

Pandemic Remittance Shocks and Resilience in the South Africa-Zimbabwe Migration Corridor



Pandemic Remittance Shocks and Resilience in the South Africa–Zimbabwe Migration Corridor

Jonathan Crush and Godfrey Tawodzera

SAMP MIGRATION POLICY SERIES NO. 86

Series Editor: Prof. Jonathan Crush

Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP)

2023

AUTHORS

Jonathan Crush is Professor at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, Canada, and Extraordinary Professor at the University of the Western Cape.

Godfrey Tawodzera is Senior Lecturer in the Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape.

© Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP) 2023

Published by the Southern African Migration Programme, International Migration Research Centre, Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada
samponline.org

First published 2023

ISBN 978-1-920596-23-1

Cover photo by Linda Mujuru, Global Press Journal, Zimbabwe

Production by Bronwen Dachs Muller, Cape Town, South Africa

KEY POINTS

- During the first year of COVID-19, international organizations and migration experts confidently predicted that the pandemic would lead to a significant decline in remittances, a result of migrant layoffs and unemployment, return migration and disrupted remittance channels. Remittance pessimism vanished during the second year of the pandemic as data indicated that remittances had not suffered the predicted collapse.
- In testing the conflicting global and local narratives about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on remittance flows in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor, the authors draw on findings of a 2021 survey they conducted of Zimbabwean migrant households in South Africa. This, and surveys in other countries, showed depressed earning and remitting capacity and behaviour of migrants during the pandemic. Given these findings, there was no obvious explanation as to why remittances had not plunged in 2020.
- With this paradox of stable or increased migrant remittances and decreased migrant capacity to remit, a narrative emerged that emphasized the distinction between formal (recorded) remittances, which are captured in IMF and World Bank data, and informal (unrecorded) remittances, which are not.
- In many parts of the Global South, including in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor, informal remittance channels and volumes have been more important than formal ones. Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa continued to use informal channels after COVID-19 hit, but border closures and mobility restrictions partially blocked these channels for much of 2020 and 2021. Migrants responded by increasing their use of formal channels and there was a significant shift towards digital remittance services.
- The pandemic-related increase in remittances captured by the reserve banks was, at least in part, a product of a shift from informal to formal remitting behaviour. Whether the COVID-19 crisis has been a permanent boon to formal money transfer operators and digital remittance service providers or whether migrants will revert to informal channels post-pandemic remains to be seen.

CONTENTS	PAGE
Introduction	1
The Remittance Corridor	4
Migration and Employment	4
Pre-Pandemic Remittance Channels	6
Pandemic Disruptions	9
Methodology	12
Zimbabwean Migrant Profile	12
From Informal to Formal Remitting	15
Conclusion	18
References	19
Migration Policy Series	25

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Destination Countries of Zimbabwean Migrants, 2022	5
Table 2: Occupational Profile of Zimbabwean Migrants in South Africa	6
Table 3: Pre-Pandemic Remittances to Zimbabwe, 2009-2019	9
Table 4: Reported COVID-19 Deaths and Excess Natural Deaths	10
Table 5: Migrant Household Profile	13
Table 6: Pandemic Impacts on Migrant Income, Remitting and Food Security	14
Table 7: Frequency of Household Remitting to Zimbabwe	15
Table 8: Formal and Informal Remittances to Zimbabwe, 2018-2021	16
Table 9: Formal and Informal Remittance Providers, Before and During the Pandemic	17

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: COVID-19 Daily Infections in South Africa, 2020-2022	10
Figure 2: Cross-Border Traffic Between Zimbabwe and South Africa	11

INTRODUCTION

During the first year of COVID-19, international organizations and migration experts confidently predicted that the pandemic would lead to a significant decline in remittances, a result of migrant layoffs and unemployment, return migration, and disrupted remittance channels (Bondarenko, 2020; Ratha, 2021). The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for example, warned that for many low-income and fragile states, the economic shock of COVID-19 would be “magnified by the loss of remittances” (Sayeh and Chami, 2020). The World Bank projected that remittances to low- and middle-income countries would suffer “the steepest decline in recent history” by 7.2% in 2020 followed by a further decline of 7.5% in 2021 (World Bank, 2020: 7). Ratha (2021) noted that a “plunge” in the volume of remittances would trigger rising poverty levels. Others predicted that the decline in remittances would lead to a substantial increase in food insecurity in migrant-sending communities (Ahmed et al., 2021; Akim et al., 2021). Alarmist predictions about the coming remittances shock to livelihoods were also sounded at national and regional levels, including in Latin America (Del Real et al., 2023; Zamora, 2020), Asia (Diao and Mahrt, 2020; Gupta et al., 2021; Karim et al., 2020; Murakami et al., 2021; Withers et al., 2022) and Africa (Bisong and Ahairwe, 2020; Kalantaryan and McMahon, 2020; Kassegn, 2021).

Remittance pessimism vanished during the second year of the pandemic as macro-level data indicated that remittances had not suffered the predicted collapse. The World Bank quickly revised its gloomy 2020 predictions, reporting that global remittances had only declined by 1.7% in 2020 (World Bank, 2021a, 2021b). Remittances to Latin America and South Asia reportedly increased by 6.5% and 5.2% respectively. However, remittances had declined in East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa by 7.9% and 12.5% respectively. In Africa, much of the decline was attributed to a 28% decrease in remittances to only one country, Nigeria. Other African countries had “defied the odds” and saw a marked increase in remittances during 2020 (Kpodar et al., 2021). Similar contradictory results were reported in Asia. An International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021a) analysis of remittances received by 10 Asian countries in 2020 found a mixed picture, with some experiencing increases (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan and South Korea), some decreases (Indonesia, Myanmar, Mongolia and Nepal) and some remaining relatively stable (Philippines and Thailand). Almost all had experienced a decrease in the first six months of 2020 (compared to 2019) and a variable increase above 2019 levels in July-December 2020. A similar remittance rebound was reported in Latin America (Babii et al., 2022).

In South Africa, similar confusion has occurred with the COVID-19 remittance narrative from catastrophe to resilience. Mathe (2020), for example, claimed that there had been “a sharp decrease in remittances because of the strict regulations imposed by the government, which left many migrant workers without employment.” FinMark Trust initially reported that remittances from South Africa declined from ZAR955.5 million to ZAR390.8 million per month in early 2020 (Mathe 2020). However, a more recent assessment reversed its previous position and suggested that total remittances from the country had nearly doubled from ZAR7,926 million in 2019 to R11,807 million in 2020 (FinMark, 2021). Remittances to Zimbabwe appeared to increase by 78% in the same time period from ZAR3,044 million to ZAR5,403 million. The reported increase in remittance outflows to Mozambique was more than 100%, while to Malawi (another major source country for migration to South Africa) the increase was only 8%. There have been no attempts to date to explain why the early projections of remittance collapse were so wrong or why remittances overall are now thought to have dramatically increased during 2020, albeit at different rates to different countries.

To date, international attention has focused on trying to explain why the dire predictions of a precipitous global decline in remittances did not occur. Initial remittance projections and subsequent correctives both make assumptions about how migrants responded to the COVID-19 crisis and modified their remittance behaviour as a result. There is not much empirical evidence to support either set of assumptions. Kpodar et al. (2021) suggest that migrants tried to cushion the economic impact of the pandemic in their home countries by remitting more. Remittance resilience was attributed by World Bank revisionism to migrant altruism and a desire to help family in countries of origin (World Bank, 2021a, 2021b). Migrants sent more money home and sacrificed their own needs by reducing consumption and drawing on savings, as well as accessing employment support programmes that provided them with the extra funds to increase remittances.

