

1 **“Kenya’s Realignment of Migration Policy to the EAC Free Movement of Persons**
2 **Protocol: From Commitment to Compliance”**

3 **Abstract**

4
5 Although partner nations are obligated under the East African Community (EAC) Common
6 Market Protocol to gradually remove obstacles to the free movement of people, there exist
7 significant differences in the degree to which these treaty requirements alter national migration
8 policies. This article examines Kenya’s immigration policy realignment trajectory through the
9 EAC free movement of persons requirements, focusing on whether reforms have moved the
10 system from nominal commitment to substantive compliance. Neo-functionalism, liberal
11 intergovernmentalism, and realism serve as the theoretical foundation for the approach, which
12 highlights the conflict between integration spillovers, the creation of domestic preferences, and
13 persistent worries about sovereignty. Empirically, the study uses a mixed methods design guided
14 by a positivist paradigm, surveying 349 officials and practitioners from key non-state actors, the
15 EAC Secretariat, and Kenya’s core migration governance institutions. SPSS is used to analyse
16 264 valid responses in addition to thematic analysis of primary informant interviews and
17 documentary data. Based on Common Market Provisions incorporated into the Constitution of
18 2010, alongside the 2011 Immigration & Citizenship Act, Kenya has achieved significant front-
19 end conformity with EAC obligations through visa-free admission for EAC citizens, the
20 implementation of the e-passport, the formation of One Stop Border Posts, and the waiver of
21 Class R work permits fees. However, a two-speed system where entry is liberalised, but deeper
22 movement rights remain precarious, is created by ongoing restrictions in the administration of
23 work permits, incomplete harmonisation of labour and residency regimes, overlapping mandates,
24 and unequal digitalisation. According to the article’s conclusion, Kenya falls somewhere
25 between full compliance and rhetorical leadership, and it outlines the institutional changes
26 required to bridge this gap.

27

28 **Keywords:** The East African Community, Kenya, Free movement of persons, migration policy,
29 Common Market Protocol, Regional Integration

30

31 **Introduction**

32 The Common Market Protocol (CMP) issued by the East African Community (EAC) provides a
33 lofty objective of a regional zone where people, capital, goods, and services can move across
34 national boundaries with little challenges (EAC, 2010). The CMP lays out a systematic bundle of
35 rights for free movement of people, such as entry, residence, establishment, and access to labour
36 markets for citizens of partner states. These rights are based on the hope that national
37 immigration laws will gradually be harmonised with regional guidelines (EATUC, 2020;
38 EAC, 2010). As a founding member state, a regional economic centre, and a crucial transit and
39 destination nation for intra-EAC travel, Kenya plays a crucial role in this architecture
40 (FKE, 2022; Njuki, 2016).

41

42 Kenya has formally demonstrated an immense dedication to the free movement provisions of the
43 CMP. It passed the Kenya Immigration and Citizenship Act of 2011, which offers a clear legal

44 foundation for coordinating national immigration policy with EAC responsibilities,ratified the
45 Protocol, and integrated the idea of regional integration within the 2010 Constitution
46 (EAC,2017;Nyawade,2019). Kenya has also further implemented various operational measures
47 related to free movement,such as allowing EAC citizens to enter the country without a
48 visa,accepting EAC electronic passports,establishing One Stop Border Posts (OSBP), and
49 waiving the cost of the Class R work permit for EAC citizens (WKA Advocates,2025;
50 Magwilu&Wasonga,2023; Kago & Masinde,2016). Kenya is now seen as a regional pioneer in
51 the institutionalisation of the CMP as a result of these reforms (Kimani,2021;Organisation,2020).

52
53 Evidence from implementation,however,indicates that there is still a discrepancy between
54 commitment to theory and actual compliance. Despite liberalised entry,residence rights are not
55 consistently guaranteed,work permit regimes for EAC citizens are still complicated and
56 arbitrary,and mandates that overlap among immigration, law, and security agencies lead to
57 coordination issues and uneven enforcement across various border posts and administrative
58 locations (Barasa,Muli & Kakai,2023;Nyawade,2019). The study’s respondents often described a
59 “two-speed” world in which bureaucratic barriers- particularly those on labour and long-term
60 stay-remain strong while physical boundaries have been opened.

61
62 This tendency is consistent with more general findings in the literature on African regional
63 integration, which emphasise the persistence of control logics driven by sovereignty under
64 integration legal frameworks (O’Connor, 2021; African Centre for Migration &
65 Society,2018;Witwatersrand,2018). That conflict is the focus of the current work. It investigates
66 commitment to substantive compliance with the CMP’s free movement of persons requirements
67 and how far the country has actually realigned its administrative practices and migration policy.
68 Three interconnected questions form the framework of the analysis. First,how well do Kenya’s
69 legal,constitutional, and regulatory frameworks comply with CMP requirements regarding EAC
70 residents’ entrance,residency,establishment, and employment? Second, what technological,
71 administrative,legal, and infrastructure frameworks has Kenya implemented to make this
72 alignment operational? Third, how do frontline officials and policy stakeholders see the strategic
73 interventions that have been implemented to strengthen compliance,such as fee
74 exemptions,digitalisation, and institutional coordination?

75
76 The article places these challenges into a theoretical framework that blends realism,liberal
77 intergovernmentalism, and neofunctionalism. Neofunctionalism highlights how commerce and
78 connection create functional pressures that might have an effect on the migratory domain
79 (Del’Melo & Tikata, 2013; Haas, 1958/2004). Liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes how
80 interstate negotiations and domestic alliances influence the scope and speed to realign
81 (Moravcsik,1998). In border and migration governance,realism highlights the tenacity of
82 sovereignty claims,especially when security and labour market issues are prominent
83 (Wesonga,2023;Witwatersrand,2018). When combined, these theories present realignment as a
84 negotiated path influenced by both national political economy and regional commitments rather
85 than a straight-line automated process.

