

S Skota

Field Data

4.4 DRIVERS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

This study's analysis of interview data revealed primary factors contributing to undocumented migration in South Africa. To evaluate the effectiveness of current border securitisation policies and address the primary research question by exploring alternative border securitisation policies for managing undocumented migration in South Africa, this study's key participants identified significant drivers of undocumented migration. The subsequent section discusses these identified themes, encompassing porous borders and their primary causes, access to economic opportunities, restricted visa options for low-skilled migrants, instances of overstaying, bureaucratic inefficiencies in processing immigration outcomes, the influence of a liberal constitution, shortcomings in the deportation system, and external macro-structural influences from countries of origin.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Porous Borders

Respondents in this study revealed that border porosity was one of the leading drivers of undocumented migration to South Africa. Respondents revealed four major causes of border porosity, namely (a) arbitrary drawing of borders during colonial inception, (b) inadequate resource capability, (c) corruption, fraud and bribery, as well as (d) transnational criminal syndicates.

4.4.1.1 Arbitrary drawing of borders

One respondent explained the arbitrary nature of the country's borders.

"...if you look at how arbitrarily the borders were drawn up, literally, physically dividing families on two sides of the borders. So suddenly overnight, because a line was drawn somewhere in Europe, then your sisters live on the other side, or your father lives on one side of the fence, and you live on the other side of the fence". (Respondent, 9).

However, the introduction of these borders did not deter unauthorised border crossings. As a result, one of the respondents provided a historical context for this form of border crossing:

"We have a long history of border jumping generally because these borders have always been quite shaky. Border security is quite a new concept because I think it started in South Africa in the 1900s. So prior to that, it was a lot more liquid". (Respondent, 10).

To underscore the above sentiment, one respondent explained why it is easy to cross borders that are shared with neighbouring countries in the SADC region:

"Our national border also run through completely underdeveloped areas with no access to roads and through villages. In some areas, the border also separates communities, contributing to people visiting friends and family for cultural reasons". (Respondent, 1).

As a result, and as explained by Respondent 1 above, another respondent went further and argued that:

"It is very easy to cross into South Africa because it shares borders with its neighbouring countries, and there is no interest from neighbouring countries to manage migration on their side". (Respondent, 3).

Respondent 1 also highlighted such community crossings by positing that "South Africa shares trans frontier parks with neighbouring countries and initiatives such as Tshidilamolomo community crossing".

4.4.1.2 Inadequate Resource Capability

Respondents highlighted that insufficient human, technological and financial resources contribute to border porosity. These resources are interdependent.

Insufficient Human Resources -

One respondent argued that:

"The SANDF is poorly equipped to secure the borderline, and the consequence is illegal immigration". (Respondent, 5).

The respondent further highlighted that the DHA is also understaffed in managing undocumented migration:

"We have repeatedly said as a department that we don't have enough resources at the ports of entry and within the inspectorate unit to efficiently manage illegal migration and people. So, we have been chronically undercapacitated". (Respondent, 5).

Another respondent corroborated the above assertion made by Respondent 5 by further highlighting the structural challenges posed by the lack of human resources in light of the physical length of land borders in South Africa:

"The long borderline (4400km) with six neighbouring countries makes it difficult to monitor and control with the current allocation of resources. Even though the SANDF deployed over fifteen companies, it remains a challenge and almost impossible to secure the entire border effectively". (Respondent, 3).

A respondent referred to the above situation as a:

"problematic geographical terrain that makes surveillance and control of immigration challenging". (Respondent, 11).

The lack of human resource findings was further affirmed by a respondent who argued that:

"A further cause of porous borders in South Africa is the lack of reaction teams that can stop illegal migration of goods, people and conveyances". (Respondent, 1).

However, another respondent had scathing views about the available human resources, arguing that the failure to guard borders was also due to:

"a lethargic, complacent and incompetent workforce that contributes to non-achievement of organisational goals and deficient command and control at first and second levels, resulting in incoherence and complacency in the workplace". (Respondent, 6).

Inadequate physical and technological infrastructure - Respondents 6, 8 and 4 posited that South African borders were marred with inadequate barriers on the land borders and a lack of other physical resources such as technological equipment.

For instance, according to one respondent, there is a:

"lack of technology being applied using camera detection systems, radar systems, UAV systems, causing the risk that illegal crossings in SA's borderlines are going undetected". (Respondent, 6).

Insufficient Financial Resources - Respondent 3 argued that ensuring that borders are not porous is a costly exercise requiring significant financial investment to acquire personnel, systems, equipment and infrastructure. As a result, one respondent posited that:

“limitations such as budgetary constraints continue to impact the country’s ability to effectively manage undocumented migration because they have resulted in gaps in border control and inadequate monitoring of migration flows”. (Respondent, 11).

This study's findings confirm the Auditor-General's (2020) warning that inadequate funding would lead to an increase in undocumented migrants violating visa requirements and overstaying, while also resulting in fewer detained and deported undocumented migrants. The findings also confirm Jackson and Hoque's (2021) argument that the Immigration Services Business Unit tasked with deportations in the DHA is facing challenges, including budget cuts. The challenge of lack of financial resources is not unique to South Africa. In the USA, Bersin *et al.* (2024) argue that the Biden administration announced a sound US-Mexico border policy framework meant to curb undocumented migration, but without the required infrastructure and resources for immigration and border officials.