an integrated, primordial, and people-centered continent (African Union, 2015).

Significance of the Study

This study is of great academic and practical importance, particularly to legal scholars, policymakers, migration specialists, and young people in Africa. The research engages platforms such as the Fourth Agenda of AfCFTA and other regional policies in demonstrating practical ways that African states can push back against legal and policy restrictions that inhibit intra-African movement, while contributing to the expanded knowledge on regional integration and migration governance (AUCIL, 2025; Kawka & Namakula, 2021).

It first presents a legal appraisal of the African Union frameworks (Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Agenda 2063) identified in the previous chapter and highlights implementation gaps that should be addressed for a visa-free Africa to materialize (African Union, 2018; African Union, 2015). That is especially important to students of international law and public policy who hope to grasp how international legal instruments may yet be localized across such a heterogeneous and fractured continent.

And second, the study provides a voice to the lived realities experienced by African youth, especially those from marginalized or conflict-affected areas like Sierra Leone. As a student of international law and citizen of Sierra Leone, the author, Thomas Sheku Marah, provides personal insight that highlights the urgency of this reform. His is the story of the dreams of many young Africans, who are looking for a chance not outside the continent via perilous migration routes, but home — through cohesion, fairness, and accessibility.

Third, the study has importance related to regional peace and development. “Preventing and countering radicalization and promoting effective youth inclusion are crucial for fostering stability and achieving long-term peace and countering violent extremism as well as achieving sustainable development” (UNDP, 2020). Visa-free mobility is more than a travel policy; it is a way to promote inclusivity, economic equity, and human dignity across African borders.

Finally, the study also suggests the evidence-based best practices based on successful visa policies from African countries like Rwanda and The Gambia, which could be the referent for other AU member states (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021). These case studies illustrate that security challenges can be reconciled with the principle of free movement.

In conclusion, the study aims to become a trigger for policy discussion in Africa and to come up with practical recommendations that can result in a borderless, youth-led, and economically proactive Africa. It makes a legal and a moral case for African solidarity — law-based, people-driven, next-generation-led.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The argument for regional integration and free movement within Africa is very much rooted in the vision of the African Union and of its member states. The African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence, and Right of Establishment (African Union, 2018) is the key legal instrument underpinning this vision and presents a roadmap for the progressive liberalization of intra-African travel. Its adoption was accompanied by slow and fragmented implementation and a limited number of countries ratifying the protocol (African Union Commission, 2019; UNECA, 2021)

However, scholars Kaaba & Namakula (2021) note that the existence of policy frameworks alone is not sufficient; action on the ground is conditioned by state-focused security concerns and absence of legal harmonization. Their analysis of immigration laws reveals how such provisions tend to reflect nationalistic spirit; they often prioritize sovereignty over continental unity. This discord, they argue, inhibits regional integration and negates the very goals of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015)

More details on how mobility drives socio-economic development can be found in The African Development Bank (2022) and Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2021). The AfDB's

African Visa Openness Index indicates that tourism, foreign direct investment, and trade between countries increase for African states with more open visa regimes. High-profile successful cases of visa regime reform include Rwanda, Seychelles, and The Gambia, which were able to reform their visa regimes in the interests of economic growth and regional connectivity (AfDB, 2022).

Doomed by restrictive visa regimes, migration scholars like Bakewell (2020) and UNDP (2020) concentrate on the human cost of such regimes — especially for African youth. They illustrate how systematic obstacles to legal migration led young people to irregular routes, putting them at risk of exploitation, trafficking, and death. The IOM (2023) reveals over 25,000 African migrants have died in the Mediterranean since 2014, an alarming figure that illustrates the need for reform.

AUCIL (2025) notes that, from a legal perspective, the failure of Member States to implement ratified AU treaties infringes these regional obligations and undermines the trust in supranational governance. The body calls for stricter enforcement mechanisms and peer-review provisions to ensure compliance. Elsewhere, OECD (2019) highlights the necessity of institutional capacity building, inter-agency collaboration, and legal training in member states to harmonize such a visa policy.