86 Empirically, the study adds to the body of literature by incorporating extensive proof from the
87 institutions that actually execute and experience free movement,going above legal and policy
88 analysis. The article offers a grounded critique of how Kenya’s migration policy has been
89 amended under the CMP using poll responses from 264 officials and specialists drawn from the

90 country's core immigration governance agencies, the EAC Secretariat, and pertinent non-state
91 actors, in addition to key interviews with informants and standard documentary analysis. Through
92 this, it adds complexity to the current depictions of Kenya as either a "laggard" or an integration
93 "champion," characterising the nation as occupying an intermediary position: well advanced in
94 formal commitment and front-end facilitation, but still lacking in deeper compliance with the
95 broad spectrum of free mobility entitlements.

96

97 **Statement of the problem**

98 The Common Market Protocol of the EAC proposes a cohesive regional bloc with unrestricted
99 capital, labour, and human mobility. Kenya, a founding member, has shown a strong front-end
100 adherence to these principles by waiving Class R employment permits fees, introducing e-
101 passports, and reforming the constitution fees (Badewa, 2020; Magwilu & Wasonga, 2023; WKA
102 Advocates, 2025). Kenya's stated policy pledges and practical operational compliance continue to
103 diverge sharply, notwithstanding these structural achievements (Wasonga, 2023; Kimani, 2021;
104 Nyawade, 2019). Deeper movement rights, like citizenship and access to the local labour markets,
105 are still extremely insecure. Although initial admission has been substantially liberalised
106 (Badwe, 2020; Wasonga, 2023).

107 A "two-speed" migration system has emerged as a result of its uneven implementation. Citizens
108 of East Africa face uncoordinated labour regulations, inconsistent work permit governance, and
109 long-standing bureaucratic obstacles (Wesonga, 2023). Additionally, inconsistent execution and
110 institutional bottlenecks among administrative positions are sometimes caused by overlapping
111 duties across Kenyan migration, law enforcement, and labour agencies (Mwangi, 2020;
112 Witwatersrand, 2018). The literature that is currently available recognises the grounds of
113 contention, but mostly depends on formal legal assessments and frequently labels Kenya as
114 either a reluctant laggard or an integration champion (Kimani, 2021; Nyawade, 2019). The
115 immediate reality is that frontline enforcement and underlying disagreement between local
116 integration and national sovereignty concerns are not adequately captured by such viewpoints
117 (Wesonga, 2023; Witwatersrand, 2018).

118 The actual depth to which Kenya has aligned its administrative procedures with the EAC
119 protocol was examined in this article. The study filled a gap in the literature by collecting data
120 from frontline practitioners and key migration governance agencies. In the end, it aimed at
121 shedding light on institutional points of contention and providing guidance for the practical
122 changes required to move Kenya's migration mechanisms from formal commitment to complete
123 compliance.

124 **Objectives of the study**

125

126 The study aimed at investigating the commitment to substantive compliance with the CMP's free
127 movement of persons requirements and how far the country has actually realigned its
128 administrative practices and migration policy.

129

130 **Literature Review**

131 **Theoretical Framework**

132 Three theoretical perspectives directly applicable to this study have been used to interpret the
133 dynamics under study. Originally developed by Hass (1958) and improved upon by Del'Melo &
134 Tikata (2013), Neofunctionalism contends that by functional spillover, integration in one area
135 creates pressure for integration in nearby sectors. When applied to the EAC, this implies that
136 increased trade and infrastructure cooperation should lead to a desire for more seamless cross-
137 border human mobility, compelling nations like Kenya to restructure their migration policy with
138 regional commitments. It is possible to see Kenya's investments in OSBPs' electronic passports
139 and digital border control systems that include the Electronic Foreign Nationals Services (eFNS)
140 as concrete examples of these spillover constraints (Magwilu & Wasonga, 2023; WKA
141 Advocates, 2025).

142
143 The emphasis is shifted to interstate bargaining and domestic preference development under
144 liberal intergovernmentalism as developed by Moravcsik (1998). According to this
145 theory, governments agree to and abide by regional regulations when they represent the interests
146 of influential domestic factions and when the distributive results of negotiations are desirable
147 (Moravcsik, 1998). While some segments of organised labour, security agencies, and political
148 elite may favour tighter control to safeguard local employment opportunities and manage
149 anticipated security risks, employers' organisations and trade actors in Kenya typically support
150 liberalisation to lower the cost of transactions and broaden regional markets (FKE, 2022;
151 Mwangi, 2020). The result is frequently a negotiated trade-off, such as enthusiastic adoption of
152 mobility-enhancing infrastructure combined with ongoing bureaucratic latitude over permits and
153 residence, or waivers of fees for EAC work permits without complete easing of underlying criteria
154 for eligibility (Badewa, 2020; Wasonga, 2023).

155
156 A further remedy is offered by realism, which emphasises the ongoing significance of
157 independence and state authority over borders and population. Authors from realism and
158 neorealist traditions contend that states only carry out commitments partially or symbolically
159 because they are unwilling to give up fundamental sovereign rights, even when they ratify
160 regional instruments (Wasonga, 2023). Empirical research on the EAC shows how local
161 politics, especially in Kenya as well as Tanzania, during cycles of elections, periodically securize
162 migration, resulting in restrictive practices that conflict with CMP commitments (Witwatersrand, 2018).

164 From this angle, Kenya's partial realignment-liberalising entrance while maintaining substantial
165 control over employment and residence is not surprising; it is an effort to strike a balance
166 between integration objectives and political and security concerns at home. When considered
167 collectively. These three theories imply that realignment is neither an automatic nor a linear
168 process. Kenya may be pushed toward conformity by political, economic, and functional
169 factors, but domestic factions and concerns about sovereignty may impede or divide that
170 progress. By tracing how these pressures manifest in the specific structure of Kenya's migration
171 policy using actual empirical data, this study expands on these conclusions.