Dintarte-Diaz et al. (2022) suggest that the paradox of increased remittances despite the pandemic shock to migrant employment, incomes and livelihoods may be resolved by distinguishing between formal and informal transfers. A shift from using informal to formal channels by migrants may well account for the observed increase in recorded remittances. On the one hand, informal remitting channels were significantly disrupted by lockdowns, border closures, and travel bans. On the other, the rise of mobile money and digital transfers, and an associated decline in remittance costs, offered migrants incentives for using

formal channels. As Dinarte et al. (2021) note, “mobility restrictions made it much harder for migrants and their families to carry cash across borders, as well as within host countries. As a result, the sending of digital payments became the only option for many.” Furthermore, the shift to digital platforms could have occurred at different rates in different countries, which might help to explain the various country-level outcomes. However, because there is no data on informal remitting, it is difficult to test this hypothesis in the absence of data on migrant remitting behaviour during the pandemic. The contemporaneous survey data that exists, such as the World Bank’s high-frequency telephone surveys, present an additional interpretive challenge. These surveys consistently report a pandemic-related decline in remitting that is inconsistent with the remittance resilience hypothesis (Dintarte-Diaz et al., 2022).

In addition, generalized explanations for decreased or increased remitting fail to explain the inter-country spatial variation in remitting outcomes. If some countries received massive increases in remittances and others did not, does this mean that migrants from the former took less of an unemployment and loss of income hit than migrants from the latter? Or does it mean that migrants from the former were somehow more altruistic or had greater access to formal remittance channels than migrants from the latter? Or, following Dinarte-Diaz et al. (2022), do the behavioural changes reflect both a reduced capacity to remit and a shift from informal to formal remitting channels? These and similar questions can only be properly answered through detailed empirical research with migrants themselves.

This report focuses on the case of Zimbabwean migrants living and working in South Africa. It addresses three questions about pandemic impacts on Zimbabwean migrants: first, did the pandemic response negatively affect the employment and income of Zimbabwean households in South Africa? Second, what impact has the pandemic had on the ability of households to sustain pre-pandemic levels and frequency of remitting? And, finally, given the importance of cross-border mobility to all pre-pandemic informal methods of remittance transfer, did restrictions on mobility prompt a shift from informal to formal remitting channels?

The first section presents an overview of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa and pre-pandemic remittances between the two countries. The next section provides an overview of how migrants in South Africa were impacted by COVID-19 and how migration between Zimbabwe and South Africa was disrupted by the pandemic. Attention then turns to the methodology and results of a survey of 500 Zimbabwean migrant households in

South Africa conducted by the authors in 2021, focusing on whether their remitting practices changed during COVID-19 and, if so, how. The conclusion focuses on the implications of the case study for research on the reasons for the counter-intuitive but uneven global surge in remittances during 2020 and 2021.

THE REMITTANCE CORRIDOR

MIGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT

In the 1990s, migration movements from Zimbabwe to South Africa began to increase and diversify. UN DESA (2019) estimates that the number of Zimbabwean-born migrants living in South Africa increased from 61,875 in 1990 to 128,983 in 2000 and to 376,668 in 2019. However, recent data from the 2022 Zimbabwe Census indicates that this is an undercount. A total of 520,240 Zimbabwean households (or 14% of the total) have at least one member living outside the country. The total number of migrants recorded is 908,914, with the vast majority – 773,246 or 86% – living in South Africa (Table 1). The 2011 South African Census recorded 672,308 Zimbabweans in South Africa, which suggests an increase of around 100,000 migrants between 2011 and 2022: a much slower rate of increase than in the previous decade.

Zimbabwe entered a protracted period of economic recession, hyper-inflation, and political turmoil after 2000. Mixed migration flows expanded and diversified to include migrants from all over the country, economic migrants and asylum-seekers, male and female, skilled and unskilled, married and single, regular and irregular (Crush et al., 2015). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Zimbabwean migrants were excluded from the South African labour market and relied on insecure employment in low-wage sectors such as domestic work, day labour, and artisanal mining (Baison, 2021; Bolt, 2015; Jinnah, 2017, 2022; Pretorius and Blaauw, 2015). Data on the employment sectors of Zimbabwean migrants is scant, although a sample survey of Zimbabwean migrant households in Cape Town and Johannesburg demonstrated the limited access of household heads and members to formal sector employment (Crush and Tawodzera, 2016).

TABLE 1: Destination Countries of Zimbabwean Migrants, 2022

Destination	No.	%
South Africa	773,246	85.6
Botswana	47,928	5.4
United Kingdom	23,166	2.6
Mozambique	9,477	1.0
USA	8,565	0.9
Asian countries	6,965	0.8
Australia	6,473	0.7
Namibia	5,660	0.6
Zambia	5,076	0.6
Canada	3,420	0.4
China	2,067	0.2
Malawi	1,080	0.1
Other Africa	4,239	0.5
Other Europe	4,146	0.5
Other/Not stated	626	0.1
Total	908,914	100.0

Source: ZIMSTAT (2023)

The survey found that only 13% of heads (and 12% of other household members) were regularly employed in skilled formal sector jobs. Another 20% of heads and 19% of members were working in a range of semi-skilled jobs, of which work in the services industry was most important. Nearly two-thirds of both groups were employed or self-employed in informal trade (39% and 36%), manual work including day labour (16% and 15%) and domestic work in private households (9% and 11%). Other surveys in these two cities found that Zimbabwean migrants hold down the largest share of jobs in the urban informal sector (23% of all participants in Cape Town and 28-30% in Johannesburg) (IOM, 2021b; Peberdy, 2016; Tawodzera et al., 2015).

TABLE 2: Occupational Profile of Zimbabwean Migrants in South Africa

	Household heads (%)	Household members (%)
Skilled	13.1	12.4
Skilled manual	3.5	3.5
Business	3.0	2.4
Office worker	1.7	2.8
Professional	1.7	2.0
Teacher	1.0	1.1
Manager	0.6	0.5
Semi-skilled	19.6	18.7
Service worker	10.8	11.7
Security	5.0	3.9
Truck driver	2.3	1.7
Miner	0.8	0.6
Police/military	0.5	0.4
Foreman	0.2	0.4
Low-skilled	64.0	62.3
Informal sector	39.0	35.6
Unskilled manual	15.9	15.4
Domestic work	9.1	11.3
<i>Source: Crush and Tawodzera (2016)</i>		

PRE-PANDEMIC REMITTANCE CHANNELS

Zimbabwean households and the economy at large have become increasingly dependent on migrant remittances (Crush and Tevera, 2010; Muzapu and Havadi, 2021). Pre-pandemic research on the South Africa-Zimbabwe remittance corridor has pursued various inter-related lines of enquiry. There is a sizable body of work focused on the utilization of remittances by urban and rural households in Zimbabwe (Bracking and Sachikonye, 2010; Maphosa, 2007; Mazwi, 2022; Ncube and Gomez, 2015; Nzima et al., 2017; Nyikahadzoi et al., 2019; Tevera et al, 2010). The consistent finding is that remittances are spent predominantly on basic livelihood needs including housing, food purchase, medical treatment, transportation, clothing and children’s education. Several studies have examined the remit-

ting characteristics, motivations, and behaviours of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa (Chikanda and Dodson, 2013; Hungwe, 2017; Makina, 2013a; Moyo and Nicolau, 2016). Most migrants remit to Zimbabwe, but the amounts and frequency vary with job status, income, education, and age. Remitting increases at first and then declines with increased length of time since first migration (Makina and Nicolau, 2016).

Attention has also been paid to the mechanics of remittance transfers and the centrality of informal, and therefore unrecorded, channels within the South Africa–Zimbabwe corridor (Chisasa, 2014; Mlambo, 2021). The pre-pandemic remittance corridor between the two countries was characterized by high degrees of informality, with informal channels proving very attractive to migrants (Makina, 2013b; Nzima, 2017; Onyango, 2021). As well as personal conveyance of cash by returning migrants and their friends and relatives, migrants used taxi and bus drivers and conductors as couriers. Private transporters, known as *omalayisha*, would also deliver remittances to recipient households in Zimbabwe (Nyamunda, 2014; Nyoni, 2012; Thebe, 2015; Thebe and Mutyatyu, 2017).

While there is no reliable data on the total volume and relative importance of informal transfers, sample survey results of remitting practices by Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa indicate the heavy reliance on informal channels. Makina's (2013a) survey of Zimbabweans in Johannesburg found that 98% relied on informal channels. A SAMP survey of migrant-sending households in Zimbabwe reported higher use of banks and the Post Office but 60% of households received remittances through informal channels (Tevera et al., 2010). An AFSUN survey of Zimbabwean households in Cape Town and Johannesburg found that two-thirds of remitters used informal methods (Crush and Tawodzera, 2016). Using a different methodology, FinMark (2018) calculated that 60% of remitting by volume was informal in 2018.

