

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary section of the report provides an overview of the SADC COVID-19 Rapid Assessment and is divided into the following sub-sections:

- ▲ Background;
- ▲ Objectives;
- ▲ Methodology;
- ▲ Findings; and
- ▲ Recommendations.

1.1 Background

The Southern Africa Migration Management (SAMM) Project is being implemented to improve migration management in the Southern Africa and Indian Ocean region. The Project targets the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Member States: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The SAMM Project is implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees (UNHCR). The project is funded by the European Union.

One of the specific objectives of the SAMM Project is an improved policy environment for labour migration across the region and improved access to legal and efficient means of labour mobility for migrant workers. The project is therefore in the process of undertaking a stocktaking of completed and on-going work on labour migration and mixed migration (including refugees and internally displaced persons) that is of direct relevance to the implementation of the project. This exercise will inform the prioritization of project activities, which includes support for labour migration policy development.

At the same time, it is clear that policy development in the countries covered by the project have been, and will continue to be affected by the current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis. The ILO therefore commissioned DPC & Associates to conduct a Rapid Assessment of the impact of COVID-19 specifically on migrant workers.

It is important to note that in principle all International Labour Standards apply to migrant workers irrespective of nationality and migration status, unless otherwise stated, and this remains true during the pandemic. Of particular relevance are the eight ILO Fundamental Conventions,¹ and notably the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). They both guarantee equal treatment without discrimination in terms of employment and occupation. All ILO Fundamental Conventions have been ratified by the SADC countries (and even without ratification countries are obliged to respect them).

The ILO's Migration for Employment Convention (revised), 1949 (No. 97) counts with five ratifications in SADC countries: Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zambia. The ILO's Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No.143) was also recently ratified by Madagascar.

¹ The Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98); Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29), and Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105); Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138); Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182).

1.2 Objectives

Within the framework of the SAMM Project, the ILO has defined the objectives of the Rapid Assessment of the impacts of COVID-19 on migrant workers in SADC Member States as follows:

- ▲ To identify the socio-economic challenges brought about by the pandemic to migrant workers. What are the direct and indirect effects on migrant workers of the pandemic including the consequences of confinement? Effects with regard to working conditions (wages, working time, leave entitlements, end of contract entitlements, occupational safety and health protection), protection issues, jobs loss, mobility and freedom of movement, reintegration of returning migrants, etc. will be captured to the extent possible. To the extent possible, challenges will be identified for specific sectors and groups of migrants (including groups identified based on their migration status).
- ▲ To assess the policies and measures that Member States are currently putting in place to address the COVID-19 effects, and in particular their effects on migrant workers. Such measures include prevention policies and practices, testing and tracing of migrants, and the extent to which migrants benefit from or are excluded from support measures including food support, income support, additional social protection measures, etc.

1.3 Methodology

The mixed methods deployed to generate the required information were the following:

- a) Review of reports, documents and regulations pertaining to COVID-19 of all the SADC Member States;
- b) Interviews with key stakeholders via e-platforms such as Zoom, Skype and Teams;
- c) Participation in COVID-19 related webinars organized by academic and research institutions; and
- d) Online questionnaire completion (using the Survey Monkey platform).

As anticipated, challenges were experienced in getting in touch with the required stakeholders in the face of the COVID-19 related lockdowns. This difficulty was most pronounced with respect to migrant workers. The assistance of Migrant Workers' Organizations was helpful in ensuring that some feedback from this stakeholder group was generated.

1.4 Findings

1.4.1 Migration Landscape

The key features and trends of migration in Southern Africa have a long history that predates the COVID-19 crisis. This historical context includes movement occasioned by kinship ties across Member State borders.