172 **Empirical Review**

173 **Regional Integration, Free Movement, And The Commitment–Compliance Gap**

174 Treaty commitment and successful compliance are regularly distinguished in focus on Regional
175 Economic Communities (RECs) in Africa. While compliance refers to how much state practices
176 and administrative procedures genuinely reflect those commitments over time, commitment
177 alludes to the formal deeds of signing, ratifying, and domestically adopting regional instruments
178 (Machakanja, 2020; Njuki, 2016). Research on African RECS reveals that although states
179 frequently implement ambitious free movement policies, they give up control over
180 admission, residency, and labour market access far more slowly and selectively (Barasa, Muli, &
181 Kakai, 2023; O'Connor, 2021).

182 This 2010 Common Market Protocol (CMP) in the EAC codifies many rights relating to
183 mobility, such as workers' freedom of movement, establishment and residence rights, and aspects
184 of social protection coordination (EAC, 2010). However, empirical evaluations show that
185 implementation has been inconsistent, with labour and residency rights liberalised more slowly
186 than entry and short-term movement (African Centre for Migration & Society, 2018; EATUC,
187 2020). Research indicates that member states are more hesitant when it comes to changing work
188 permit systems, professional licensing, and long-term resident frameworks, but they are likely to
189 streamline travel documents and border crossing procedures (Kimani, 2021; Nyawade, 2019).
190 The "implementation gap" narrative that currently permeates a large portion of African free
191 movement literature is supported by this pattern.

192

193 **The State Of Kenya And Free Movement Literature in the EAC**

194

195 Kenya is often used as a sample for the CMP's free movement of individuals policy within this
196 larger framework. Numerous studies emphasise Kenya's early adoption of the
197 CMP, constitutional acknowledgement of regional integration, and implementation of policies
198 like One Stop Border Points (OSBPs) at major crossings, the EAC e-passport, and visa-free entry
199 for EAC citizens (WKA Advocates, 2025; FKE, 2022; Kago & Masinde, 2016). These
200 publications frequently portray Kenya as a pioneer in front-end mobility facilitation and
201 highlight the nation's function as a regional socioeconomic centre and diplomatic champion for
202 integration.

203 The underlying responsibilities of the CMP and Kenya's domestic migration system continue to
204 be out of harmony, according to an increasing amount of research and policy analysis. Nyawade
205 (2019) argues that stringent permit categories and complicated paperwork requirements continue
206 to hamper the mobility of EAC workers, citing discrepancies from Kenyan immigration law
207 along with CMP regulations on working permits and visas. Even in cases where fees have been
208 lowered or cancelled, Wesonga (2023) observes that the Protocol's revolutionary potential is
209 undermined by administrative complexity, the exclusion of low-skilled workers, and restricted
210 work permit systems. Despite verbal vows to liberalisation, Barasa et al. (2023) emphasise the
211 persistence of non-tariff barriers, licensing regimes, and protectionist measures that obliquely
212 restrict free movement.

213

214 This image of incomplete realignment is supported by comparative analysis. Research frequently
215 compares Kenya to Rwanda and Uganda, which have liberalised labour and residence regimes
216 more aggressively, for instance, by removing some authorisation requirements, while Tanzania
217 has remained more conservative, putting domestic labour protection ahead of regional mobility

218 (Organisation, 2020; Witwatersrand, 2018). These initiatives place Kenya in a middle position: it
219 is less inclined to completely open labour and residency regimes, but it is more decisive than
220 some of its peers in coordinating formal regulations and infrastructures with CMP provisions. As
221 a result, Kenya is perceived as both a cautious sovereign actor and an integration “champion”.
222

223 **Institutional Capacity towards Implementation: Mechanisms, Discretion, and Awareness**

224 Institutional factors influencing whether formal promises are transformed into daily compliance
225 are the subject of the last corpus of literature. The CMP’s execution is frequently hampered by
226 weak or disjointed institutions,uneven interpretation by frontline authorities, and low public
227 awareness of rights,according to comparative research on the program (African Migration
228 Trends,2025; EAC,2017). For instance,research on OSBPs reveals that although practical
229 integration between border posts can cut down on lags,national officials may still implement
230 different regulations within the same facility due to variations in oversight,organisational culture,
231 and training (KIPPRA, 2022E; ATUC, 2020).
232

233 Research indicates that immigration,labour,security, and trade authorities in Kenya have
234 overlapping responsibilities,inadequate coordination, and occasionally opposing goals (Magwili
235 & Wasonga, 2023). According to WKA Advocates (2025), the implementation of online
236 mediums and biometric technologies has increased transparency in certain areas,but it has also
237 exposed capacity and connectivity limitations,especially at smaller border checkpoints.
238 According to studies,residents and even a few officials have little understanding of the specific
239 rights and responsibilities related to EAC free movement,which results in underutilization of
240 current legislation and arbitrary decision-making (Organisation, 2020; Mwangi, 2019).

241 The notion that procedures are important is supported by these institutional viewpoints. Digital
242 platforms,e-passports,temporary travel permits, and visa-free entry are significant realignment
243 tools,but their effects rely on frontline officials’ actions,administrative processes, and
244 organisational structures. Even in the existence of progressive law and policy,implementation
245 gaps continue in areas where such structures are still disjointed and where discretion is not
246 strictly regulated (Barasa et al., 2023; Wasonga, 2023).

