

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue of missing migrants in the Southern Africa region is a complex and multi-faceted problem that is not well documented or understood. While there is limited information available, migrants in the region face a range of challenges and risks that can lead to death or disappearance. One of the main drivers of migration in the region is economic opportunity, with many people seeking work and a better standard of living. However, migrants are often vulnerable to exploitation, including labour and human rights abuses, human smuggling and trafficking in persons on the Southern Migratory Corridor, which can result in them becoming missing or at worse, dead. Unfortunately, comprehensive and reliable statistics on missing migrants in the Southern Africa region are difficult to come by due to the irregular nature of mobility patterns by this category of migrants as well as the lack of documentation and reporting on the issue.

Since 2014, when IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) started documenting fatalities on migration routes worldwide, there have been at least 750 migrant deaths in the Southern Africa region, of which 65 occurred in 2022. Due to the serious challenges of documenting migrant fatalities in the region, this is only a minimum estimate of the real number of lives lost and should be considered indicative. The most common cause of death is drowning, accounting for 63 per cent of all recorded fatalities, followed by vehicle accidents or deaths linked to hazardous transport (14%) and accidental deaths (9%). There is also little information available on the identity of the individuals whose deaths have been recorded, which translates into poor-quality data in terms of sex and age disaggregation. Of all recorded migrant fatalities in the region, 171 of the victims were men, 17 were women, and 18 were minors. The top countries of origin of the victims are the Democratic Republic of the Congo, accounting for 42 per cent of all deaths, followed by Ethiopia (21%) and Comoros (7%).

This annual briefing on migrant deaths and disappearances in the Southern Africa region provides a contextual insight on the available data on migrant deaths and disappearances that occurred from January to December 2022, based on IOM's Missing Migrants Project. The briefing highlights the regional realities, country specific incidents and plausible factors contributing to migrant deaths and disappearances in the region in 2022. Given the extensive data challenges in the region, this briefing also highlights ways to improve such data and provide humanitarian assistance and policy recommendations in the Southern Africa region by the international community, Member States of SADC and other relevant partners dealing (in)directly with migrant deaths and disappearances.

THE SOUTHERN MIGRATORY CORRIDOR - A BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Southern Migratory Corridor is one of the most popular corridors frequently used by migrants from Eastern and Southern Africa and increasingly becoming a more dangerous route, claiming at least 700 migrants' lives since 2014. Large numbers of human remains indicating mass suffocation during transport are periodically recovered, with many smaller incidents that likely go overlooked. The Comoros-Mayotte crossing has gained prominence as one of the deadliest routes for migrants in the region, although data hereby is also scarce.

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The Southern Migratory Corridor covers many countries from the East and Horn of Africa (EHOA) as well as Southern Africa Development Communities (SADC) including Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and transit countries including Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe with the popular destination country being predominantly South Africa. The Southern Corridor can be defined as comprising of mixed migration flows, including populations of interest, from countries outside the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) transiting countries in southern Africa en route to different destinations in the SADC region. Anecdotal evidence points to Burundi and DRC as the transit countries mostly used to reach Madagascar and Comoros. These movements are predominantly classified as mixed migration with people migrating due to a variety of adverse drivers such as conflict, food insecurity, religious persecution, or striving for improved livelihood strategies in destination countries.