Government exchange controls, the difficulty migrants face in opening bank accounts in South Africa, and high bank charges combine to discourage the use of formal remittance channels (Nicoli et al., 2018; Nzima, 2017). In the years leading up to the pandemic, global money transfer operators (MTOs) such as Western Union, Instagram and Ria Money, were permitted to enter the remittances market but only if they partnered with major South African banks such as FNB, Standard Bank and ABSA (Luhabe-Morrison, 2018).

The growth of digital remittance platforms has been rapid but uneven in the Global South (Rodima-Taylor, 2023). Advocates of fintech platforms for remittances have emphasized the local challenges of scaling up usage in South Africa (Nicoli et al., 2018; Smith and Van Zyl, 2021; Technoserve, 2016). Mlambo (2021), for example, notes that “the Southern African market is failing to benefit from benefits presented by mobile technology. This inability of the Southern African market to reap the benefits of mobile technology is caused by the poor telecommunications infrastructure, poor financial awareness and absence of business-friendly legislation.”

Despite the regulatory challenges, several remittance service providers (RSPs) set up digital remittance transfer services specifically focused on the South-Africa Zimbabwe corridor after 2015. Mukuru has emerged as the most popular fintech platform. Using WhatsApp or the Mukuru App, migrants send e-transfers to Zimbabwe where they are collected in cash from Mukuru orange booths, payout partners including banks and supermarkets, or used for digital payments to an Ecocash wallet. Other, smaller digital RSPs, including Mama Money and hellopaisa, also have cash payout partners and Ecocash mobile wallets. Food remitting via mobile technology is an even newer development. Companies such as Malaicha, Mukuru Groceries, Senditoo, Ahoyi Africa, Shumba Africa and Tinokunda transmit non-cash remittances, including groceries, through transactions using digital platforms and mobile devices (Sithole et al., 2022).

According to the World Bank, during some of the worst years of Zimbabwe’s economic crisis, total remittance receipts increased from USD1,413 million in 2010 to USD2,114 million in 2012. They then declined as the Zimbabwean economy stabilized, reaching a low of USD922 million in 2018 (Table 3, column A). Data from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe shows a much lower volume of remittances but a similar pattern of rise and decline between 2009 and 2018 (Table 3, column D). By 2019, hyperinflation had returned and the economy was back in crisis (Burke and Chigono, 2019). However, data from the South African Reserve Bank (SARB) on recorded remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe suggests that remittances were in decline before the pandemic (Table 3, column C). Column D uses the 60:40 ratio to estimate the volume of informal remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe between 2016 and 2019, and column E provides an estimate of the total volume of remittances.

TABLE 3: Pre-Pandemic Remittances to Zimbabwe, 2009-2019

	A. Total remittances (USD million)*	B. Total remittances (USD million)**	C. Remittances from South Africa (USD million equivalent)***	D. Estimated informal remittances (USD million)+	E. Estimated formal (C)+ informal (D) remittances (USD million)
2009		294			
2010	1,413	361			
2011	1,919	570			
2012	2,114	646			
2013	1,890	788			
2014	1,904	837			
2015	2,047	935			
2016	1,856	799	270	405	675
2017	1,730	699	310	465	775
2018	922	619	223	335	558
2019	1,417	635	211	317	528

* World Bank at <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>
** Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (Bonga, 2020b)
*** SARB (FinMark, 2022)
+ Informal to formal at 60:40 threshold

PANDEMIC DISRUPTIONS

The first recorded case of COVID-19 in South Africa was on March 5, 2020. At the peak of the first wave in July 2020, over 15,000 people per day tested positive (Figure 1). By September 30, 2020, 4 million cases and over 100,000 deaths had been recorded. These figures are widely regarded as underestimates. Table 4 shows the number of excess deaths during each wave, totalling almost 300,000.

FIGURE 1: COVID-19 Daily Infections in South Africa, 2020-2022

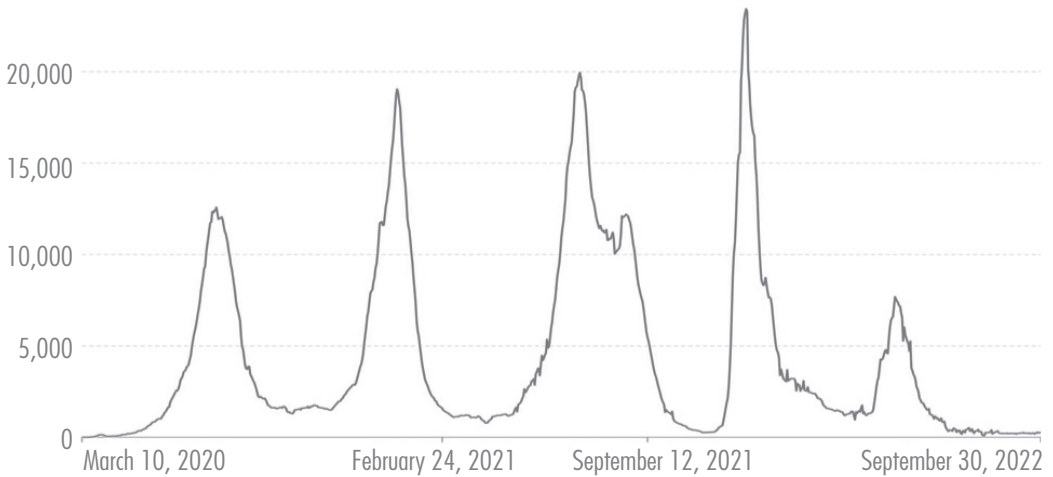


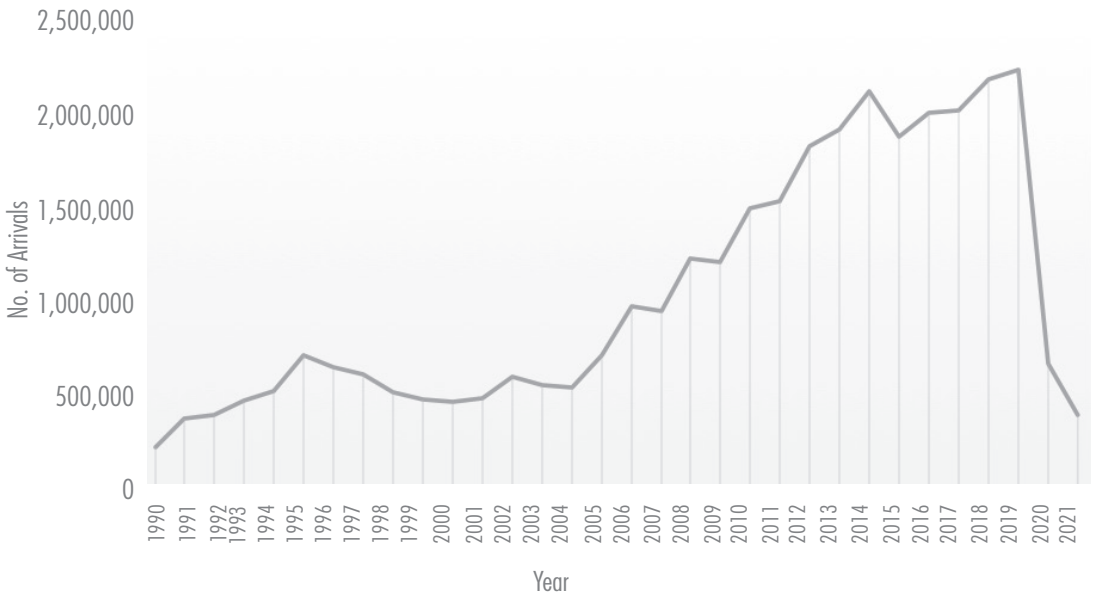
TABLE 4: Reported COVID-19 Deaths and Excess Natural Deaths

	No. of reported COVID-19 deaths	No. of excess natural deaths	Ratio of reported to excess deaths (%)
Wave 1	18,457	48,857	38
Wave 2	33,128	108,061	31
Wave 3	36,268	116,343	31
Wave 4	5,333	22,483	24
Total	93,186	295,135	31

Source: Bradshaw et al. (2022)

The government response to COVID-19 included a 100-day stay-at-home lockdown, which was strictly enforced. Arrests for breach of lockdown were widespread with nearly 300,000 arrests by June 2020, more than in any other country. Pandemic restrictions were gradually relaxed between May and September 2020 and re-imposed in December 2020, during the second wave of COVID-19, and again from May to July 2021 with the third wave. In addition to lockdown, land and air border entry points were closed to all but essential workers until February 2022. A major consequence of border closures was a dramatic drop in cross-border traffic between Zimbabwe and South Africa in 2020 and 2021 (Figure 2). However, Moyo (2022) and Mutendi and Chekro (2023) suggest that despite the closures, borders remained relatively porous and informal cross-border activity was disrupted but did not stop.

