

SOUTHERN AFRICA

ICRC'S ACTIVITIES IN FAVOUR OF MIGRANTS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

2020



South Africa is a major destination and transit country for migrants from the Eastern and Southern Africa regions and beyond. Though the Southern African route receives far less public attention than the Central Mediterranean route, the dangers and risks that migrants face along this route are of similar concern from a humanitarian perspective.

Along the journey and within the country, migrants often face intense hardships and violations of their fundamental rights. This has lasting effects on their physical and mental health and on their families. Many lose their lives, and it is not infrequent for migrants to lose contact with their families and disappear without a trace. In fact, no reliable data exists on the number of separated, missing or deceased migrants along the Southern African route. The family members who are left behind are also deeply affected as they face the uncertainty of not knowing whether their loved ones are alive or dead.

Addressing these increasing humanitarian concerns in the region, the Pretoria regional delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is working on various projects in Southern Africa that aim to prevent migrants from disappearing or getting separated, restore and maintain contact with family members and increase the rate of identification of bodies in South African mortuaries.



TRACING AND FAMILY REUNIFICATION SERVICES

The ICRC works with National Red Cross Societies (in Angola, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe) and other humanitarian organizations in critical locations with high concentration of migrants, such as refugee camps, settlements, reception centres, border points and shelters. Together, we seek to provide free telephone call services, Wi-Fi connectivity and other forms of communication so that people can trace their family members and maintain contact. We also organize cross-border reunification of migrant unaccompanied minors with their relatives.

Going beyond offering connectivity services to migrants, the regional delegation has started a digitalization process of the activities carried out under the ICRC's Restoring Family Links programme in Southern Africa. In 2019, we launched a website called Trace the Face Southern Africa (www.familylinks.icrc.org/sa) that allows the ICRC and National Societies to publish photos of people looking for their missing relatives in the hope of reconnecting families. Its reach expands to countries beyond Southern Africa. We also coordinate directly with migrant communities through various mediums, including digital communication with migrant community leaders, to raise awareness on prevention and tracing activities. While a majority of the migrant communities that we serve are refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, many others also come from countries affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, or are exposed to conflict and other factors that increase their vulnerability along the journey.

HAVE YOU LOST CONTACT WITH YOUR FAMILY DUE TO MIGRATION?

Visit **Trace the Face Southern Africa**. The website can help you search for your missing loved ones.
Go to: familylinks.icrc.org/sa

For more information on our free services:
Call or WhatsApp: +27 66 306 8939
Email: tracethefaceSA@icrc.org

RESTORING FAMILY LINKS

MISSING AND DECEASED MIGRANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The identification of dead bodies, specifically of migrants, continues to be a challenge and is of particular concern to the ICRC. While we do not know the mortal remains of how many migrants lie in the mortuaries, thousands of unidentified bodies are buried in common graves annually, many of them presumably migrants. This gap is often due to a lack of biometric data and information on personal features that the South African authorities commonly rely on for verification of the deceased. Many migrants come from isolated rural areas and from families that lack resources to conduct efficient searches across the border even as they wait desperately for news on their missing relatives.

We launched a multidisciplinary pilot project, including Restoring Family Links and other forensics activities, to maximize the potential of identifying missing migrants (alive or dead) by creating a system for information to flow from the families to the South African authorities. The project was carried out in close collaboration with National Red Cross Societies, authorities and other parties concerned to support migrants and their families.

The pilot project confirmed that families participate readily in reporting missing relatives when a channel of communication is accessible. Families also provide useful ante-mortem data and other forensically-pertinent information that not only assists with the tracing inquiry but can also be used in various databases to complement efforts in the identification of deceased people.





FORMALIZING THE PROJECT: A SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH

The plight of family members of missing migrants and the successful implementation of the pilot project demonstrated the need to gradually expand and formalize the project with a cross-border coordinating role led by the authorities. While the pilot project covered only certain communities in Zimbabwe, it roused interest among others with new requests continuously coming in.

In response to the need, we are working with the authorities and other parties concerned on a mechanism that would clarify the fate and whereabouts of missing people and ensure that contact is maintained between separated family members. Although the scope of the programme is to address migrants from Zimbabwe, it also forms the basis for a dialogue with southern African authorities on the broader issue of missing and deceased migrants in the whole region.

DIGITAL HUMANITARIAN PLATFORM: RED SAFE

We are piloting a digital humanitarian platform, Red Safe, in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is part of a new project that would allow migrants to access a variety of services digitally. The platform aims to:

- help people in distress who need trusted and timely information.
- provide access to quick online services.
- provide an effective and safe way for migrants to send pre-written messages to their loved ones.
- provide a safe alternative to the current commercial online platforms and protect against the misuse of data and surveillance.