Comparative studies also have promise. Munemo (2012), looking at visa liberalization in SADC and ECOWAS, found that regional economic communities (RECs) must facilitate trust-building among member states. His findings remind us how trust-building at the regional level and agreements among a few countries can eventually lead to continental frameworks. (IDS, 2021)

Despite the wealth of insights on free movement at the international level, little is available in the academic literature on youth-directed action toward free movement, nor on human-centered legal arguments for reform. This study, by Thomas Sheku Marah, attempts to make up for that shortcoming — adding the voices of youth and underrepresented African countries, such as Sierra Leone, to the regional debate.

As such, the literature establishes the legal, economic, and humanitarian aspects of the debate on free movement — setting the stage for this research to suggest actual policy and legal changes that contribute to the cause of a borderless, inclusive Africa.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a scholarly work that uses qualitative legal research methodology based on doctrinal and socio-legal approaches. It requires a thorough analysis of regional legal frameworks, national visa regulations, migration statistics, and policy papers to evaluate the feasibility, obstacles, and repercussions of a Pan-African visa-free regime.

Legal Doctrinal Method

Doctrinal approach: This involves the analysis of primary legal texts, including:

1. African Union 2018 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons
2. Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015)
3. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (OAU, 1981)
4. National relevant immigration laws for selected AU member states

This approach assists in determining existing commitments, the ratification situation, and differences in implementation between member states (AUCIL, 2025).

Socio-Legal Analysis

In addition to discussing the black-letter law, this study brings together empirical accounts and social science data to provide a summary of the human toll of existing visa policies. To gain insights into how restrictive mobility policies affect irregular migration, youth displacement, and socio-economic exclusion, we turn to reports by IOM (2023), UNDP (2020), and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2021).

Comparative Analysis

To showcase best practices, the research compares visa policies and their impact across countries including:

1. Rwanda, which offers visa on arrival to all African
2. The Gambia, which allows most African nationals to visit without a visa
3. Seychelles, with an open-borders approach (AfDB, 2022; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021)

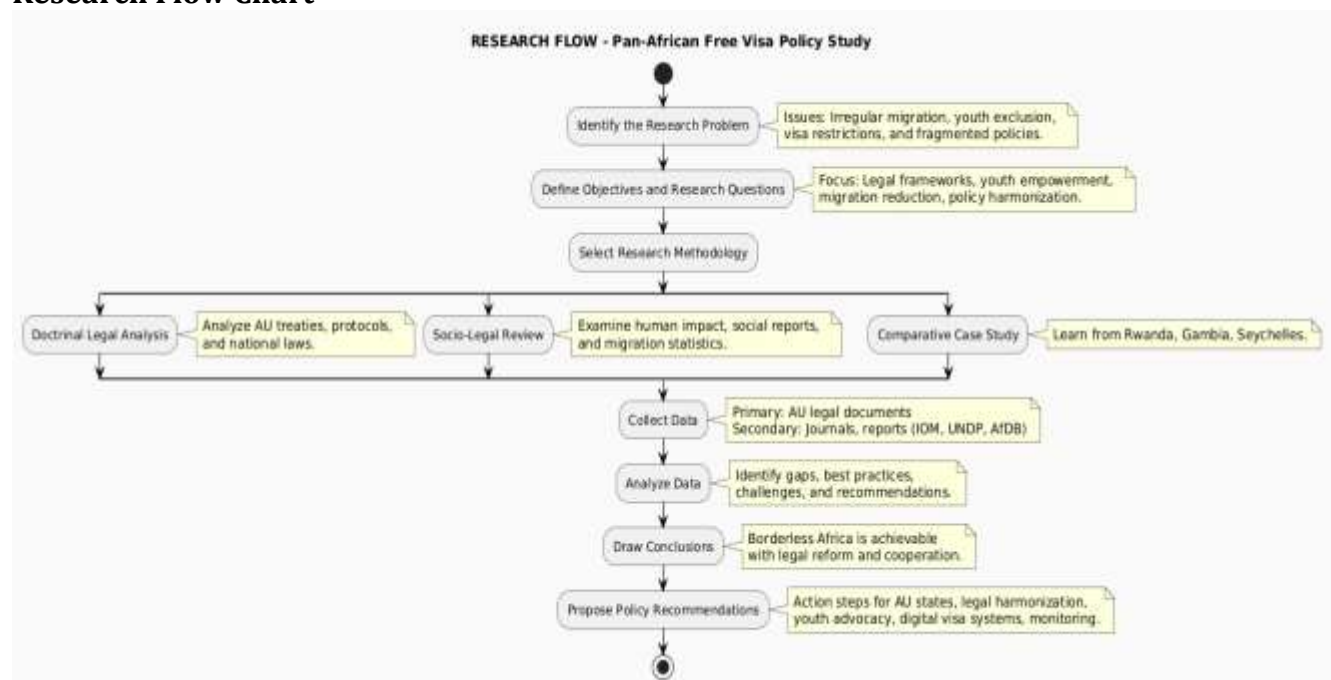
The examples above show that security and openness are not mutually exclusive, and that successful models already exist on the continent.