247 **Study Gaps**

248 Three gaps are realised in the extensive corpus of literature reviewed. First, the majority of the
249 literature on Kenya’s compliance with the CMP is based on legal analysis and external opinions;
250 fewer studies systematically use data from officials and experts who carry out free movement on
251 everyday (Nyawade, 2019; Njuki, 2016). Second,there is little empirical research that breaks
252 down various levels of compliance and makes a systematic distinction between deeper rights
253 (labour,residency,establishment) and front-end facilitation (entrance,documentation). Third,few
254 studies explicitly conceptualise realignment as a path through commitment to compliance and
255 identify the significance of certain procedures and tactics in that trajectory,despite the
256 widespread usage of the words “implementation gap” and “partial compliance”.

257 To fill in these gaps, this research used a mixed methods approach that incorporates key
258 informant interviews,documentary analysis, and survey responses from 264 officers and

259 stakeholders in Kenya's migration governance system. It clearly presents Kenya's experiences as
260 a realignment process and looks at how administrative procedures, legislative changes and
261 tactical interventions work together to advance or impede the system at various stages of the
262 commitment-compliance continuum. By doing this, the article provides a more detailed and fact-
263 based explanation of Kenya's place in the EAC open movement framework than is currently
264 found in the literature.
265

266 **Methodology**

267 **Research philosophy and design**

268 The study was based on a positivist research methodology, which holds that systematic empirical
269 methodologies can be used to observe, quantify, and analyse phenomena like alignment of
270 policies and compliance (Creswell, 2014). Because the main study concepts—realignment of
271 immigration legislation and the disparity between commitment and compliance—are
272 operationalised as observable changes in institutional mechanisms, legal frameworks, and
273 opinions of stakeholders rather than as solely normative judgments, positivism is suitable for this
274 investigation (Machakanja, 2020; Njuki, 2016). A mixed-method approach was used, integrating
275 documentary analysis, qualitative key informant interviews, and quantitative survey data.
276 The quantitative module offered a structured image of how officials and practitioners view
277 Kenya's compliance with the EAC Common Market Protocol (CMP) regarding free movement
278 of individuals, as well as the efficacy of policies and processes meant to strengthen compliance.
279 Deeper insights into how stakeholders understand these reforms and deal with the conflict
280 between domestic policy aims and regional commitments in practice were produced by the
281 qualitative module. When taken as a whole, these components provide both a descriptive
282 depiction of the current realignment situation and an explanatory study of the variables that
283 either help or hinder the shift from symbolic commitment to substantive compliance.
284

285 **Study area, population, and sampling**

286 Kenya was the study area, and organisations directly involved in EAC integration and migration
287 governance were the main emphasis. Kenya's prominence in the EAC free movement framework
288 and the necessity to evaluate how a single state's legal and administrative machinery has been
289 restructured under CMP requirements justify this national scope. A total of 1,746 people who
290 work for key governmental and non-governmental organisations that develop or carry out
291 migration policy within the framework of the EAC made up the target population. These
292 included employees of the Ministry of Interior (especially those in charge of immigration as well
293 as border administration), the Ministry of Foreign and Diaspora Affairs and the Ministry of Trade
294 and Liberalization, the Ministry of East African Community (EAC), Arid and Semi-Arid Lands
295 (ASALs) and Regional Development, as well as representatives from the International
296 Organization for Migration (IOM), the EAC Secretariat, and certain employer associations and
297 civil society organizations like the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE). The actors involved

298 in the creation of immigration policy and its execution at borders, in labour markets, and in
299 regional forums were covered to enhance comprehensive coverage.

300
301 With a 5% margin of error, Yamane's (1967) formula for limited populations was used to
302 calculate the sample size, resulting in a sample of 326 participants.

303
304
$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

305
306 where:

307 e = the degree of precision,

308 N = the population size and

309 n = the sample size.

310 The sample size was expanded to 349 to account for any non-response. The sample was then
311 distributed proportionally across the institutions using a stratified sampling approach. Purposive
312 sampling was then used within each strata to choose respondents who were directly involved in
313 labour mobility management, migration control, or EAC coordinating policies. This strategy
314 made sure that the study included well-informed viewpoints on both practical compliance and
315 formal alignment. 264 totally completed questionnaires served as the basis for the final
316 analysis; this response rate is appropriate for institutional surveys in comparable circumstances
317 (KIPPRA, 2022).

318

319 **Data sources and instruments**

320 Three key sources of data were used:

- 321 i. The 264 respondents were given a structured questionnaire with both closed-ended and
322 open-ended questions. The questionnaire collected sociodemographic data, opinions on
323 how closely Kenyan law and CMP guidelines align, evaluations of the efficacy of
324 particular mechanisms (like e-passports, OSBPs, digital platforms, and visa-free entry), and
325 assessments of strategic interventions (like fee waivers, policy harmonisation, technology
326 integration, and public knowledge campaigns).
- 327 ii. Interviews with key informants with top officials and professionals chosen from the EAC
328 Secretariat, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labour & Social Security, the
329 Ministry of EAC Affairs, the IOM, and civil society organisations' senior officers. These
330 interviews delved deeper into decision makers' perspectives on unresolved realignment
331 gaps, their understanding of Kenya's shift from pledge to compliance, and the
332 institutional and political limitations they encounter at home.
- 333 iii. Documentary analysis of pertinent national and regional legal and policy documents, such
334 as the EAC Treaty, CMP and its appendices, Kenya's 2010 Constitution, Kenya's
335 Citizenship and Immigration Act (2011), and its associated regulations and national, IOM,
336 and EAC reports on free movements and labour migration. These records served as the

337 standard by which opinions of compliance and alignment could be evaluated (African
338 Migration Trends, 2025;EAC, 2017; EAC, 2010).

