



# THE MISSING AND DECEASED MIGRANTS PILOT PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE: 2016 TO 2018

# INTRODUCTION

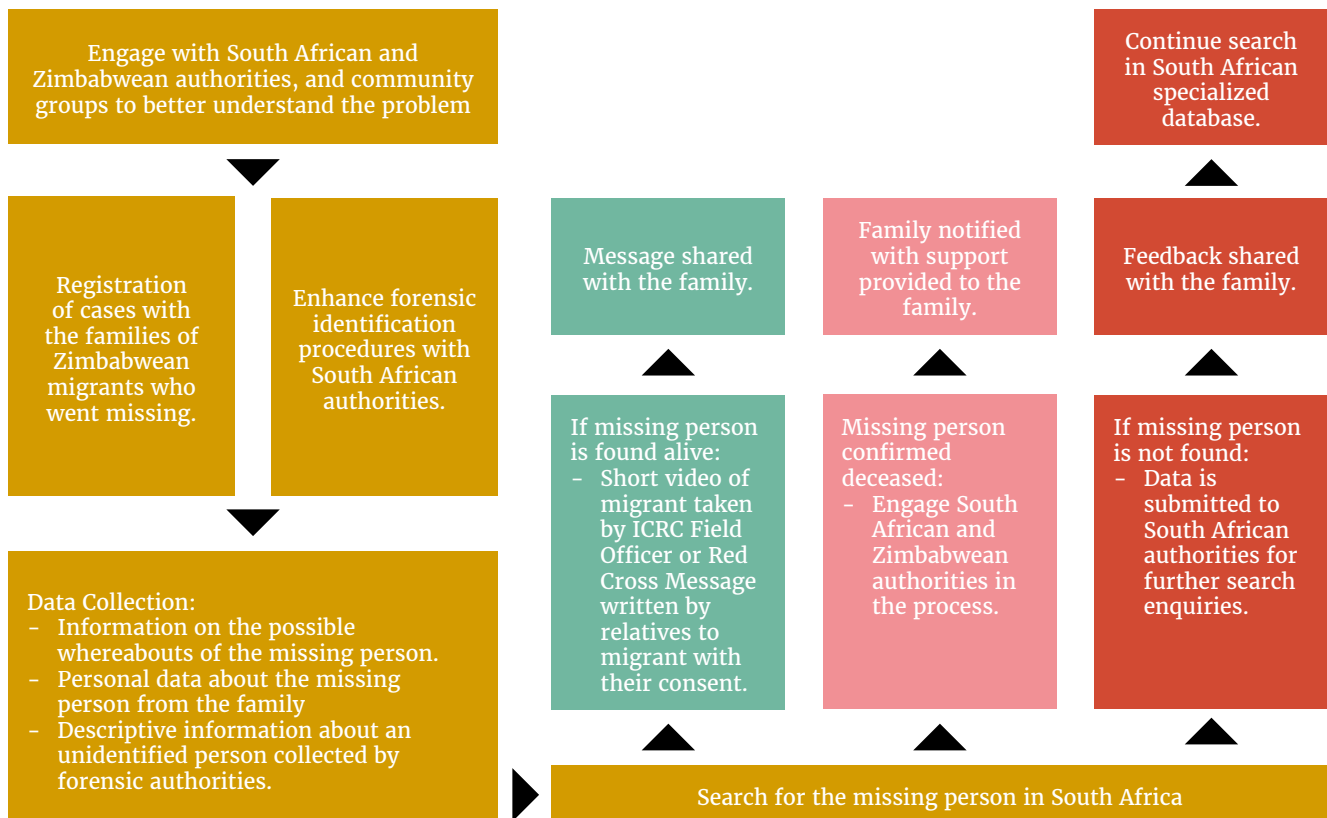


- Every day, people all over the world leave their homes in search for a better life. On the road or after they have arrived at their destination, many migrants go missing. It is these vulnerable migrants that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) seeks to help.
- Through the Missing and Deceased Migrants Pilot Project, the ICRC is working with South African and Zimbabwean authorities to complement existing systems, tools and resources that are used to locate missing migrants – whether they are living or deceased.

## OUR AIMS

- To enable families of missing or deceased migrants to receive clear answers about the fate of their loved ones.
- To restore the identity and dignity of deceased migrants and further enable the return of their human remains to their loved ones.
- To improve the way families, public authorities and forensic practitioners share information used to search for and identify missing and deceased migrants.

## OUR APPROACH



“Her last words were, ‘I will call you as soon as I arrive’.”

– Ms M.N. whose daughter went missing in 2012.

# THE RESULTS

- We collected 61 requests in Zimbabwe to search for missing family members in South Africa. Of these requests, the ICRC successfully located 15 migrants. We restored communication links to enable family members in Zimbabwe and migrants in South Africa to rebuild their relationships. For remaining requests where the ICRC's tracing efforts were unsuccessful, the missing persons' data was submitted to the South African authorities for future searches.
- An identification team was created at Johannesburg Forensic Pathology Services in South Africa. 24 forensic practitioners were trained in the examination and collection of unique identifiers. Over 100 identification examinations were performed which resulted in 38 confirmed identities. These examinations were not directly linked to the requests from families in Zimbabwe. However, they confirmed that enhanced methods to ensure fewer persons remain unidentified in mortuaries in South Africa are effective.

## KEY LESSONS SO FAR

- Standard procedures that require additional information from families or the forensic authorities maximize the potential of locating or identifying a missing or deceased migrant.
- Families of missing and deceased migrants are willing to participate and support the search for their loved ones through sharing confidential information for strictly humanitarian purposes.



**“Look at how old I am. I am 80 years old now and do not have the physical energy to cross the border and look for him. Even if I wanted to send a relative to look for him, where would they start?”**

**“It has been ten painful years for me. The greatest source of pain is not knowing whether he is alive or not. I may not ask him to come back home immediately, but all I want is to know.”**

– 80 year old Mr S. N. who has been looking for his grandson who went missing in 2007.





**“Many migrants become anonymous and this continues into death. No one knows where they are buried, and no one comes to visit them. This is a small project, but it’s a reflection that humanitarian organizations and state authorities could do more to ensure that migrants have dignity in death.”**

– Stephen Fonseca, ICRC Regional Forensic Manager – Africa

## WAY FORWARD

- The key findings and impact of Phase One of the Missing and Deceased Migrants Pilot Project are being shared with the families, communities and public authorities. We are engaging with all stakeholders to identify key lessons learned that can be put into practice immediately.
- The ICRC will be establishing Phase Two of the Pilot Project in South Africa and Zimbabwe. We aim to support additional aspects of the processes needed to assist families and the public authorities to search for missing migrants or to identify their human remains. Phase Two of the Pilot Project will run from late 2018 until the end of 2019.

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