However, migration in the region is viewed as largely stemming from push and pull factors in "pursuit of economic opportunities, political instability and increasingly, environmental hazards".²

According to the IOM GMDAC Migration Data Portal, South Africa accounts for the largest stock of migrants as a destination country in Southern Africa while Mozambique and Zimbabwe are the largest countries of origin.³

² IOM GMDAC, 2020; <https://migrationdataportal.org/regional-data-overview/southern-africa>

³ Ibid

South Africa accounted for the largest (60%) stock of migrants as a destination country followed by Zimbabwe and Mozambique each just below 8% in 2019. Within the region, the list of sending countries were, on the other hand, led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo followed by South Africa and the United Republic of Tanzania. Lesotho and the Seychelles have the largest proportion of their populations who are migrants in the region at 16% and 19% respectively.

While some flow monitoring data by IOM has been generated for some border posts in the region, a consolidated, representative, statistical view of movements pre and during COVID-19 is not yet available. However, as shown below, Member State specific detail will point to evidence of COVID-19 induced return flows. These return flows are due to job losses for some migrant workers, both documented and undocumented.

Flow monitoring data by IOM shows that of the 10 080 returnees to Zimbabwe, more than half (4 952) were processed through the Beitbridge port of entry from South Africa while 2 776 were processed through Plumtree from Botswana between April and June 2020.⁴ The same reports show that 117 140 people crossed through Beitbridge (58 930) – South Africa, Chirundu (21 550) – Zambia, and Forbes (36 660) – Mozambique.

1.4.2 Government Policy Responses and their Socio-Economic Impacts

SADC Member States⁵ and the region as a whole have not been spared the adverse impact of COVID-19 although in the first four to five months of 2020, the outbreak was most virulent in only a few countries. In particular, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Tanzania and Mauritius accounted for 93% of all cases reported by end of April 2020.⁶

To curb the spread of the virus, most governments responded with a mix of measures that include:

- ▲ Declaration of state of emergency/disaster;
- ▲ School closures;
- ▲ Workplace closures;
- ▲ Cancellation of public events;
- ▲ Restrictions on gatherings;
- ▲ Public Transport system closures;
- ▲ Stay-at-home requirement;
- ▲ Restrictions on internal movement;
- ▲ International travel controls or prohibitions; and
- ▲ Income support to qualifying citizens.

Most of these measures were taken on board by most of the Member States in the region: All but three SADC Member States had implemented national lockdowns between March and April 2020.

It is important to note that by end of May, relaxation of lockdown conditions was occurring in some of these Member States. For instance, while South Africa has been worst hit by the virus in terms of the total number of cases and deaths in the region, it started easing lockdown measures although interprovincial travel for leisure was still prohibited.

⁴ IOM, 2020; <https://displacement.iom.int/system/tdf/reports/Flow%20Monitoring%20June-2020.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=9190>

⁵ The SADC Member States are: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, the Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. All these countries are targeted by the SAMM Project.

⁶ SADC Secretariat, 2020; https://www.sadc.int/files/8015/8988/3255/COVID-19_SADC_Economy_Report.pdf

The negative socio-economic effects of COVID-19 have been associated with setbacks in human development given its triple manifestation in terms of health, education, and income – which are key elements in the Human Development Index. Evidence to hand during this Rapid Assessment was that most developing countries were already in the grip of the negative socio-economic consequences of the pandemic as they have dealt with a severe blow to the progress towards several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁷

The impacts of COVID-19 are diverse, complex and multidimensional and include not just a sparking economic crisis but it is also adversely affecting the livelihoods of many, including groups that were already vulnerable prior to COVID-19. While migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, the impacts of COVID-19 are broad, and in that sense, all workers are affected.

While deficits in terms of social protection and job losses may be more acute for migrant workers, these challenges confront other workers as well and solutions for this and other issues will likely be more effective if they cover *all* workers.

On the economic front, contraction in various United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) economic indicators has been observed and/or forecasted as direct consequence of COVID-19 with a contraction at regional level of 3% in 2020, 6.4% for South Africa, 13.1% for Botswana and 7.4% for Zimbabwe.⁸

This has translated into a number of adverse impacts including the following:

- ▲ Increased vulnerabilities due to the reduction in social protection measures;
- ▲ The state of inequality which was already pronounced in most of Southern African countries is exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis;
- ▲ Declining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI);
- ▲ Increasing debt levels as SADC Member State reach out internationally to attract funding not only for direct COVID-19 interventions but also to support government spending in other areas inclusive of relief grants;
- ▲ Sharp drops in sectors directly impacted by lockdowns and border closures such as hospitality and tourism; and
- ▲ Declining commodity prices driven by weakening demand in major export markets such as China and Europe.