339 The conceptual framework of the study and current tools for research on migratory management
340 and regional integration served as the foundation for the questionnaire's design,which was then
341 customised to the unique circumstances of Kenya and the EAC based on study concepts. This
342 framework was reflected in key informant interview guides,which enabled the triangulation of
343 both qualitative and quantitative information.
344

345 **Validity And Reliability**

346 Academic supervisors and professionals with experience in EAC affairs and migration policy
347 evaluated the proposed questionnaire and guidelines for interviews to guarantee content validity.
348 Their input was utilised to improve the phrasing of the items, make technical phrases more
349 understandable, and guarantee that all significant aspects of free movement, such as
350 admittance,residency,establishment, and labour mobility, were covered.

351 An exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was used to evaluate the quantitative measures' construct
352 validity. The determination that the instrument covered the intended latent dimensions was
353 supported by items meant to assess policy alignment,mechanisms, and strategies loaded onto
354 various factors in ways that substantially conform to the conceptual framework (Creswell,2014).

355 Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of internal consistency, while acceptable
356 dependability for social science research was indicated by coefficients over 0.7 for the primary
357 subscales(Kothari, 2014).

358 Triangulation between interviews,open-ended questionnaire responses, and documentary
359 resources, as well as meticulous record keeping and a transcription of interview data,all
360 contributed to the qualitative component's increased trustworthiness. To lessen the possibility of
361 interpretation bias, themes were addressed with peers who were knowledgeable about EAC
362 migration challenges.
363

364 **Data collection procedures**

365 After receiving ethical clearance from the appropriate academic bodies and a research permit
366 from the National Commission for Science,Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI), data
367 collection took place between 2024 and 2025. A combination of in-person administration,drop-
368 and-pick tactics, and online distribution of the surveys was employed to fit the schedules of high-
369 level officials and the geographical dispersion of institutions. The study's goals,methods, and
370 ethical guidelines-such as informed consent, confidentiality, and how to handle potentially
371 sensitive data on migration management-were taught to research assistants.

372 The study's objectives, the anonymity of their answers, and their freedom to discontinue
373 participation at any time without consequences were all explained to the respondents.
374 Participants in the interviews gave their individual approval to be recorded on audio. In
375 accordance with institutional and national requirements, all data were safely secured and were
376 only available to the study team.
377

378 Data analysis

379 The questionnaires' quantitative data were coded and then imported to SPSS (Version 23) for
380 examination. Respondents' opinions about policy alignment, the efficacy of certain mechanisms,
381 and the perceived effect of strategic interventions were summarised using descriptive
382 statistics, which include frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. To investigate
383 differences in these perceptions throughout institutional affiliation and functional roles, for
384 instance, contrasting opinions from various ministries or comparing border-based officers with
385 headquarters staff cross-tabulations were used. The study concentrated on the descriptive and
386 bivariate data that clearly showed Kenya's path through a commitment to full compliance with
387 the free movement of people.

388
389 Thematic analysis was used to examine data from open-ended questionnaires and qualitative
390 interviews. An initial categorisation scheme was created around major topics, including "policy
391 alignment", "front-end facilitation", "work permit constraints," "institutional fragmentation,"
392 and "bureaucratic discretion". Then, new themes-such as "two-speed integration" and "symbolic
393 compliance" -emerged, and codes were iteratively improved. To create a cohesive story about
394 how stakeholders interpret and experience Kenya's realignment with CMP responsibilities,
395 patterns were found throughout interviews and in connection with quantitative data.

396 The approach facilitated a comprehension of Kenya's place on the commitment-compliance
397 spectrum by combining quantitative data. While qualitative insights shed light on the methods,
398 limitations, and political dynamics that underlie those impressions, quantitative data determine
399 the scope and distribution of perspectives on alignment and effectiveness. Thus, the article's
400 claim that Kenya has progressed past mere rhetorical commitment, although it still does not fully
401 comply with the EAC free movement of people framework, has a solid empirical foundation due
402 to the use of a mixed-methods approach.

403

404 Study Findings

405 1. Perceptions of policy alignment with EAC free movement provisions

406 Assessing Kenya's migration policy perceived alignment with the CMP's rules and the free
407 movement of people was the first goal. Overall, respondents said that there is significant but
408 unequal formal alignment among various sectors of the free flow system. Table 1.1 demonstrates
409 that when questioned about how immigration policy supports the CMP, 40% of respondents cited
410 visa-free admission for EAC citizens as the most crucial component. This was followed by 30%
411 who emphasised streamlined border crossing procedures, 20% who mentioned rights of residency
412 and establishment, and 10% who mentioned harmonisation of labour laws.

413 **Table 1.1: How Immigration Policy Promotes The EAC Protocol**

Question	Response	No. of responses	Percentage
How does immigration policy promote the EAC Protocol?	Visa-free entry for EAC citizens	263	40%
	Homogenization of labor policies	110	10%
	Simplified border crossing procedures	198	30%
	Rights to residence and establishment	132	20%
	Others(specify)	0	0

	Total	703	100%
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415
416 According to these numbers,alignment is less evident in the areas of labour and residency,where
417 rights are more complicated and administratively mediated, and more evident at the entrance
418 stage,where Kenya’s policy reforms are tangible and readily apparent (Nyawade, 2019).This
419 interpretation is supported by perceptions of regional cooperation. When asked how well EAC
420 partner states work together to improve the unrestricted flow of people through Kenyan
421 policies,45.4% of respondents said it is very effective,54.5% said it is moderately efficient, and
422 none said it is ineffective.

423 In line with broader EAC evaluations of a lingering implementation gap despite strong treaty
424 commitments, this distribution shows that practitioners acknowledge significant progress but are
425 hesitant to characterise the current situation as fully satisfactory (African Centre for Migration &
426 Society, 2018; EATUC, 2020).

427 Perceptions of visa policies generally support the idea of significant front-end alignment. Half of
428 the respondents (50%) though kenya’s visa policy was “fully aligned with no restriction” with
429 CMP’s expectations of free movement for EAC citizens without a visa, while 25% thought it was
430 partially aligned with some restrictions, and 25% were unsure.