This Corridor has been complemented by a newly identified crossing that includes migrants from East and Horn of Africa, and elsewhere, who transit through Tanzania and countries in the Indian Ocean, specifically Comoros, as they attempt to reach Mayotte, an overseas region of France. Current data shows us that the crossing is growing in popularity but it remains understudied. In January 2023, 30 stranded migrants were identified in the Moheli, an autonomous island that forms part of the Union of the Comoros. Irregular migrants in Southern Africa and along the routes of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) are exposed to a series of risks, including natural hazards, utilization of unsafe means of transportation, exploitation and abuses at different stages of their migratory journeys. Some of these migrants have been victims of drowning due to capsizing of unregistered and rickety boats, utilized to cross rivers (e.g. Zambesi River; between Comoros and Mayotte sea crossing). Episodes of crocodile attacks on migrants crossing flooded rivers have also been widely cited as conventionally known threats to migrants. Migrants also cross natural parks like the Kruger National Park in South Africa along their migratory journeys as these represents plots of lands whose vastity is believed to favour escaping from authorities patrolling from Zimbabwe to South Africa. However, migrants are occasionally attacked by wild animals while crossing through these parks. Moreover, the popular crossing area between Beitbridge in Zimbabwe and Musina in South Africa has been cited as a dangerous one as migrants have been threatened and sometimes fatally attacked by crocodiles in the Limpopo River. Additionally, armed robbery and assaults are not uncommon in the Beitbridge area.

FLOWS ALONG THE SOUTHERN MIGRATORY CORRIDOR DURING 2022

Intra-regional mobility within the Southern Africa is frequent, circular and complex. Because data on missing migrants is so scarce in the Southern African region, in order to better understand the movement patterns and trends in the region, IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix data has been analyzed.¹

According to IOM Flow Monitoring data, around 1,460,587 movements were tracked from January 2021 till December 2022 in the Southern Africa region. Of these flows, the last stage of the Southern Migratory Corridor, the border region between South Africa and Zimbabwe through Beitbridge represents the highest mobility area, covering 50 per cent of the total movements tracked. This is followed by flows between Mozambique and Malawi through Mulanje representing 12 per cent; Lesotho and South Africa estimated at

¹ IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) Flow Monitoring is a data collection activity which seeks to gather key information on mobility and migrant profiles. In terms of methodological approach, it begins by identifying zones in which large mobility flows occur and highlighting the characteristics and journeys of travellers in these zones. DTM collects data at Flow Monitoring Points (FMPs) through direct observation and interviews with key informants, including staff working at transit stations, border patrol officers, local authorities, bus or taxi drivers, and travellers themselves. At each FMP, data is collected by a team of enumerators daily, between 8:00 am and 5:00 pm. DTM Flow Monitoring gathers data on the number of travellers crossing FMPs, as well as the provenance, next destination, vulnerabilities, and means of transport of travellers. Enumerators collect data via a mobile data collection form to ensure data integrity and quality. The study draws on a cross-sectional survey distributed across points of entry (POEs) in countries situated within the Southern Africa Region between the beginning of 2021 to the end of 2022.

nine per cent and Malawi (Mchniji) - Zambia (Mwami) representing six per cent of total movements tracked (see Table 1).

The majority of individuals recorded during these flows identified themselves as originating in Zimbabwe (57 percent), followed by Malawi (13%), Lesotho (10%), Mozambique (7%) and Zambia (6%), which also correspond to the top five sending countries in data on migrant stocks Southern Africa.

Table 1: High mobility areas in the Southern Africa Region

High mobility areas	Number of individuals
South Africa - Zimbabwe (Beitbridge)	736,146
Mozambique – Malawi (Mulanje)	180,099
Lesotho - South Africa	134,422
Malawi (Mchniji) - Zambia (Mwami)	85,930
Zambia - Zimbabwe (Chirundu)	79,557
Democratic Republic of the Congo (Kasumbalesa) - Zambia (Chililabombwe)	70,362
Mozambique (Manica) - Zimbabwe (Mutare)	67,086
Malawi (Karonga) - United Republic of Tanzania	24,391
Mozambique (Maputo) – South Africa	23,814
Mozambique (Tete) - Malawi (Mwanza)	22,259
Botswana - Zimbabwe (Plumtree)	17,810
Lesotho - South Africa	11,019
Mozambique - Malawi (Mangochi)	7,692
GRAND TOTAL	1,460,587

Source: 2021-2022 DTM data

Table 2: Nationality of Individuals tracked by Flow Monitoring Surveys (FMS) in Southern Africa