FIGURE 2: Cross-Border Traffic Between Zimbabwe and South Africa



The economic impact of the lockdowns was especially devastating for migrants in South Africa (Addison, 2023; Adegboye, 2021; Angu et al., 2022; Mukumbang et al., 2020; Nhengu, 2022; Odunitan-Wayas et al., 2022). Migrants felt disproportionate effects by virtue of their precarious legal status and informal employment, with women migrants from poor households particularly affected. Hardship was exacerbated by migrants' exclusion from the South African government's allocation of ZAR500 billion (about USD26 billion) for pandemic relief, which included a temporary increase in existing social grants and a new COVID-19 grant (Bhorat et al., 2021). Migrant-owned informal businesses were also ineligible for government relief programmes for the private sector. Many Zimbabwean migrants worked in sectors in which employment and incomes were severely affected, including services, domestic work, day labour, and informal street trading (see Table 2) (Battersby, 2021; Blaauw et al., 2021; Mbeve et al., 2020; Rogan and Skinner, 2020; Skinner et al., 2021; Wegerif, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper is from an in-person household survey conducted during the third wave in July and August 2021. For two main reasons, we chose the South African cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg in which to conduct the research. First, these major cities are home to many Zimbabwean migrants. And second, we had conducted a survey in these cities before the pandemic, which enabled us to make comparisons between pre-pandemic and pandemic remitting patterns. Although the two surveys did not target the same households, they were conducted in the same group of neighbourhoods, which means that there is a degree of comparability between the two samples. In each case, 500 Zimbabwean migrant households were sampled, 250 in each city. The selected sites were Dunoon, Masiphumelele and Nyanga in Cape Town, and Johannesburg Central, Alexandra Park and Orange Farm in Johannesburg. In each site, six migrant households were located and assigned numbers. By means of a dice, a household starting point was established. This household was interviewed and identified one other household to approach. The process was repeated until the target number was reached before moving on to the next site. Household heads were interviewed, but in their absence any household member above the age of 18 with knowledge of household food economics was chosen for interview.

ZIMBABWEAN MIGRANT PROFILE

The majority of household heads were male (70%), of working age (72% between 25 and 44 years old) and single (53%) (Table 5). Very few household heads were unemployed, which suggests that by July 2021 most were back at work or had found new jobs, in stark contrast with the early months of the pandemic when many had lost their sources of income. Just over one-third were self-employed in the informal sector while 44% were employed in low-income, often menial jobs in domestic work and the services industry. Another 7% were working as casual day labourers.

TABLE 5: Migrant Household Profile

		%
Age of household head	16-24	14.4
	25-34	45.8
	35-44	26.8
	45-54	9.2
	55-64	9.2
	65+	3.9
Sex of household head	Male	69.6
	Female	30.4
Main occupation of household head	Domestic/service worker	43.8
	Self-employed in informal sector	34.6
	Unskilled manual worker	7.2
	Education	3.3
	Skilled manual worker	3.3
	Office worker	3.0
	Employer/manager	0.7
	Farm worker	0.7
	Unemployed	3.3

The highly disruptive impact of COVID-19 is captured in responses to livelihood impact questions. Around 21% of the surveyed households had a household member who became ill with COVID-19. And 62% said they had been unable to visit Zimbabwe because borders were closed. As many as 72% of household heads had been unemployed during the pandemic (with 70% of households also experiencing the unemployment of another household member). As a direct result, nearly 90% of households had suffered a loss of income. Despite the restoration of employment and income-earning opportunities after the end of the hard lockdown in late 2020, less than 10% of household heads felt that the economic status of their household was the same or better than before the pandemic. Over 90% indicated that their household economic conditions were worse (25%) or much worse (67%). The impact of unemployment and income loss was exacerbated by higher food prices and

a decline in the availability of food. Additionally, just over three-quarters of the surveyed households said they had remitted less money to Zimbabwe as a direct result of pandemic-related unemployment and lost income.

TABLE 6: Pandemic Impacts on Migrant Income, Remitting and Food Security

	%
Food became more expensive because of the pandemic	86.7
My household experienced a loss of income because of the pandemic	86.5
I sent less money to Zimbabwe because of the pandemic	76.7
There was less food to eat because of the pandemic	76.7
I became unemployed and was unable to find a job	72.2
Others in my household became unemployed and were unable to find a job	70.2
I was unable to visit Zimbabwe because the border was closed	61.5
Members of my household became ill with COVID-19	20.7

There was also a shift in the frequency of remitting. A comparison of pre-pandemic and pandemic remitting frequencies suggests that non-remitting did not substantially increase during the pandemic. The main impact was to decrease the frequency of remitting. Regular remitting (at least once per month) declined from 31% to 22%, although infrequent remitting increased from 49% to 61%. Thus, it is likely that one of the main impacts of the pandemic was to reduce the volume of remittances through a decline in the frequency of remitting.

The evidence from this survey suggests that Zimbabweans in South Africa may have remitted less, and less frequently, in 2020 and 2021. However, the Reserve Bank data from both countries indicates that remittances from South Africa increased substantially. The only way to resolve this apparent paradox is to assess whether COVID-19 precipitated a significant shift from (unrecorded) informal channels to (recorded) formal channels. In the next section we address the paradox of the documented increase in recorded remittances with the evidence from this survey that migrants remitted less and less frequently.

TABLE 7: Frequency of Household Remitting to Zimbabwe

	Before the pandemic (%)	During the pandemic (%)
More than once per month	11.0	2.2
Once per month	21.4	19.5
A few times	33.2	55.3
Once	7.0	5.8
Occasionally	9.2	1.2
Never	18.2	15.9

FROM INFORMAL TO FORMAL REMITTING

Mbiba and Mupfumira (2022) contrast the remittance transfer options available to Zimbabwean migrants in the United Kingdom with those in South Africa. They point out that transfers from Europe largely move through formal channels whereas transfers from South Africa are a mix of the formal and the informal. They also suggest that Zimbabwean migrants in the United Kingdom “dug deep” to assist relatives in Zimbabwe during COVID-19 and increased the amounts they sent home. They argue that the diaspora community in the United Kingdom “sent more money during COVID-19 than in previous years. This happened because of the urgency and gravity of health, care and education needs arising during COVID-19 in a fragile socio-economy like Zimbabwe. In addition, the majority Zimbabwean diaspora in the United Kingdom retained their jobs and worked extra hours or borrowed to send emergency cash to family in Zimbabwe” (Mbiba and Mupfumira, 2022: 8). They conclude that this is consistent with, and a significant contribution to, the sharp increase in recorded remittances to Zimbabwe in 2020 and 2021.

The World Bank and SARB both show a sizable jump in remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe in the first year of the pandemic. The World Bank methodology estimates that remittances increased by 30% between 2019 and 2020, with further substantial increases of 41% in 2021 and 20% in 2022 (Table 8, column A). SARB data indicates that remittances grew by as much as 70% during the first year of the pandemic (Table 8, column B). In sum, despite their differences, both data sets support the conclusion of Mbiba and Mupfumira (2022: 8) that Zimbabwe “registered phenomenal increases in remittances” during COVID-19.

Table 8 also estimates the ratio of informal to formal remittances for the two years prior to the pandemic (2018-2019) and the first two years of the pandemic (2020-2021) using SARB remittance rather than World Bank data. To estimate pre-pandemic informal remittances, we assume that the ratio of formal to informal is 40:60 as suggested by the literature (FinMark, 2018). In 2019, this gives a total remittance flow of USD528 million divided into USD211 million formal (40%) and USD317 million informal (60%).