431 While more cautious respondents noted inconsistent implementation through border points and
432 uncertainty about how entry rights convert into longer-term residence and employment
433 opportunities,officials and trade stakeholders cited extended stay periods and visa-free entry as
434 proof of compliance (FKE, 2022; Kimani, 2021).

435

436 2. Mechanisms that operationalise realignment

437 The second goal was to determine how Kenya operationalises its compliance with the free
438 movement rules of the CMP and assess the perceived efficacy of such procedures. Respondents
439 discovered a collection of administrative,infrastructure, and documentation systems that
440 collectively offer regional commitments with real-world impact.

441 According to Table 1.2,Kenyans most frequently use national identity cards,EAC e-passports,
442 and EAC temporary passports to travel freely inside the community. This is a reflection of both
443 the CMP’s focus on uniform travel documentation and the EAC’s decision to permit people of
444 some partner states to travel using their national IDs (EAC, 2010; Kago & Masinde, 2016).
445 According to respondents and documentation, these tools save transaction costs and improve
446 traveller predictability,especially for frequent cross-border traders.

447 **Table 1.2:Commonly Used Documents by Kenyans For Unrestricted Movement in the**
448 **EAC Community.**

Question	Response	No. of responses	Percentage
What document is most commonly used by Kenyans to move unrestricted in the community?	Kenyan National ID	67	25.3%
	Temporary Passport	102	38.6%
	e-passport	74	28%
	Kenyan passport	21	7%
	Total	264	100%

449

450
451 On infrastructure, OSBPs have been recognised as a key tool for promoting free movement.
452 According to respondents, OSBPs have increased collaboration between border
453 agencies, streamlined processes, and decreased time spent at borders, bringing operative practice
454 close to CMP goals. Although some facilities still have capacity challenges, the results
455 demonstrate a high degree in consensus that OSBPs have improved mobility.

456 A third important mechanism was the emergence of digitalisation. A key component of
457 modernising migration management was thought to be the move toward Electronic Foreign
458 Nationals Services (eFNS) as well as other digital platforms. While inconsistent connection and
459 limited user capacity were noted as persistent issues, respondents stated that digital platforms
460 have improved openness during some processes and enabled data exchange.
461

462 The findings show that work permit policies and residency requirements remain persistent
463 barriers, notwithstanding these advancements. Just 28.4% of the respondents thought Kenya's
464 work permit processes were completely in line with EAC requirements, compared to 48.1% who
465 said they were partially in line, 3% who said they weren't, and 19.6% who weren't sure.
466 Qualitative replies highlighted that labour mobility is still severely hampered by substantive
467 constraints, arbitrary decision-making, and processing delays, even if the Class R work permit
468 price waiver for EAC citizens is a step toward compliance.

469 A variety of issues that restrict the efficacy of policies meant to promote free mobility were also
470 mentioned by respondents. These included inadequate frontline officer training, deficiencies in
471 digital systems, overlapping institutional mandates, inadequate infrastructure at some border
472 checkpoints, and poor understanding of EAC mobility rights. These limitations align with
473 regional evaluations that pinpoint administrative discretion and institutional capability as crucial
474 factors that determine whether formal procedures result in actual movement (African Migration
475 Trends, 2025; Barasa, Muli, & Kakai, 2023).
476

477 **3. Strategic interventions and the trajectory from commitment to compliance**

478 The third objective was to evaluate how far Kenya has progressed in the transition from
479 commitment to compliance by analysing the strategic measures it has implemented to enhance its
480 approach to immigration in accordance with the CMP free mobility principles. Respondents
481 emphasised various strategies:

- 482 i. The Kenya Immigration and Citizen Act (2011) and the 2010 Constitution both
483 normatively incorporate CMP elements, including clear references to the integration of
484 regions and rights of EAC citizens.
- 485 ii. More lenient stay lengths for EAC tourists and fee waivers for the Class R employment
486 permit for EAC citizens.
- 487 iii. Technological and procedural changes, including digital platforms, biometric border
488 controls, and OSBP protocol standardisation.

489 iv. Institutional coordination strategies to harmonise stances in immigration,labour,trade, and
490 foreign affairs,such as the Ministry of EAC Affairs' participation and interministerial
491 coordination channels.

492
493 Integration of technology and the Class R waiver of fee were recognised as two of the most
494 important actions for promoting free movement by respondents to a survey on the perceived
495 efficacy of tactics. However, they also emphasised that fee exemptions do not eliminate the need
496 for permissions and that,if underlying regulations are left unaltered,digital systems may replicate
497 or even strengthen current bureaucratic barriers.

498 Various structural aspects that continue to mitigate the effects of strategic initiatives were noted
499 by respondents. These include:political pressure to securitise migration during times of increased
500 security concerns or electoral competition; the persistence of sector-specific governing rules that
501 are not fully harmonised with CMP requirements; divergent interpretations of EAC obligations
502 by first-line officers; and low comprehension among EAC citizens of their legal entitlements to
503 relocate,live, and work in Kenya. These results align with a larger body of research on EAC
504 implementation that emphasises the influence of bureaucratic discretion,institutional capacity,
505 and domestic politics on the level of compliance (Machakanja, 2020; Wesonga, 2023;
506 Witwatersrand, 2018).

507 When considered collectively,the findings show that Kenya has shifted considerably from a
508 purely commitment-centric approach,in which regional norms are embraced but not
509 operationalised, to a partially compliant system marked by robust front -end facilitation but
510 insufficient harmonisation of deeper mobility freedoms.