Data Collection

Data sources include:

1. AU and UN legal databases
2. International organization publications (IOM, UNDP, AfDB)
3. Research papers (Kaaba & Namakula, 2021; Bakewell, 2020)
4. Refugee-level immigration data
5. Policy briefs and relevant news articles related to youth migration and visa regimes

Research Flow Chart



Research Flow Chart Explanation

The diagram outlines the flow of research and is a descriptive guide on how this study was carried out. The study seeks to understand the legalities and policies related to the establishment of a Pan-African free visa policy as a pattern of socio-legal and comparative research was undertaken, moving sequentially and holistically.

The process starts with the framing of the problem which, in this case, is the highly fragmented and diverse nature of the visa regime policies applied on the African continent. National frameworks such as the African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and Agenda 2063 are in place, but significantly more restrictive national policies still remain and these inhibit access by the youth to mobile opportunities, increasing irregular migration, economic stagnation, and socio-political exclusion.

Then, a set of objectives and clearly defined research questions are crafted. In this case, the objectives aim at testing the practicality of operating a visa-free regime across Africa, delimiting the legal and political obstacles to its operationalization, and investigating the ways such a policy could enable young people and in so doing aid in reducing the perilous routes of migration.

The next stage is defining the qualitative research approach to be applied. The current study combines three methods that are interrelated:

1. **A doctrinal analysis** of law approach enables the assessment of primary legal materials such as treaties of the AU, national immigration statutes, and regional contracts.
2. **Socio-Legal Review** employs both empirical and institutional information to evaluate the effects of current mobility restrictions on human development.
3. **Comparative Case Study** allows one to learn from the best practices of other African countries such as Rwanda, The Gambia, or Seychelles, which have benefitted from liberalized visa regimes.

The data collection stage consists of the gathering of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include AU legal instruments and policy frameworks, while secondary sources consist of scholarly articles, migration reports, and publications from various institutions such as IOM, UNDP, and AfDB.

Then in the data analysis stage, a thematic synthesis of the legal and policy documents is conducted to extract common trends, legal gaps, and issues around enforcement. The study also analyzes national implementation as compared to continental obligations in order to determine the gaps between policies and their intended objectives.

In the end, the research reaches the final conclusions alongside policy recommendations. With the evidence analyzed in the study, there are clear steps suggested to align visa policy frameworks within Africa, strengthen inter-African institutional collaboration, age demographics engagement, and align with the goals of Agenda 2063. These findings affirm that an Africa without borders is not only legally achievable but needed strategically for regional integration and sustainable development.

To conclude, the Research Flow Diagram captures the reasoning and the methods used at every stage during the course of this study. It illustrates the movement of the research from diagnosing problems to constructing rational legal and policy remedies, underpinned academically and built on Pan African principles.