Deciding on a ratio for 2020 is more challenging since some migrants used both formal and informal channels (Table 9). Although 70% of migrants used formal channels in 2020, more than 35% used informal channels too. To account for this phenomenon, the share of formal remittances has been adjusted upwards to 60% and the informal downwards to 40%. As a result, the total estimated remittance flow increased by USD77 million from USD528 in 2019 to USD605 in 2020 (an increase of 14%). In addition, formal remittances rose by USD152 million (a 72% increase) and informal remittances declined by USD75 million (24%) between 2019 and 2020.

TABLE 8: Formal and Informal Remittances to Zimbabwe, 2018-2021

	A. World Bank (USD million)	B. SARB (USD million equivalent)	C. Informal remittances+	Formal (C)+ informal (D)
2018	922	223	335	558
2019	1,417	211	317	528
2020	1,832	363	242	605
2021	2,574	362	241	603

Source: <https://www.knomad.org/data/remittances>; FinMark (2022)

+ Calculated at 60% of B for 2016-2019 and 40% of B for 2020-2021

TABLE 9: Formal and Informal Remittance Providers, Before and During the Pandemic

		Before the pandemic (%)	During the pandemic (%)
Formal	Money transfer companies/remittance service providers	18.0	67.8
	Bank to bank	11.2	4.2
	Post Office	—	0.6
Informal	Informal money transfer (<i>omalayisha</i>)	30.2	24.6
	By hand with friends/relatives/co-workers	27.0	22.2
	By hand in person	8.8	12.2

Table 9 indicates that informal channels were relatively resilient during the pandemic with 25% of surveyed households using *omalayisha*, 22% relying on friends and relatives, and 12% taking remittances themselves. How was this possible given the impact of border closures and mobility restrictions? Both Moyo (2022) and Mutendi and Chekero (2023) argue that the South Africa-Zimbabwe border remained relatively porous in 2020 and that there was a significant increase in two-way irregular border crossing. This would help explain the ability of migrants to take the money themselves or to rely on friends and relatives. On the other hand, buses and taxis as well as light *omalayisha* vehicles were barred from crossing at official road border posts. Permission to cross into Zimbabwe was restricted to commercially registered trucks carrying essential supplies such as food imports. Moyo (2022) notes that many *omalayisha* got around the ban by buying or renting commercial vehicles and posing as essential service providers.

Migrants clearly made much greater use of formal remittance channels during 2020 and 2021. Banks and the Post Office continued to be avoided, even though the former now have platforms and apps for digital transfers. The major shifts were in patronage of MTOs such as Western Union, Instagram and Ria Money, and digital RSPs including Makuru, Mama Money and hellopaisa. The MTOs require the senders and recipients to go to a bank to effect the sending and receipt of cash. With RSPs, migrants with internet access send money virtually but recipients have to go to a payout partner such as a dedicated booth, commercial bank or supermarket in Zimbabwe. While the survey did not distinguish between MTOs and digital RSPs, the lower transaction costs and convenience of RSPs for remitters make them a more attractive option.

CONCLUSION

This report set out to test the conflicting global and local narratives about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on remittance flows in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor. Underlying these narratives are different, but largely untested, assumptions about the remitting behaviour of migrants during the pandemic. In constructing the first narrative in 2020 it was reasonable to assume that the capacity of migrants to remit was being severely compromised by COVID-19 infections and deaths, business closures, job layoffs and income loss. The IMF and the World Bank, as well as numerous economists and migration experts, confidently predicted that there would be a significant decline in remittances during the pandemic. The IMF and World Bank trend was reflected in data from the South African Reserve Bank on remittances to Zimbabwe in 2020 and 2021. The survey research for this report on the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa found that they experienced severe pandemic-related economic consequences, including unemployment and income loss. Additionally, nearly 80% of those surveyed said they had remitted less as a consequence. This negative change in remitting capacity and behaviour is perfectly consistent with the assumptions of the first narrative and with numerous other migrant surveys in many countries.

This narrative was upended in 2021 by the IMF and World Bank's own balance of payments and remittance data. The data revealed a minor slowdown in remittances and massive differences between individual countries. Some African countries, such as Nigeria, recorded a major decline while others, like Zimbabwe, saw a significant increase. Scrambling to make sense of data that showed that there had not been a precipitous decline in remittances in 2020, the IMF and the World Bank did an abrupt U-turn and proposed a different, and equally untested, set of assumptions about remitting behaviour to attempt to explain why their initial predictions were so wrong. In this second narrative, migrants safeguarded scarce resources and drew on their savings in a spirit of altruism to maintain and even increase their pre-pandemic levels of remitting.

Given the findings of surveys, including that reported on here, about the depressed earning and remitting capacity and behaviour of migrants during the pandemic, there was no obvious explanation as to why remittances had not plunged in 2020. In search of a resolution to this pandemic paradox of stable or increased migrant remittances and decreased migrant capacity to remit, a third narrative has emerged. This emphasizes the distinction

between formal (recorded) remittances, which are captured in IMF and World Bank data, and informal (unrecorded) remittances, which are not. In many parts of the Global South, including in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor, informal remittance channels and volumes have been more important than formal ones. Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa continued to use informal channels after COVID-19 hit, but border closures and mobility restrictions partially blocked these channels for much of 2020 and 2021. Migrants responded by increasing their use of formal remittance channels and there was a significant shift towards the digital remittance services offered by MTOs and RSPs. Thus, the COVID-19-related increase in remittances captured by the reserve banks was, at least in part, a product of a shift from informal to formal remitting behaviour. This conclusion now needs to be tested with a larger sample than the 500 households reported on here. Whether the COVID-19 crisis has been a permanent boon to formal MTOs and digital RSPs or whether migrants will revert to informal channels post-pandemic remains to be seen.

REFERENCES

1. Addison, L. (2023). Amplifying invisibility: COVID-19 and Zimbabwean migrant farm workers in South Africa. *Journal of Agrarian Change* 23(3): 590-599.
2. Adegboye, O. (2021). The impact of Covid-19 on African migrants and mobility in South Africa. *African Journal of Development Studies* 11(1): 273-286.
3. Ahmed, F., Islam, A., Pakrashi, D., Rahman, T. and Siddique, A. (2021). Determinants and dynamics of food insecurity during COVID-19 in rural Bangladesh. *Food Policy* 101: 102066.
4. Akim, A., Ayivodi, F. and Kouton, J. (2021). *Do remittances mitigate COVID-19 employment shock on food insecurity? Evidence from Nigeria*. Working Paper No. 4, Africa Institute for Research in Economics and Social Sciences, Rabat.
5. Angu, P., Masiya, T., Gustafsson, K. and Mulu, N. (eds.). (2022). *South African-Based African Migrants' Responses to COVID-19: Strategies, Opportunities, Challenges and Implications*. Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG.
6. Babii, A., Carare, A. and Vasilyev, Y. (2022). Evolution of remittances to CAPDR countries and Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic. IMF Working Paper No. 2022/092, International Monetary Fund, Washington, DC.
7. Baison, P. (2021). Recruitment and job-seeking mechanisms for Zimbabwean women care workers in the domestic services sector in South Africa. *African Human Mobility Review* 7(1): 68-88.
8. Battersby, J. (2020). South Africa's lockdown regulations and the reinforcement of anti-informality bias. *Agriculture and Human Values* 37(3): 543-544.