In the process of developing the Red Safe mobile application, from identifying target communities to creating content, we have engaged extensively with migrant communities and other parties concerned. We believe the needs of this community can be met by a secure mobile digital platform that will offer three types of services:

- information as aid to provide accurate and actionable information to migrants to help keep them safe and mitigate risks along the way.
- digital vault for migrants to upload important documents and keep digital copies safely stored.
- contact notification to allow migrants to send pre-written messages to a list of contacts.

Providing contact notification and digital vault services are a first for the ICRC. As a result of the increased mobile internet penetration, the Red Safe mobile application will also help us reach more people, explore new digital services adapted to those in distress, respond better to new needs, analyze trends and improve humanitarian services.



THE RED CROSS CAN HELP!

- We offer free phone calls;
- Free access to internet and
- Online tracing: familylinks.icrc.org/southernAfrica

IMMIGRATION, DETENTION AND INNOVATION: SOLUTIONS FOR LINDELA REPATRIATION CENTRE

The ICRC monitors the living conditions and treatment of migrants held at Lindela Repatriation Centre, which is the main deportation facility in South Africa. Based on our findings and recommendations we engage in bilateral, confidential dialogue with the authorities on how to improve the situation whenever needed.

At present, there is a lack in systematic and sustainable opportunities for migrants to maintain or re-establish contact with their families. Migrants are not allowed to have cell phones inside the facility and the only available means of communication with their loved ones are the quarterly visits offered by the ICRC (and a public phone system for those who can afford it.) The ICRC currently offers a three-minute slot during which a person can make as many calls as they want. But often, hundreds of migrants are left without the opportunity to make a call due to lack of time. Apart from their psychosocial impact, these phone calls are important so that the migrants can make the necessary financial arrangements to speed up their deportation process.

The overall objective of this project is to enable migrants to make free calls using a public phone at the facility, offering greater autonomy and a more systematic service, while aligning with the existing processes on the ground. We have compiled and submitted to the concerned authorities a proposal that would align with the existing processes on ground.





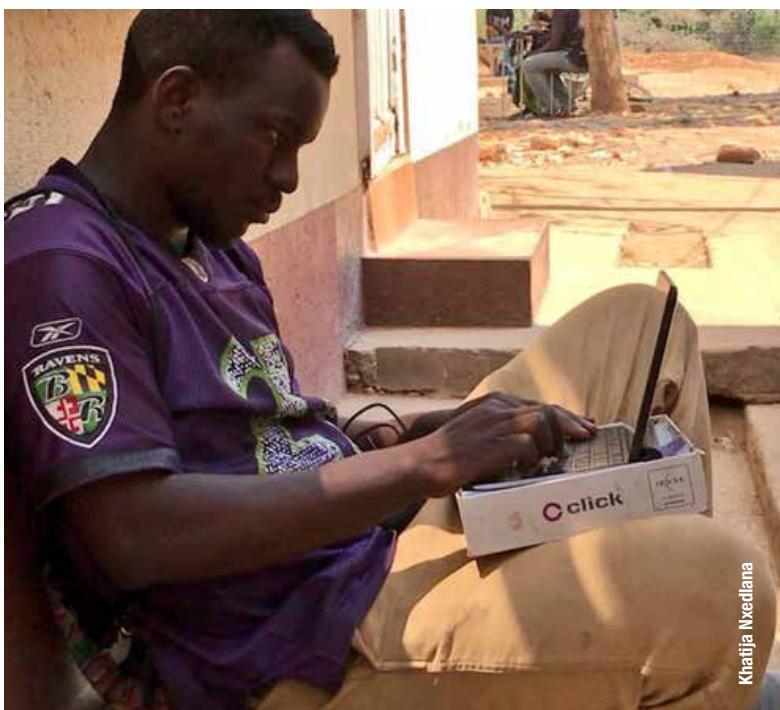
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PROTECTION OF THE CIVILIAN POPULATION

At the ICRC, we seek to engage with states so that the fundamental rights of asylum seekers, refugees and other vulnerable migrants are respected. Together with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, we seek to address assistance and protection needs of vulnerable migrants, including their access to essential services and provide impartial and independent humanitarian aid. Compliance with national and international laws and standards helps reduce human rights violations and the suffering of migrants. We have been engaged in a confidential bilateral dialogue with various authorities to remind them of their obligations under various bodies of international law, and that migrants are treated with dignity and protected from violation of human rights.



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