Nationality	Number of Individuals
Zimbabwe	810,774
Malawi	185,750
Lesotho	142,402
Mozambique	101,616
Zambia	85,834
Democratic Republic of the Congo	59,572
South Africa	20,447
United Republic of Tanzania	13,252
Botswana	1,585
Angola	437
Eswatini	333
Namibia	326
Comoros	47
Mauritius	33
Seychelles	32

Source: 2021-2022 DTM data

DEATHS AND DISAPPEARANCES DURING TRANSIT ALONG THE SOUTHERN MIGRATORY CORRIDOR

An increasing number of mass casualty events have been documented on the Southern Corridor since 2020, and this trend continued in 2022. IOM’s Missing Migrants Project recorded a total of 37 deaths and disappearances in SADC countries on the Southern Corridor in 2022, with the majority (29) happening in the last quarter (October) of 2022. Out of this total recorded, 89 per cent were identified as males while the rest do not have known demographic information. In terms of the cause of death, it is unknown for 29 out of the 37 recorded, while six recorded deaths were caused by drowning, and one death each caused by Sickness / lack of access to adequate healthcare and violence (see figure 1 below).



Figure 1: Deaths during migration in Southern Africa in 2022 by cause of death

The story of Lerato, 21

In 2022, a 21-year-old man was shot dead allegedly by security officers while attempting to cross into Eswatini through the borderline at Ngwenya.



Malawian crossing the border at Beitbridge, Zimbabwe.
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“Lerato (pseudonym) is a 21-year-old man from South Africa who decided to try his luck in Eswatini. He had lived by the border with Ngwenya, Eswatini his whole life and saw many people crossing the barbed wire that divides the two countries. No matter how many times the wire was repaired, it would always be cut again. Everyone could see it because it was right there next to the road. One day, he woke up early, went down to the border, crossed the barbed wire and crossed. As soon as he did he felt the shock of a gunshot and dropped to the ground. He was reportedly shot by the South African security forces and died on the spot. His father said that he had warned him of the dangers, and regrets that his child didn’t listen to him.”²

² Times of Swaziland, 2022. Available at:
<https://archive.ph/IMuFN>.

It is imperative to highlight some tragic incidences recorded in 2022 which rekindled stakeholder and policy interest in missing migrants' issues in the Southern Africa region.

- In October 2022, the Malawian authorities uncovered about **30 bodies from a mass grave** believed to be Ethiopians who had immigrated irregularly.
- In December 2022, **the bodies of 27 people**, believed to be migrants from Ethiopia, were found by the roadside in Ngwerere area north of Zambia's capital Lusaka, likely to have suffocated to death during transit.
- In 2022, **the bodies of 27 Ethiopian migrants were found abandoned** in Chongwe Ngwerere, Zambia, a tragedy that came less than two months after the bodies of 30 Ethiopian migrants were also discovered in a mass grave in neighbouring Malawi.

CORRIDORS TO MAYOTTE

The Indian Ocean is known for its significant maritime migration flows, with many migrants attempting to reach Mayotte, a French overseas department and the only part of the European Union located in the region. Mayotte is often seen as a gateway to Europe, and many migrants from Comoros and other neighbouring countries such as Madagascar attempt to reach the island in search of economic opportunities. The journey to Mayotte is extremely perilous, with many migrants crossing the open sea in overcrowded and unseaworthy boats. Additionally, the French authorities have implemented strict border controls and have been known to intercept and forcibly return migrants, which can increase the risks faced by those attempting to make the crossing. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many migrants are undocumented and may not have anyone to report their disappearance to. This can make it difficult for authorities to track and locate missing migrants, and many cases go unresolved. While no shipwrecks could be confirmed in 2022, anecdotal reports indicate that the issue of missing migrants is a significant concern on routes to Mayotte, with many people disappearing without a trace while attempting to make the dangerous journey across the Indian Ocean. In total, 214 deaths have been documented between Comoros and Mayotte alone since 2014, but many more likely go undocumented.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA QUALITY

IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) counts migrant fatalities only at the external borders of a state or during the process of migrating towards an international destination. Collecting data on migrant deaths and disappearances remains challenging due to the lack of systematic reporting on the deaths of non-nationals in transit, and when available, data are often incomplete. MMP collects data through official sources such as the coast guard and local authorities; nongovernmental civil society organizations and focal points in IOM country offices; and media monitoring. However, media sources can have incomplete or incorrect coverage, which poses an additional challenge on routes with limited official reporting. This data collection methodology presents some limitations in terms of consistency and comparability of data given the availability of sources of data and information, but this does not diminish the value of the reported analysis.

In the Southern Africa region, the most used information source is traditional news media. This source of information is mostly cross-validated with IOM country offices and government counterparts to further solicit for missing information. Some of the media reportage on missing migrants also lack enough details like the routes used, motives for routes selection, points of entry, high risk migratory routes, and relevant hotspots to inform the rationale for the complexities and dynamics of the MMP. This renders data inaccurate and less meaningful for analysis. Therefore as of 2022, all migrant deaths and disappearances found in SADC media are further investigated by the MMP, being verified by government authorities, IOM missions, or

other international organizations whenever possible. These data sources provide insight into the pattern of human mobility and the likelihood of recording incidents of missing migrants on the uncharted routes used by migrants.

Despite the Southern Corridor being one of the most dangerous and challenging migration routes in the continent, there are no timely and comprehensive data as it remains largely understudied. The most recent comprehensive study on Southern Corridor was conducted more than a decade ago.³ The lack of data on migration from the Horn of Africa to Southern Africa hinders the capacity of national governments, policy makers, development and humanitarian programming teams to plan, promote, and advocate for evidence-based interventions that will minimize risks, manage flows and implement protection services to mitigate the vulnerability situation in the origin, transit and destination countries. In 2023, IOM plans to conduct a research study on the Southern Corridor. IOM also plans to integrate missing migrants modules in DTM flow monitoring surveys in the region to enhance data collection, particularly on the many smaller incidents that likely remain undocumented.

Corridor	Official Sources	Civil Society Organizations/ International Organizations	Multiple Media Sources	Single Media Source
Southern Corridor	0%	16%	81%	3%

Table 3: MMP data sources on the Southern Corridor in 2022

CONCLUSION

Overall, the issue of missing migrants in the Southern Africa region is a complex and urgent problem that requires a coordinated and multi-faceted approach to address. It is important for governments, civil society organizations and other stakeholders to work together to raise awareness of the issue, strengthen protections for migrants and improve access to basic services and support. The increasing complexities of mixed migration in the SADC region, particularly along the Southern Corridor, call for immediate and concrete ways to promote regular pathways for safe migration. The growing number of high-profile mass casualty events involving migrants has stimulated the general public’s interest to better address the protection issues faced by migrants. Despite this, much remains to be done both in terms of understanding the scope of migrant deaths and disappearances in the SADC region and in terms of the actions needed to prevent people on the move from harm.

Improving data on missing migrants to provide humanitarian support is also a fundamental commitment towards informing the Global Compact for Migration’s Objective 8, which commits signatory States to “save lives and establish coordinated international efforts on missing migrants”. This call is echoed by the inclusion of indicator 10.7.3 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development, which measures the “number of people who died or disappeared in the process of migration towards an international destination”. While progress has been made to address the growing crisis of missing migrants in the region, in particular following the 2022 Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) recommendations, the SADC region must urgently prioritize the efficient and sustainable management of issues related to migrants’ deaths and disappearances, including saving migrant lives, identifying the many missing and providing support to the families and communities affected by this crisis.



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Confédération suisse
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Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
State Secretariat STS-FDFA
Peace and Human Rights

³ Crush et. Al (2006). International Migration and Good Governance in the Southern African Region.