9. Bhorat, H., Oosthuizen, M. and Stanwix, B. (2021). Social assistance amidst the COVID-19 epidemic in South Africa: A policy assessment. *South African Journal of Economics* 89(1): 63-81.
10. Bisong, A., Ahairwe, P. and Njoroge, E. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on remittances for development in Africa*. Discussion Paper No. 269, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Maastricht.
11. Blaauw, D., Yu, D. and Schenk, R. (2021). COVID-19 and day labourers in the South African economy: The impact on their lives and livelihoods. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 61(4): 15301.
12. Bolt, M. (2015). *Zimbabwe's Migrants and South Africa's Border Farms: The Roots of Impermanence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
13. Bondarenko, K. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: The case of remittance. *International Organisations Research Journal* 15(3): 109-128.
14. Bonga, W. (2020a). Exploring the level of diaspora remittances flows in Zimbabwe. *Global Scientific Journals* 8(11): 1525-1531.
15. Bonga, W. (2020b). Understanding diaspora remittance levels in Zimbabwe (2009-2020) including future forecasts using Arima Technique. *European Journal of Research Development and Sustainability* 1(2): 10-21.
16. Bracking, S. and Sachikonye, L. (2020). Migrant remittances and household wellbeing in urban Zimbabwe. *International Migration* 48(5): 203-227.
17. Burke, J. and Chingono, N. (2019). Millions face hardship as Zimbabwe comes close to 'meltdown.' *The Guardian* 21 July.
18. Chikanda, A. and Dodson, B. (2013). Bandid transnationalism: Remittance practices of emigrant Zimbabwean medical doctors. *Migration and Development* 2(1): 57-73.
19. Chisasa, J. (2014). Nature and characteristics of informal migrant remittance transfer channels: empirical study of remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe. *Banks and Bank Systems* 9(2): 59-64.
20. Crush, J. and Tawodzera, G. (2016). *Migration and food security: Zimbabwean migrants in urban South Africa*. AFSUN Food Security Series No. 23, Cape Town.
21. Crush, J. and Tevera, D. (eds.). (2010). *Zimbabwe's Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival*. Ottawa: IDRC.
22. Crush, J., Chikanda, A. and Tawodzera, G. (2015). The third wave: Mixed migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa. *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 49: 363-82.
23. Del Real, D., Crowhurst-Pons, F. and Olave, L. (2023). The work, economic, and remittance stress and distress of the COVID-19 pandemic containment policies: The case of Venezuelan migrants in Argentina and Chile. *International Journal of Environmental research and Public Health* 20(4): 3569.
24. Diao, X. and Mahrt, K. (2020). Assessing the impact on household incomes and poverty of declines in remittances due to COVID-19. Myanmar SSP Policy Note 6. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Washington, DC.

25. Dinarte, L., Jaume, D., Medina-Cortina, E. and Winkler, H. (2021). Neither by land nor by sea: The rise of electronic remittances during COVID-19. Policy Research Working Paper Series 10057, World Bank, Washington DC.
26. Dinarte-Diaz, L., Jaume, D. and Medina-Cortina, E. (2022). Did remittances really increase during the pandemic? World Bank Blogs, Let's Talk Development, July 11.
27. FinMark (2018). SADC remittance values and volumes. FinMark Trust, Midrand.
28. FinMark (2021). Remittances market assessment. FinMark Trust, Midrand.
29. Gupta, A., Zhu, H., Doan, M., Michuda, A. and Majurnder, B. (2021). Economic impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown in a remittance-dependent region. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 103(2): 466-485.
30. Hungwe, C. (2017). Motivations for remitting behaviour of Zimbabwean migrants in Johannesburg. *Journal of Identity and Migration Studies* 11(1): 47-64.
31. IOM (2021a). Remittance inflow trends snapshots. International Organization for Migration, Geneva.
32. IOM (2021b). *The socioeconomic contributions of migrant business owners in South Africa's informal urban settlements and inner-city areas: A case study of the City of Johannesburg*. Report for IOM Regional Office, Pretoria.
33. Jinnah, Z. (2017). Silence and invisibility: Exploring labour strategies of Zimbabwean farmworkers in Musina, South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology* 48(3): 46-63.
34. Jinnah, Z. (2022). *Informal Livelihoods and Governance in South Africa*. Cham: Springer Nature.
35. Karim, M., Islam, T. and Talukder, B. (2020). COVID-19's impacts on migrant workers from Bangladesh: In search of policy intervention. *World Development* 136: 105123.
36. Kalantaryan, S. and McMahon, S. (2020). *Covid-19 and remittances in Africa*. JRC Technical Report, European Commission, Luxembourg.
37. Kassegn, A. (2021). COVID-19: The impacts of the global crises on African remittances and countries response to this an extreme crisis. *Cogent Economics & Finance* 9(1): 1948665.
38. Kpodar, K., Mlachila, M., Quayyum, S. and Gammadigbe, V. (2023). Defying the odds: Remittances during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Development Studies* 59(5): 673-690.
39. Luhabe-Morrison, L. (2018). Determinants of remittance channels amongst immigrants in South Africa. M Comm Thesis, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
40. Makina, D. (2013a). Migration and characteristics of remittance senders in South Africa. *International Migration* 51(1): e148-e158.
41. Makina, D. (2013b). Financial access for migrants and intermediation of remittances in South Africa. *International Migration* 51(1): e133-e147.
42. Makina, D. and Masenge, A. (2015). The time pattern of remittances and the decay hypothesis: Evidence from migrants in South Africa. *Migration Letters* 12(1): 79-90.

43. Maphosa, F. (2007). Remittances and development: The impact of migration to South Africa on rural livelihoods in southern Zimbabwe. *Development Southern Africa* 24(1): 123-126.
44. Mathe, T. (2020). Vital remittance flows plummet due to Covid-19 lockdown. *Mail & Guardian* August 14.
45. Mazwi, F. (2022). The impact of migratory practices on food security and asset accumulation in Zimbabwe: A study. *African Geographical Review* 41(2): 240-251.
46. Mbiba, B. and Mupfumira, D. (2022) Rising to the occasion: Diaspora remittances to Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic. *World Development Perspectives* 27: 100452.
47. Mbeve, O., Nyambuya, V., Munyoro, A., Dube, N. and Shumba, K. (2020). The challenges faced and survival strategies adopted by Zimbabwean informal traders that live in Johannesburg Inner-City, during the COVID-19-induced lockdown in South Africa. *Journal of Social Development in Africa Special Issue*: 31-64.
48. Mlambo, C. (2021). The nexus between remittances and mobile technology: Evidence from Southern Africa. *Academy of Accounting and Financial Studies Journal* 25(5): 1-16.
49. Moyo, I. (2022). COVID-19, dissensus and de facto transformation at the South Africa-Zimbabwe border at Beitbridge. *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 37(4): 781-804.
50. Moyo, I. and Nicolau, M. (2016). Remittances and development: Zimbabwean migrant teachers in South Africa and their impact on their Zimbabwean families. *African Population Studies* 30(2): 2506-2519.
51. Mukumbang, F., Ambe, A. and Adebeyi, B. (2020). Unspoken inequality: How COVID-19 has exacerbated existing vulnerabilities of asylum-seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants in South Africa. *International Journal for Equity in Health* 19: 141.
52. Murakami, E., Shimituzani, S. and Yamada, E. (2021). Projection of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the welfare of remittance-dependent households in the Philippines. *Economics of Disasters and Climate Change* 5: 97-110.
53. Mushomi, J., Palattiyil, G., Bukuluk, P., Sidhva, D., Myburgh, N., Nair, H., Mulekya-Bwambale, F., Tamuzi, J. and Nyasulu, P. (2022). Impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis on migrants on the move in Southern Africa: Implications for policy and practice. *Health System Reform* 8(1): e2019571.
54. Mutendi, M. and Chereko, T. (2023). Nimble-footed Zimbabwean migrants: (Im)mobility and the porousness of borders between South Africa and Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 national lockdown. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 46(1): 21-33.
55. Muzapu, R. and Havadi, T. (2021). Boosting diaspora remittances as a key source of investment capital: The case of Zimbabwe. *Management* 11(2): 27-37.
56. Ncube, G. and Gomez, G. (2015). Remittances in rural Zimbabwe: From consumption to investment? *International Journal of Development and Sustainability* 4(2): 181-195.

