

SADC Migration Patterns and Trends and Implications on Migration Governance

Purpose of Brief

The Policy Brief is a reflection of **prior engagements** made by the organization surrounding **the conversation of migration**. It **underlines the main concerns** that had been consistently raised throughout previous briefings.

Migration in the Southern African area stems from **interconnected factors, including historical legacies, economic crises, political unrest, conflicts, climate change, environmental degradation, and the desire to escape difficult living conditions**.

Several countries are both source, transit and destination countries. Countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Angola are major destinations for labor migration, especially in mining, agriculture, and services. Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, and Malawi serve as major origin countries. **Due to colonial legacy, most migrants move within the SADC region in search of jobs in the mining sector**, especially in South Africa, Botswana, and Angola. **However, recent labor migration trends in Southern Africa show that migrants are increasingly seeking employment opportunities in various sectors in the host countries, including the informal economy, agriculture, and services.** As the economic hub of the region, South Africa is the primary destination for international migrants within the SADC region. Amid conflicts, insecurity, and other structural challenges, many refugees come from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. **Conflicts, insecurity, climate change, and environmental degradation have led to the influx of significant numbers of refugees and asylum seekers** from the DRC and Burundi into Zambia, South Africa, and Malawi.

Migration within the SADC region reflects a range of trends, including labor migration, irregular migration, skilled migration, forced displacement (refugees and IDPs), climate-induced migration, cross-border trade, and student migration. **In the context of socioeconomic hardships, insecurity, and political unrest, irregular migration poses a fundamental challenge in the region. Irregular migration is often linked to human trafficking and migrant smuggling. There is an increasing feminization of migration in the SADC region**, with women's migration often driven by the search for better living conditions, poverty, and family reunification, among other factors.

Key Summary Findings

Box 1: Indicates the distinct kinds of migration that happens in and around the SADC region.

Box 2: Explains the changes in climate change, natural disasters and environmental degradation that have triggered the increased migration within and outside the SADC region.

Box 3: provides an overview of the several legislative instruments used by the SADC to strengthen the governance on migration across the region of Africa.

Box 4: Lists the various challenges that hinder effective human rights-based migration governance in the SADC region, including gaps in data and statistics, gaps in policy implementation, brain drain, strains on social services, xenophobia, antimigrant sentiment, human trafficking, and migrant smuggling.

Box 5: Elaborates on how migration can be a fundamental driver for socio-economic developments in the SADC region.

Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) Policy Brief



Box no. 1: Migration Patterns in the SADC Region

- **Migration in the SADC region is driven by economic, social, political, and environmental factors and entails both opportunities and challenges.**
- Labor migration exhibits varying patterns, including movement within the SADC and outside the region, especially motivated by the search for better economic opportunities.
- **Skilled labor migration tends to result in more brain drain than in brain gain, as highly skilled professionals**, such as medical doctors, nurses, engineers, IT specialists, and academics, move to destination countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, the Middle East, Germany, Canada, and the USA.
- **Informal cross-border trade involves traders, especially women**, who often operate without formal documentation, notably along the Zimbabwe-South Africa, Malawi-Mozambique, Zambia-DRC, and Lesotho-South Africa corridors.
- **Circular migration: Citizens of some SADC countries move for seasonal or rotational work**, such as Zimbabweans and Mozambicans moving to South Africa to work in the agriculture, mining, and manufacturing sectors.
- Entrepreneurial migration involves moving to SADC countries to establish businesses. For instance, **Zimbabwean and Somali entrepreneurs move to South Africa and Botswana, respectively, to establish businesses, as do Malawian and Congolese traders.**
- Domestic and care work migration: For instance, **women from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique, and Lesotho migrating to neighboring countries to work as domestic helpers or caregivers.**

Box no. 2: Climate Change, and Environmental Migration Drivers and Trends

- **Climate-induced migration includes internal migration, with populations in rural areas moving to towns as a coping strategy to escape droughts, floods, and land degradation, and to cope with constraining urban infrastructure.**
- Climate-induced migration also has intra-regional patterns, with **communities moving to neighboring countries like South Africa and Botswana to rebuild their livelihoods, which have been hard hit by the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters, and environmental degradation.**
- **Droughts and floods can trigger seasonal migration**, forcing communities to temporarily relocate as an adaptation strategy to climate change and natural disasters, and to return once conditions improve.
- **Climate change has increasingly affected communities across the SADC region**, with severe droughts affecting communities in South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, and floods affecting communities in Mozambique, Zambia, and Malawi, resulting in significant displacement.
- **Disasters such as Cyclone Kenneth (2019)** have led to significant displacement in Mozambique's Cabo Delgado.
- **Climate-induced migration exacerbates food insecurity, water scarcity, thus diminishing livelihoods, weakening socioeconomic resilience, and potentially fueling social unrest.**

Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) Policy Brief



Box no. 3: Brief overview of implemented policies and legal instruments on migration in SADC

- **The 1992 SADC Treaty.**
- **The 1995 Draft Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons.** The 1995 Draft Protocol was opposed by some SADC Member States.
- **The 2005 SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons.** Notwithstanding its adoption following amendments, ratification of this Protocol has been slow.
- **The Harmonized SADC Regional Strategic Plan on Combating Illegal Migration, Smuggling, and Trafficking (2016-2020).**
- **The SADC Labour Migration Action Plan (2020-2025).**
- **Bilateral agreements.** For instance, South Africa and Lesotho have signed agreements, including the Lesotho Special Permit, enabling cross-border labor migration.
- SADC regional policy and legal frameworks are aligned with international instruments. However, **harmonizing national laws, legislation, and policies with regional and international instruments remains a significant challenge.**
- Some countries such as Seychelles have removed visa requirement for citizens of other African countries.

Box no. 4: Brief overview of SADC's migration governance-related challenges

- Major challenges include **weak or poor implementation, limited technical, financial, and institutional capacity, and heavy reliance on international partners for funding**, which undermines the regional and national ownership of these policies.
- **Gaps in accurate, reliable, up- to- date, and disaggregated migration data** hinder effective migration governance. Official data does not reflect the real effects of the migration in the SADC region.
- **Brain drain is a fundamental issue** that reflects the need to address the adverse effects of skilled international migration on national development.
- Migration offers significant opportunities for both origin and host countries. **However, it can strain public services such as healthcare, housing, and education in host countries and accentuate labor workforce shortages in origin countries.**
- Amid rising anti-migrant sentiment, **migrants are increasingly vulnerable to xenophobia, discrimination, and violence in the SADC region.**
- Women and children are especially vulnerable to exploitation and at risk of **human trafficking and smuggling of migrants.**
- Migrants are at risk of socioeconomic vulnerabilities due to their lack of or **limited access to protection mechanisms.**
- Migrants, especially those working in the informal economy, often **face precarious employment, low wages, and exploitation.**
- While SADC countries have improved border control efforts, **infrastructural gaps, corruption, inconsistent documentation, delays, informal crossings, a lack of harmonization of laws and regulations across the SADC region hinder effective border control and governance.**

Southern Africa Migration Network (SAMIN) Policy Brief



- **Box no. 5: The Development contribution of labor migration in the SADC region**
- **Labor migration can contribute to national development** through migrant workers' financial remittances, transfers of skills and knowledge, social remittances, and investment opportunities.
- **Migrants help address labor shortages**, especially in sectors such as agriculture, mining, construction, healthcare, and domestic work, thereby contributing to economic and social development.
- **Migrants contribute to job creation, start businesses, and foster trade and investment.**
- **Remittances help alleviate poor living conditions.** They are used for household consumption, access to education, healthcare, and overall household and family stability. For example, according to estimates, remittances transferred by Zimbabwean nationals account for more than \$649 million annually.
- **Migration can foster regional integration and trade.** It can foster the development of a common market, thereby enhancing economic growth and regional integration.
- **Promoting free movement is a keystone to fostering regional integration and to migration's contribution to national development.**
- By helping to address labor shortages and filling skills gaps in critical sectors, migrants play a major role in the host country's socioeconomic development.
- **Diaspora engagement can be a catalyst for homeland development**, enabling knowledge and skills transfer, remittances, opportunities for investment and trade, international partnerships, and transnational business networks.

Policy Recommendations for Human Rights-based Migration Governance

- **Short-term:** promote migrants' rights; prevent and combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling; enhance human rights- based border management; provide protection for vulnerable migrants and humanitarian assistance to forcibly displaced persons; and address racism, xenophobia, and discrimination; strengthen statistics and data collection.
- **Mid-term:** harmonize national migration policies, laws, and legislation with regional, continental, and international instruments; adopt labor mobility agreements; establish digital information platforms; harmonize visa procedures; and facilitate migrants' integration into the host country and their contribution to the country's economic development.
- **Long-term:** address the root causes of migration, including poverty, unemployment, conflict, climate change, and environmental degradation; foster good governance and regional integration through free movement and regional trade; and develop and implement comprehensive labor migration governance and policy frameworks.
- **Advocacy efforts:** strengthen advocacy by increasing awareness, fostering cooperation, improving migration governance by easing formal processes, and digitalizing the system for enhanced efficiency.
- **Building institutional capacity**, developing and maintaining databases on migration at national and regional levels, and mobilizing adequate human and financial resources for improved migration governance are keystones.

This policy brief was made possible with the support of our partners