Scope and Limitations

This study is primarily focused on sub-Saharan Africa, with reference to continental frameworks. Non-African immigration policies are beyond its scope. Further, while the author has personal experience to bear as a Sierra Leonean youth, the data presented is secondary and relies on the credibility of institutional and academic sources.

The methodology facilitates a comprehensive grasp of both the legal architecture and human impact of Africa's visa regimes—situating the recommendations in normative and practical categories.

EXPECTED RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Drawing upon the review of existing legal instruments, policy reports, and comparative country models, the study expects that these outcomes will be observed with the complete implementation of the free visa policy on the African continent.

Combined Youth Mobility and Opportunities

The study anticipates that liberalization of visa policies will result in an increase in legal, safe avenues of migration for African youth. Greater mobility will help eliminate bureaucratic and financial hurdles to travel, allowing more young people to access education, jobs, and opportunities for cultural exchange across the continent (UNDP, 2020; African Union, 2018). This will reduce the push factors that lead to irregular migration today (IOM, 2023).

Regional Integration and a Stronger Pan-African Identity

Open movement between African countries would allow Africans to understand each other's shared cultures and histories, build continental solidarity, and realize the vision for Agenda 2063—an integrated continental society with seamless borders (African Union, 2015). According to the research, a pan-African visa will strengthen RECs and advance diplomatic collaboration (Kaaba & Namakula, 2021).

Growth with Expansion in the Labor Market

Citing experiences from countries such as Rwanda, The Gambia, and Seychelles, the analysis predicts that visa liberalization will spur economic growth, encourage intra-African trade, and establish labor mobility routes that can help close skills gaps across geographies (AfDB, 2022; Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021). This will be beneficial to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), tourism, and investments among the countries.

Decrease in Irregular Migration and Migrant Deaths

Most prominent among these is a drop in the number of illegal migrations flows and related deaths. Enhanced African mobility and opportunities on the continent would reduce the number of migrants from Africa needing to risk dangerous sea routes to reach Europe or depend on trafficking (Bakewell, 2020; IOM, 2023). This is in accordance with the UN Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (UN, 2018).

Increased Legal Harmonization between Member States

It is envisaged that the research will lead to recommendations for legal and institutional environments in AU member states to better conform to the AU Protocol on Free Movement. This involves reciprocal recognition of housing rights, visa information paradigms, and dispute settlement systems (AUCIL, 2025; OECD, 2019).

Some States' Pushback and Political Challenges

The analysis also warns of resistance from some member states due to security concerns, economic protectionism, or political instability. This section will address the legitimacy of these concerns but will also discuss possible solutions, including biometric visa systems, gradual implementation, and the piloting of sub-regional programs (Munemo, 2012; UNECA, 2021).

Ultimately, this study will show that despite the challenges, the advantages of free movement far outweigh its disadvantages, particularly regarding regional peace, youth development, and economic equity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Reflecting on a beautiful future for Africa, I, Thomas Sheku Marah, a Sierra Leonean youth, especially cherish imagining a time where we can freely roam **anywhere** on the continent without restrictions on studying or working. This wishful thought isn't an unrealistic daydream; rather, it is grounded **in** the policies that deepen the legal domains of the continent. This research, seeking to empower African youth, has composed legal and policy blueprints aimed at achieving a Pan-African free visa policy. Through the combination of qualitative methodologies such as doctrinal legal analysis, socio-legal reviews, and comparative case studies, the positivist approach taken by the study **purports** that there are existing legal and political barriers to such a transformation; nevertheless, the African Union's architecture can easily facilitate this within its frameworks.

This particular research had goals with specific purposes, such as reframing the boundaries of the concept of movement to capture its legal scope in Africa, analyzing how visa arrangements impact youth informal migration, and compiling lessons from effective domestic policies suitable for a continental visa-less ethos. The accomplishment of those aims required systematic structuring through primary literature like the AU Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Agenda 2063, AfCFTA, and IOM and UNDP reports, alongside scholarly literature.