57. Nhengu, D. (2022). Covid-19 and female migrants: Policy challenges and multiple vulnerabilities. *Comparative Migration Studies* 10: 23.
58. Nicoli, M., Kachingwe, N. and Kaput, E. (2018). The market for remittance services in Southern Africa. FCI Insight, World Bank Group, Washington, D.C.
59. Nyamunda, T. (2014). Cross-border couriers as symbols of regional grievance? The Malayitsha remittance system in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe. *African Diaspora* 7: 38-62.
60. Nyikahadzoi, K., Dzingirai, V., Zamasiya, B., Warinda, P. and Quarshie, E. (2019). Incomes, remittances and implications for the welfare of migrant-sending households in Zimbabwe. Migrating Out of Poverty Working Paper, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.
61. Nyoni, P. (2012). New insights on trust, honour and networking in informal entrepreneurship: Zimbabwean malayishas as informal remittance couriers. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 25(1-2): 1-11.
62. Nzima, D. (2017). Channeling migrant remittances from South Africa to Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Obstacles. *Alternation* 24(1): 294-313.
63. Nzima, D., Duma, V., Moyo, P. and Hlatywayo, C. (2017). Local development and migrant remittances: Education, skills and capabilities as preconditions for investment in Tsholotsho, Zimbabwe. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 8(2): 69-76.
64. Odunitan-Wayas, F., Alaba, O. and Lambert, E. (2021). Food insecurity and social injustice: The plight of urban poor African immigrants in South Africa during the COVID-19 crisis. *Global Public Health* 16(1):149-152.
65. Onyango, B. (2021). The South Africa-Zimbabwe remittance corridor: an analysis of its characteristics and the cost of remittance payments. M Comm Thesis, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
66. Peberdy, S. (2016). *International migrants in Johannesburg's informal economy*. Migration Policy Series No. 71, Southern African Migration Programme (SAMP), Cape Town and Waterloo.
67. Pretorius, A. and Blaauw, D. (2015). Getting to know the *amakwerre-kwerre*: The socio-economic circumstances of Zimbabwean day labourers in South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(5): 808-823.
68. Ratha, D. (2021). Staying the course on global governance of migration through the COVID-19 and economic crises. *International Migration* 59(1): 285-288.
69. Rodima-Taylor, D. (2023). The uneven path toward cheaper digital remittances. Migration Information Source, Migration Policy Institute, Washington D.C.
70. Rogan, M. and Skinner, C. (2020). The Covid-19 crisis and the South African informal economy 'Locked out' of livelihoods and employment. NIDS-CRAM Wave 1 Research Report No. 10, University of Cape Town, Cape Town.
71. Sayeh, A. and Cham, R. (2020). Lifelines in danger. *Finance & Development* June: 16-19.

72. Sirkeci, I., Cohen, J. and Ratha, D. (eds.). (2012). *Migration and Remittances During the Global Financial Crisis and Beyond*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
73. Sithole, S., Tevera, D. and Dinbabo, M. (2022). Cross-border food remittances and mobile transfers: The experiences of Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town, South Africa. *Eutopia* 22: 10-32.
74. Skinner, C., Barrett, J., Alfors, L. and Rogan, M. (2021). Informal work in South Africa and COVID-19: Gendered impacts and priority interventions. WIEGO Policy Brief No 22, Manchester.
75. Smith, S. and Van Zyl, K. (2021). Barriers and enablers for the uptake of fintech remittance platforms by migrant entrepreneurs in South Africa. Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
76. Tawodzera, G., Chikanda, A., Crush, J. and Tengeh, R. (2015). *International migrants and refugees in Cape Town's informal economy*. SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 70, Cape Town and Waterloo.
77. Technoserve (2016). The digital remittance revolution in South Africa. At: <https://www.mfw4a.org/publication/digital-remittance-revolution-south-africa-challenges-and-next-steps-africas-largest>
78. Tevera, D., Crush, J. and Chikanda, A. (2010). Migrant remittances and household survival in Zimbabwe. In: Crush, J. and Tevera, D. (eds.). *Zimbabwe's Exodus: Crisis, Migration, Survival*. Ottawa: IDRC, pp. 307-323.
79. Thebe, V. (2015). The malayisha industry and the transnational movement of remittances to Zimbabwe. In: Crush, J., Chikanda, A. and Skinner, C. (eds.). *Mean Streets: Migration, Xenophobia and Informality in South Africa*. Ottawa: IDRC, pp. 194-206.
80. Thebe, V. and Mutyatyu, S. (2017). Socially embedded character of informal channels of remittances: 'omalayisha' in the South Africa/Zimbabwe remittance corridor. *Remittances Review* 2(1): 5-22.
81. Wegerif, M. (2020). 'Informal' food traders and food security: Experiences from the Covid-19 response in South Africa. *Food Security* 12: 797-800.
82. Withers, M., Henderson, S. and Shivakoti, R. (2022). International migration, remittances and COVID-19: Economic implications and policy options for South Asia. *Journal of Asian Public Policy* 15(2): 284-299.
83. World Bank (2020). COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens. Migration and Development Brief 32, World Bank Group, Washington DC.
84. World Bank (2021a). Resilience: COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens. Migration and Development Brief 34, World Bank Group, Washington DC.
85. World Bank (2021b). Recovery: COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens. Migration and Development Brief 35, World Bank Group, Washington DC.
86. Zamora, R. (2020). Remittances from Mexican migrants in the United States during the time of COVID-19. *Remittances Review* 5(2): 143-153.
87. ZIMSTAT (2023). *Zimbabwe 2022 Population and Housing Census Report, Volume 1*. Harare: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency.

MIGRATION POLICY SERIES

- 1 *Covert Operations: Clandestine Migration, Temporary Work and Immigration Policy in South Africa* (1997) ISBN 1-874864-51-9
- 2 *Riding the Tiger: Lesotho Miners and Permanent Residence in South Africa* (1997) ISBN 1-874864-52-7
- 3 *International Migration, Immigrant Entrepreneurs and South Africa's Small Enterprise Economy* (1997) ISBN 1-874864-62-4
- 4 *Silenced by Nation Building: African Immigrants and Language Policy in the New South Africa* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-64-0
- 5 *Left Out in the Cold? Housing and Immigration in the New South Africa* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-68-3
- 6 *Trading Places: Cross-Border Traders and the South African Informal Sector* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-71-3
- 7 *Challenging Xenophobia: Myth and Realities about Cross-Border Migration in Southern Africa* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-70-5
- 8 *Sons of Mozambique: Mozambican Miners and Post-Apartheid South Africa* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-78-0
- 9 *Women on the Move: Gender and Cross-Border Migration to South Africa* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-82-9
- 10 *Namibians on South Africa: Attitudes Towards Cross-Border Migration and Immigration Policy* (1998) ISBN 1-874864-84-5
- 11 *Building Skills: Cross-Border Migrants and the South African Construction Industry* (1999) ISBN 1-874864-84-5
- 12 *Immigration & Education: International Students at South African Universities and Technikons* (1999) ISBN 1-874864-89-6
- 13 *The Lives and Times of African Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (1999) ISBN 1-874864-91-8
- 14 *Still Waiting for the Barbarians: South African Attitudes to Immigrants and Immigration* (1999) ISBN 1-874864-91-8
- 15 *Undermining Labour: Migrancy and Sub-Contracting in the South African Gold Mining Industry* (1999) ISBN 1-874864-91-8
- 16 *Borderline Farming: Foreign Migrants in South African Commercial Agriculture* (2000) ISBN 1-874864-97-7
- 17 *Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Press in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2000) ISBN 1-919798-01-3
- 18 *Losing Our Minds: Skills Migration and the South African Brain Drain* (2000) ISBN 1-919798-03-x
- 19 *Botswana: Migration Perspectives and Prospects* (2000) ISBN 1-919798-04-8
- 20 *The Brain Gain: Skilled Migrants and Immigration Policy in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (2000) ISBN 1-919798-14-5