511

512 **Discussion**

513 **Kenya between commitment and compliance**

514 The results demonstrate that Kenya has made significant progress along the commitment-
515 compliance progression,but they also highlight the unequal and fragmented nature of this
516 trajectory. Kenya's acceptance of the CMP,legislative acknowledgement of integration, and
517 legislative reforms all demonstrate normative realignment at the formal commitment level. These
518 standards have been transformed into concrete mechanisms that influence daily mobility,as seen
519 by universal recognition of visa-free entry,streamlined border processes,electronic passports, and
520 OSBPs as important facilitators of free movement.

521

522 Nonetheless,compliance is stratified:good in connection to admission and short-term
523 mobility,weaker compared to labour and long-term settlement,according to the persistent view
524 that work permit processes and resident rights are only partially harmonised. This pattern is
525 consistent with regional assessments that show a similar ordering across other African RECs
526 where states liberalise commerce and travel before addressing the politically delicate topic of
527 labour market integration, if at all(African Migration Trends, 2025; O'Connor, 2021).

528 Thus, from a theoretical standpoint, the Kenyan situation demonstrates both the strengths and the
529 limitations of treaty-based regionalism. According to Del'Melo & Tikata (2013) and Njuki
530 (2016),the CMP and associated rulings have undoubtedly influenced legal and legislative

531 changes. However, liberal intergovernmental as well as realist assertions that national objectives
532 and sovereign concerns influence the degree of compliance are highlighted by the continuation
533 of restrictive or discretionary procedures surrounding employment and residence.
534

535 **Two-Speed Realignment: Front-End Facilitation Versus Deep Mobility Rights**

536 The findings provide compelling evidence for describing Kenya's trajectory as a "two-speed"
537 realignment process. The first speed relates to front-end facilitation, which is where alignment is
538 comparatively sophisticated. Simplified border processes, OSBPs, digital platforms, and visa-free
539 entrance for EAC nationals all lower both direct and indirect expenses of crossing borders and
540 amply demonstrate CMP promises for admittance. A significant number of respondents agree
541 with these metrics' efficacy, indicating that they have been institutionalised in practice rather
542 than just embraced on paper.
543

544 Deep mobility rights—the capacity of EAC people to work, start a business, and live in Kenya
545 under predictable conditions—are the subject of the second speed. Realignment is more
546 constrained here. Although the Class R fee waiver is a significant step, labour and residency may
547 continue to be places of controlled openness rather than complete integration due to the ongoing
548 importance of discretionary decision-making, complicated eligibility requirements, and drawn-
549 out processing. This result is in line with liberal intergovernmental arguments on the effect of
550 domestic coalitions that fear labour competition or security risks, as well as realist insights
551 regarding the importance of border control to state sovereignty (Barasa, Muli, & Kakai, 2023;
552 Moravcsik, 1998).
553

554 Binary designations like "leader" and "laggard" are complicated by this two-speed pattern.
555 Kenya is unquestionably at the forefront of front-end facilitation compared to some of its
556 contemporaries in the area, especially when it comes to using OSBPs and digital
557 platforms (Magwilu & Wasonga, 2023; WKA Advocates, 2025). However, it continues to be
558 cautious when it comes to profound mobility rights, reflecting the larger EAC pattern of
559 incrementalism in labour market integration. It follows that evaluations of Kenya's compliance
560 need to be dimension-specific rather than dependent on general perceptions.
561

562 **Institutions, discretion and the politics of implementation**

563 The importance of institutional and administrative autonomy in mediating realignment is a
564 recurrent theme in the results. The presence of several authorities with overlapping mandates—
565 immigration, labour, security, trade, and EAC affairs—creates coordination issues that may result
566 in uneven enforcement of regulations at various locations. According to respondent accounts
567 regarding disparate practices at different border posts and offices, implementation might vary
568 depending on organisational culture, capabilities, and incentives, even in cases when statutory
569 standards are harmonised.

570 According to the literature on compliance, such a difference is especially prevalent in situations
571 where frontline workers have significant discretion and rules are not strictly enforced (

572 Machakanja, 2020). There are options for partial or figurative compliance with CMP
573 responsibilities in Kenya due to the flexible interpretation of work permit guidelines, the
574 continuation of sector-specific licensing regulations, and the periodic securitisation of migration.
575 The results thus support the claim that realignment necessitates substantial institutional
576 consolidation, including distinct lines of authority, standard operating processes, and strong
577 oversight in addition to legal and infrastructure improvements. Implementation is further shaped
578 by domestic politics. Immigration in Tanzania and Kenya is sometimes framed in terms of
579 security, especially around elections, as other studies have demonstrated (Barasa et al., 2023;
580 Wesonga, 2023). This can lead to demand for tougher enforcement or changes in policy. Even in
581 situations when regional commitments are strong, respondents' allusions to concerns about
582 security and political sensitivities imply that these dynamics limit the extent and speed of
583 migration policy liberalisation.

584

585 **Study Implications For Theory And Policy**

586

587 In theory, the study encourages a synthetic interpretation of realism, liberal intergovernmentalism
588 and neofunctionalism. As demonstrated by Kenya's investments in OSBPs, e-passports, and
589 digital platforms, neofunctionalism accurately forecasts that trade and infrastructure unification
590 will generate demand for mobility-enhancing reforms. Nevertheless, liberal intergovernmentalism
591 alongside realism are required to explain why labour and residence rights are not automatically
592 covered by these reforms: domestic coalitions and concerns about sovereignty determine which
593 aspects of free movement are liberalised and which are still strictly regulated.

594

595 The results show that three areas will need to be addressed to transition from partial to
596 comprehensive compliance with policy. To ensure that EAC citizens experience consistent rights
597 throughout the whole mobility cycle, regulatory harmonisation must first go beyond entrance
598 requirements to encompass work permits, professional licensing, and residence regimes. Second,
599 especially at border crossings and permission offices, institutional reform and capacity training
600 are required to make mandates clearer, improve interagency cooperation, and lessen the
601 possibility of arbitrary decision-making.