The analysis verifies that the restrictive policies of visas do not only inhibit movement, but are also a source of crises. They directly escalate irregular migration, put younger Africans at risk of exploitation and death, and worsen socio-economic exclusion. The failure of the **state's** members to align their policies on the visa system clashes with Pan-Africanism and goes against the developmental goals set in Agenda 2063. On the other hand, the comparative study of countries like Rwanda, The Gambia, and Seychelles shows that liberal policies on visas support intra-African trade, advance regional integration, and promote safe, legal, and productive mobility of the youth.

On that note, this research supports the notion that abolishing borders in Africa is not only appealing but essential. The initiatives are already proposed; what is needed is collective action and political determination to execute them. The concerns regarding **the** economy and security that are often cited against free movement can be solved with step-by-step construction, controlling the borders with the help of digital systems, and regional testing programs that establish confidence **among** states. The African Union, alongside regional bodies and the wider civil society, has the responsibility to take command **of** the enforcement of existing protocols, ensuring that member nations adhere to their obligations.

As a young African, I feel the pressure. Every single day that goes by with visa restrictions still in place is precisely another day of lost potential, wasted skill, and purposeless agony. A region of the world that restricts movement of its own enables citizens to limit access to **elsewhere** and leads to nullifying the opportunities of its future. But a region that allows movement helps **encourage** young people to learn, innovate, and work beyond geographical delimitation **and** is a region that is sure to touch the skies when it comes **to** peace, prosperity, and dignity.

At the end of the day, this paper aims to extend beyond an academic document and instead serve as a call to arms. This serves as proof that pursuing integration is as much a logical step as an empathetic one. If African leaders, nations, and institutions find it in themselves to dream, address, and work together, then the dream of an Africa devoid of borders that is steered by its youth is possible, and it will happen not in a far-removed point in time, but during our lifetime.

Recommendations

These include:

1. **Immediate Ratification and Implementation of AU Protocol:** All AU member states should prioritize the fulfillment of the Free Movement Protocol ratification and its domestic implementation in a bid to achieve the 2063 goals of integration (African Union, 2018; GIZ, 2020)
2. **Create a Pan-African Visa System:** Building on the Schengen Zone approach, develop a digital and biometric visa system that will enable citizens to move seamlessly across member states with one African visa (OECD, 2019; UNECA, 2021).
3. **Launch Feasibility Studies for Sub-Regional Pilot Projects:** Conduct studies in amenable RECs like ECOWAS or EAC, and pilot them as blueprints for continental expansion (Munemo, 2012).
4. **Legal Harmonization and Institutional Restructuring:** AU legal bodies such as the African Court and AUCIL should cooperate with national congresses to harmonize immigration laws, minimize inconsistencies, and enhance compliance (AUCIL, 2025).
5. **Youth Inclusion and Advocacy:** Youth leaders, like me, must be given platforms to participate in shaping mobility policies through the mechanisms of the African Youth Charter and civic engagement programs (UNDP, 2020; Bakewell, 2020).
6. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Counter fear-based narratives by establishing continent-wide campaigns that elucidate the economic and social merits of free movement based on shared identity and responsibility (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2021)

7. **Resilient Closure of Borders:** Strengthen efficient cross-border intelligence sharing, border control technologies, and border policing to combat legitimate security threats while balancing free movement for honest travelers (IOM, 2023).
8. **Funding and Partnerships:** Engage development partners, such as the AfDB, to provide funding for infrastructure and capacity-building efforts integral to the integration of visa systems (AfDB, 2022).
9. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Set up an independent AU mechanism and platform for regular oversight of member state compliance and evaluation of the social and economic impacts, as well as key lessons learned from free visa implementation (UNECA, 2021;AUDA-NEPAD, 2020)).
10. **Integrate Human Rights and Pan-African Ethics:** Reforms related to visas must be rooted in the principles of human dignity, freedom of movement, and African solidarity, ensuring no one is left behind (OAU, 1981).

With political will, solidarity, and the necessary legal reforms, there is hope in Africa—that the continent can create an environment where citizens do not feel like they have to emigrate but are empowered to live and prosper on the motherland. Let this paper be a call to action—not only for policymakers but for the African community as a whole.

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