- 21 *Cross-Border Raiding and Community Conflict in the Lesotho-South African Border Zone* (2001) ISBN 1-919798-16-1
- 22 *Immigration, Xenophobia and Human Rights in South Africa* (2001) ISBN 1-919798-30-7
- 23 *Gender and the Brain Drain from South Africa* (2001) ISBN 1-919798-35-8
- 24 *Spaces of Vulnerability: Migration and HIV/AIDS in South Africa* (2002) ISBN 1-919798-38-2
- 25 *Zimbabweans Who Move: Perspectives on International Migration in Zimbabwe* (2002) ISBN 1-919798-40-4
- 26 *The Border Within: The Future of the Lesotho-South African International Boundary* (2002) ISBN 1-919798-41-2
- 27 *Mobile Namibia: Migration Trends and Attitudes* (2002) ISBN 1-919798-44-7
- 28 *Changing Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Botswana* (2003) ISBN 1-919798-47-1
- 29 *The New Brain Drain from Zimbabwe* (2003) ISBN 1-919798-48-X
- 30 *Regionalizing Xenophobia? Citizen Attitudes to Immigration and Refugee Policy in Southern Africa* (2004) ISBN 1-919798-53-6
- 31 *Migration, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS in Rural South Africa* (2004) ISBN 1-919798-63-3
- 32 *Swaziland Moves: Perceptions and Patterns of Modern Migration* (2004) ISBN 1-919798-67-6
- 33 *HIV/AIDS and Children's Migration in Southern Africa* (2004) ISBN 1-919798-70-6
- 34 *Medical Leave: The Exodus of Health Professionals from Zimbabwe* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-74-9
- 35 *Degrees of Uncertainty: Students and the Brain Drain in Southern Africa* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-84-6
- 36 *Restless Minds: South African Students and the Brain Drain* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-82-X
- 37 *Understanding Press Coverage of Cross-Border Migration in Southern Africa since 2000* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-91-9
- 38 *Northern Gateway: Cross-Border Migration Between Namibia and Angola* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-92-7
- 39 *Early Departures: The Emigration Potential of Zimbabwean Students* (2005) ISBN 1-919798-99-4
- 40 *Migration and Domestic Workers: Worlds of Work, Health and Mobility in Johannesburg* (2005) ISBN 1-920118-02-0
- 41 *The Quality of Migration Services Delivery in South Africa* (2005) ISBN 1-920118-03-9
- 42 *States of Vulnerability: The Future Brain Drain of Talent to South Africa* (2006) ISBN 1-920118-07-1
- 43 *Migration and Development in Mozambique: Poverty, Inequality and Survival* (2006) ISBN 1-920118-10-1
- 44 *Migration, Remittances and Development in Southern Africa* (2006) ISBN 1-920118-15-2
- 45 *Medical Recruiting: The Case of South African Health Care Professionals* (2007) ISBN 1-920118-47-0
- 46 *Voices From the Margins: Migrant Women's Experiences in Southern Africa* (2007) ISBN 1-920118-50-0

- 47 *The Haemorrhage of Health Professionals From South Africa: Medical Opinions* (2007) ISBN 978-1-920118-63-1
- 48 *The Quality of Immigration and Citizenship Services in Namibia* (2008) ISBN 978-1-920118-67-9
- 49 *Gender, Migration and Remittances in Southern Africa* (2008) ISBN 978-1-920118-70-9
- 50 *The Perfect Storm: The Realities of Xenophobia in Contemporary South Africa* (2008) ISBN 978-1-920118-71-6
- 51 *Migrant Remittances and Household Survival in Zimbabwe* (2009) ISBN 978-1-920118-92-1
- 52 *Migration, Remittances and 'Development' in Lesotho* (2010) ISBN 978-1-920409-26-5
- 53 *Migration-Induced HIV and AIDS in Rural Mozambique and Swaziland* (2011) ISBN 978-1-920409-49-4
- 54 *Medical Xenophobia: Zimbabwean Access to Health Services in South Africa* (2011) ISBN 978-1-920409-63-0
- 55 *The Engagement of the Zimbabwean Medical Diaspora* (2011) ISBN 978-1-920409-64-7
- 56 *Right to the Classroom: Educational Barriers for Zimbabweans in South Africa* (2011) ISBN 978-1-920409-68-5
- 57 *Patients Without Borders: Medical Tourism and Medical Migration in Southern Africa* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920409-74-6
- 58 *The Disengagement of the South African Medical Diaspora* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-00-2
- 59 *The Third Wave: Mixed Migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-01-9
- 60 *Linking Migration, Food Security and Development* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-02-6
- 61 *Unfriendly Neighbours: Contemporary Migration from Zimbabwe to Botswana* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-16-3
- 62 *Heading North: The Zimbabwean Diaspora in Canada* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-03-3
- 63 *Dystopia and Disengagement: Diaspora Attitudes Towards South Africa* (2012) ISBN 978-1-920596-04-0
- 64 *Soft Targets: Xenophobia, Public Violence and Changing Attitudes to Migrants in South Africa after May 2008* (2013) ISBN 978-1-920596-05-7
- 65 *Brain Drain and Regain: Migration Behaviour of South African Medical Professionals* (2014) ISBN 978-1-920596-07-1
- 66 *Xenophobic Violence in South Africa: Denialism, Minimalism, Realism* (2014) ISBN 978-1-920596-08-8
- 67 *Migrant Entrepreneurship Collective Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa* (2014) ISBN 978-1-920596-09-5
- 68 *Informal Migrant Entrepreneurship and Inclusive Growth in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique* (2015) ISBN 978-1-920596-10-1
- 69 *Calibrating Informal Cross-Border Trade in Southern Africa* (2015) ISBN 978-1-920596-13-2

- 70 *International Migrants and Refugees in Cape Town's Informal Economy* (2016) ISBN 978-1-920596-15-6
- 71 *International Migrants in Johannesburg's Informal Economy* (2016) ISBN 978-1-920596-18-7
- 72 *Food Remittances: Migration and Food Security in Africa* (2016) ISBN 978-1-920596-19-4
- 73 *Informal Entrepreneurship and Cross-Border Trade in Maputo, Mozambique* (2016) ISBN 978-1-920596-20-0
- 74 *Informal Entrepreneurship and Cross-Border Trade between Zimbabwe and South Africa* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-29-3
- 75 *Competition or Co-operation? South African and Migrant Entrepreneurs in Johannesburg* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-30-9
- 76 *Refugee Entrepreneurial Economies in Urban South Africa* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-35-4
- 77 *Living With Xenophobia: Zimbabwean Informal Enterprise in South Africa* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-37-8
- 78 *Comparing Refugees and South Africans in the Urban Informal Sector* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-38-5
- 79 *Rendering South Africa Undesirable: A Critique of Refugee and Informal Sector Policy* (2017) ISBN 978-1-920596-40-8
- 80 *Problematizing the Foreign Shop: Justifications for Restricting the Migrant Spaza Sector in South Africa* (2018) ISBN 978-1-920596-43-9
- 81 *Rethinking the South African Medical Brain Drain Narrative* (2019) ISBN 978-1-920596-45-3
- 82 *Deadly Denial: Xenophobia Governance and the Global Compact for Migration in South Africa* (2020) ISBN 978-1-920596-46-0
- 83 *Between Burden and Benefit: Migrant Remittances, Social Protection and Sustainable Development* (2021) ISBN 978-1-920596-47-7
- 84 *Small-Town Xenophobia and Migrant Anxieties in South Africa's Limpopo Province* (2022) ISBN 978-1-920596-48-4
- 85 *Pandemic Food Precarity, Crisis-Living and Translocality: Zimbabwean Migrant Households in South Africa during COVID-19* (2022) ISBN 978-1-920596-49-1

This report sets out to test the conflicting global and local narratives about the impact of COVID-19 on remittance flows in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor. Remittance pessimism vanished during the second year of the pandemic as data indicated that remittances had not suffered the predicted collapse. Given survey findings, including the survey reported on here, about the depressed earning and remitting capacity and behaviour of migrants during the pandemic, there was no obvious explanation as to why remittances had not plunged in 2020. In search of a resolution to this pandemic paradox of stable or increased migrant remittances and decreased migrant capacity to remit, a narrative has emerged that emphasizes the distinction between formal (recorded) remittances, which are captured in IMF and World Bank data, and informal (unrecorded) remittances, which are not. In many parts of the Global South, including in the South Africa-Zimbabwe migration corridor, informal remittance channels and volumes have been more important than formal ones. Zimbabweans in South Africa continued to use informal channels after COVID-19 hit, but mobility restrictions partially blocked these channels. Migrants increased their use of formal channels and there was a significant shift towards digital remittance services. Thus, the COVID-19-related increase in remittances captured by the reserve banks was, at least in part, a product of a shift from informal to formal remitting. Whether the COVID-19 crisis has been a permanent boon to formal money transfer operators and digital remittance service providers or whether migrants will revert to informal channels post-pandemic remains to be seen.