602

603 Third, to extend the national coalition in favour of deeper integration, political and societal
604 perceptions around migration must be changed so that free movement is seen as a driver of
605 regional growth instead of solely as a security risk.

606 Overall, the findings and their interpretation demonstrate that Kenya has constructed a
607 substantial, if insufficient, foundation for adherence to the CMP's free movement of persons
608 rules, going beyond a simple rhetorical commitment. Extending realignment beyond frontiers to
609 the labour market and from legislative literature to daily practice while balancing integration
610 aspirations with domestic realities of politics is the remaining task.

611

612 **Conclusion**

613 Kenya has made significant strides in regulated and operational alignment, according to the data.
614 At the conventional level, the Kenya Immigration and Citizenship Act (2011), accession to the
615 CMP, and recognition under the constitution of integration provide a legal basis for handling
616 EAC free movement commitments as part of Kenya's migration policy framework.

617 Practically, the implementation of OSBPs, the widespread use of national IDs and the EAC e-
618 passport, the introduction of visa-free entry for EAC citizens, and the integration of digital
619 platforms like the Electronic Foreign Nationals Services (eFNS) all have reduced barriers at the
620 point of entry and brought Kenya's border procedures into compliance with regional norms.
621 These actions have led to a high level of front-end compliance and are generally seen by
622 respondents as tangible examples of Kenya's commitment to the CMP.
623

624 However, the analysis has revealed that compliance is still stratified and incomplete. The greatest
625 obstacles to the full realisation of free movement, according to respondents, are work permit
626 policies, residence rights, and sector-specific laws, which are still only partially harmonised with
627 CMP norms. While the removal of the statutory Class R work permit charge for EAC nationals is
628 a significant step, it does not eliminate the discretionary decision-making or substantive
629 eligibility requirements that frequently restrict employment and long-term stay opportunities.

630 The impact of reforms is further diminished by overlapping institutional mandates, inconsistent
631 implementation across border checkpoints and offices, and sporadic securitisation of migration.
632 The consequences are a two-speed realignment pattern: deeper mobility rights are still restricted,
633 but admission and short-term mobility have been liberalised in accordance with CMP
634 commitments.
635

636 This result is explained by the theoretical framework. As demonstrated by Kenya's investments
637 in OSBPs, e-passports, and digital systems, neofunctionalism accurately predicts that commerce
638 and connectivity will create demand for mobility-enhancing reforms. However, liberal
639 intergovernmentalism & realism emphasise how domestic coalitions and concerns about
640 sovereignty can impede or divide compliance, especially in areas with significant labour market
641 and security sensitivity. Thus, the Kenyan situation lends credence to a nuanced perspective that
642 holds that while regional commitments are important, national political economics and the
643 capacity of institutions influence how they are implemented.
644

645 **Recommendations**

646

647 For Kenya to transition from partial to full compliance with the CMP for free movement systems,
648 the findings point to three major areas for governmental intervention.

649 First, regulatory harmonisation needs to go beyond entrance requirements. To reduce
650 inconsistencies between immigration, labour, and sectoral laws, legislative and regulatory
651 changes should concentrate on bringing work permit classifications, residence requirements, and
652 professional licensing systems closer to CMP norms. EAC nationals would have less ambiguity
653 and fewer opportunities for unfair rejections if the requirements for permits and residency were
654 made clear and available to the public.
655

656 Second, capacity building and institutional consolidation are crucial. The implementation
657 limitation identified by this study could be addressed by enhancing interagency coordination
658 platforms, standardising operational processes, and clarifying mandates across
659 immigration, labour, security, and EAC affairs. Investing in frontline officials' training on EAC
660 responsibilities and digital platforms usage can help guarantee that current procedures reach their
661 maximum potential rather than replicating outdated obstacles in novel ways.

662
663 Third, public awareness and political narratives need to be addressed. The effect of episodic
664 securitisation might be lessened, and the national coalition in favour of deeper compliance could
665 be expanded by persistent attempts to convey the developmental advantages of free mobility,
666 such as improved trade,labour matching, and regional resilience. To convert statutory provisions
667 into practical mobility,parallel public education initiatives aimed at AAC citizens and enterprises
668 would raise understanding of current rights and procedures.

669
670 There are limitations to the study. The opinions of officials and practitioners, as opposed to those
671 of migrants themselves, are the main focus, and it only looks at Kenya. Additionally, it heavily
672 relies on self-reported experiences and views,which can be impacted by institutional positioning.
673 By conducting comparative,multi-country studies throughout the EAC,integrating migrant-
674 centered viewpoints and employing ethnographic or process tracking techniques to track
675 decision-making at particular border checkpoints and permit offices overtime, future research
676 could expand on this work.

677 Through offering a detailed,statistically supported explanation of how one EAC member has
678 shifted from commitment to limited compliance in the area of free flow of persons,the analysis
679 adds to both scholarly and policy discussions. It demonstrated that while Kenya has already
680 established significant groundwork for a more integrated mobility across regions regime,more
681 institutional,political, and legal changes are necessary if the nation is to fully realise its vision of
682 itself as a regional pioneer in free movement, in addition to fully realising the revolutionary
683 potential of the CMP for all community members.

684
685
686 **Acknowledgement**

687 The author expresses gratitude to research colleagues and the supervisor at Kenyatta University's
688 School of Law,Arts and Social Sciences, for their guidance and critical insights. Additionally,
689 the author acknowledges the assistance of officials from pertinent Kenyan ministries, the EAC
690 Secretariat, and civil society organisations that contributed their time and expertise to the study.
691 She also thanks all respondents who provided data for this study and the National Commission
692 for Science,Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) for their ethical clearance.

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