Overall, diverse impacts have been recorded across the board but with migrant workers being particularly exposed to the adverse impacts of COVID-19 response measures inclusive of:

- a) Reduced income due to temporary workplace closures, work stoppages or outright job losses especially in sectors not deemed to be essential such as hospitality and industry;
- b) Deprivation and extreme poverty driven by loss of jobs and reduced incomes in the face of COVID-19 lockdowns, with many migrants becoming stranded in the countries of destination with little or no income to meet their basic needs; nor enough to pay for assisted repatriation;
- c) Closures of public transport systems, preventing many migrant workers from getting to their workplace even in cases where they were allowed to continue to work;
- d) Multi-year bans or entry prohibitions because of some migrant workers who had overstayed, in some cases motivating the use of unconventional border crossings to travel;

⁷ UNDP, 2020; <https://feature.undp.org/covid-19-and-the-sdgs/>

⁸ UNECA, 2020; https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/COVID-19/covid-19_southern_africa_regional_strategies_17_may_2020.pptx

- e) Adverse psycho-social outcomes associated with loss of income, lockdown in meagre accommodations, inability to meet rental and food costs, and limited ability to meet the financial and social requirements for incidents such as funerals;
- f) Anxiety about returning arising from quarantining protocols and danger of not being able to return to the country of destination and/or immigration bans being imposed by authorities;
- g) Increased domestic violence where COVID-19 is seen to be compounded by money, health and security stresses, movement restrictions, crowded homes and reduced peer support, and migrants are likely to be particularly affected, e.g. in view of the lack of social networks in the country of destination compared to non-migrants; and
- h) Xenophobia and xenophobic violence is a serious problem, in particular in South Africa, where a significant number of African migrant workers in the country are victims of xenophobic violence or threats of such violence and this continued during the lockdown.

Moreover, some impacts on migrant workers have been more prominent in certain sectors, for instance:

- a) Increased border processing times for workers in essential sectors who were still allowed cross-border movement, with long queues forming at the busy border points such as Musina and Beitbridge between South Africa and Zimbabwe;
- b) Increased driver fatigue due to longer processing times at borders as well as working hours and restrictions on the number of crew members in a truck cabin;
- c) Local truck drivers striked or protested, calling for truck companies to stop hiring foreign nationals, as reported by Xenowatch.
- d) The platform Xenowatch⁹ have received reports on migrant shop owners who were either threatened or attacked by local business owners as they are seen as a threat. Xenowatch have also received a lot of complaints or reports about selective enforcement of bylaws by officials towards migrant workers. Another trend they saw increase during the lockdown period and prior was the issue of police extorting funds from migrant shop owners and retaliating with violence if the migrants refused to give in to their demands.
- e) With restaurants in South Africa moving towards delivery and pick-up models on account of the lockdown, some migrants who worked as waiters/waitresses or provided support services for the restaurant are no longer earning their wages as their role is currently obsolete; and
- f) Mineworkers in the sub-region with limited or no digital literacy who had been affected by silicosis and TB faced even longer waiting periods to get their applications for compensation processed, and SADC mineworkers' associations flag capacity in digital literacy as an important issue.

High levels of job losses have been most pronounced in the informal economy where job protection is weaker,¹⁰ followed by those sectors which fall outside what Member States have defined as essential services such as the following:

- ▲ Transport;
- ▲ Tourism and hospitality;
- ▲ Education; and
- ▲ Manufacturing.

With respect to education, most SADC countries imposed localized or countrywide closures which affected just over 81 million students and United Nations Educational and Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) warns that the education sector, which was under pressure

⁹ Xenowatch, 2020. <https://www.xenowatch.ac.za/> Xenowatch have launched a call for reports on xenophobia in times of COVID-19: <https://www.xenowatch.ac.za/report-covid19/>

¹⁰ SADC Secretariat, 2020; https://www.sadc.int/files/8015/8988/3255/COVID-19_SADC_Economy_Report.pdf

even before the pandemic, is now faced with an unfolding crisis as a result of COVID-19.¹¹ Although one consequence of the pandemic in the education sector has been the movement towards online delivery,¹² many education providers are not in a position to move to virtual delivery platforms with lack of digital access being a serious limitation.¹³

Adverse impacts on trade and transport have also been felt by drivers and cross-border traders. For example, drivers and cross-border traders plying routes between South Africa and Zimbabwe saw their business activities come to an abrupt halt when borders were closed on the 26th of March 2020.¹⁴

1.4.4 International Cooperating Partners and Other Actors' Responses

Various International Cooperating Partners (ICPs) inclusive of the ILO, IOM and IMF have implemented regional and country level interventions in response to COVID-19. These include fiscal and monetary support measures, migration management measures and capacity development as well as facilitation of tripartite responses to the pandemic.

The ILO was involved across different Member States in such activities as: a) supporting rapid impact assessments; b) technical advice on coordination, planning, monitoring, risk communication and community engagement; c) awareness raising regarding health and safety issues; d) supporting social dialogue and encouraging consensus building; e) supporting tripartite stakeholders to stay engaged; and f) support and sponsor specific efforts by workers and employers' organizations.

The other ICPs in this space that were observed are the World Health Organisation (WHO) (globally leading health response to COVID-19), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (using networks of farmer field schools, extension workers, women's discussion groups and community veterinary health networks to share COVID-19 health and safety messages); as well as IOM (implementing various activities ranging from flow monitoring to profiling migrant workers and registering those in distress).

From a financing perspective, the IMF, World Bank and the African Development Bank have undertaken various COVID-19 related financing initiatives. The African Development Bank recently issued a US\$3 billion "Fight COVID-19" social bond, while the African Export-Import Bank has set up a US\$3 billion credit facility. Combined, official creditors have mobilised up to US\$57 billion for Africa in 2020 alone. This includes the recent US\$18 billion the IMF and the World Bank made available to enhance front-line health services, support people in poverty and the vulnerable and keep economies afloat in the face of the worst global economic downturn.

1.5 Summary Recommendations

Based on the findings of this Rapid Assessment, the following preliminary recommendations are made:

- ▲ **Recommendation 1:** Include migrant workers in national COVID-19 policy responses and recovery and development strategies to help to ensure the realization of equality and social justice

¹¹ UNESCO, 2020; <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

¹² Gamuchirai Masiyiwa, 2020; <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/zimbabwe/zimbabwe-begins-virtual-learning-coronavirus-crisis/>

¹³ Sharon Kavhu, 2020; <https://southerntimesafrica.com/site/news/e-learning-comes-in-handy-in-sadc-as-region-battles-covid-19>

¹⁴ Gamuchirai Masiyiwa, 2020; <https://globalpressjournal.com/africa/zimbabwe/cross-border-trading-zimbabwe-becomes-casualty-coronavirus/>

- ▲ **Recommendation 2:** Promote the rights of migrant workers within the context of universal social protection coverage and recognition of international labour standards, particularly concerning working and living conditions
- ▲ **Recommendation 3:** Implement a holistic, rights-based and coherent regional policy approach to labour migration governance that addresses international migration as a whole
- ▲ **Recommendation 4:** Design and implement fair and effective labour migration policies through tripartite plus social dialogue and interventions that purposefully target migrant workers with a particular focus on the most vulnerable
- ▲ **Recommendation 5:** Strengthen the region's labour migration data collection, reporting and information dissemination capacities
- ▲ **Recommendation 6:** Promote affordable, efficient, streamlined and safe remittance transactions, and improve knowledge and awareness among migrant workers of available, safe and affordable remittance platforms