

REPORT ON THE 2025 ANNUAL IN-PERSON CONVENING OF THE SADC ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION NETWORK

Introduction

Southern Africa continues to experience increasing migration flows, alongside a global trend toward the securitisation and criminalisation of migration. Across the region, these dynamics have contributed to the expanded use of immigration detention, often in ways that undermine human rights and due process. In response, the SADC Alternatives to Detention (ATD) Network, convened by the International Detention Coalition (IDC) and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) since its launch in 2024, works to promote rights-based, non-custodial and community-focused alternatives to immigration detention. The Network held its Annual In-Person Convening on 28 and 29 October 2025 in Banjul, The Gambia, strategically aligned with the 85th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

Key Discussions

The convening opened with welcome remarks and participant introductions, creating space for members to share national perspectives and reflect on the Network's progress since its 2024 launch. Participants then examined the state of migration governance and detention trends both globally and in Southern Africa, followed by a global overview of the state of play of ATD and recent international trends, including the increasing criminalization of migration concerning with detention as one of its symptoms, negative narratives on migration, and the concerning use of technology by some countries in this area. As part of the opportunities, the momentum on ending child immigration detention in the region and the need to promote ATD were highlighted. These sessions provided a shared analytical framework linking regional realities with global policy developments.

The afternoon focused on practice and lived-experience elements. Participants explored concrete examples of ATD implementation and reflected on the role of lived experience leadership in driving policy change, grounded in interventions of some of the members of the Network. National updates on immigration detention by members from different countries highlighted both persistent challenges and entry points for advancing ATD at country level.

The day concluded with a collective discussion on key regional challenges, including criminalisation, detention, and xenophobia, alongside emerging opportunities. These reflections fed into a SWOT analysis of the ATD context and the Network, laying the groundwork for strategic planning on Day Two.

Day Two began with a recap of key insights from the SWOT analysis and an overview of the objectives for the day. Participants then engaged in small-group discussions to reflect on lessons from their national contexts and to brainstorm practical ways to address shared challenges and seize identified opportunities.

Following a focused exchange on emerging themes, the convening moved into a core session on building advocacy synergies and coordination. This dialogue explored how to better link national, regional, and global advocacy efforts, including alignment with regional human rights mechanisms, including with the Africa Union, and global processes such as the IMRF and the GRF. Participants agreed on concrete action points for 2026 and discussed the future of the SADC ATD Network, including its draft shared objectives, vision, and strategic priorities for the coming year: 1. Evidence-based advocacy and data collection within the Network and the region; 2. Leveraging connections and advocacy with governments at local, regional, and global levels to influence law, policy, and practice; 3. Fostering partnerships within the Network; and 4. Shifting the migration narrative and policy implementation through social media and other means.

The formal convening was followed by a side event at the margins of the ACHPR which was open to the public. The event highlighted the human impact of detention, regional legal and policy frameworks, intersectional dimensions of migration governance, and promising



practices for scaling up ATD across SADC, with the participation from the ACHPR Special Rapporteur, Ms. Salma Sassi. This strategic engagement significantly increased the visibility of the Network and anchored its work within broader regional human rights discussions.

Key Outcomes and Reflections

The 2025 convening strengthened regional coordination, clarified shared priorities, and reinforced the importance of peer learning and lived experience in advancing Alternatives to Detention. By aligning the meeting with the ACHPR, the Network effectively elevated ATD within regional human rights spaces and expanded opportunities for advocacy and collaboration. Participants concluded the convening with a clear roadmap for 2026 and a renewed commitment to advancing humane, effective, and rights-based alternatives to immigration detention across Southern Africa, particularly in the lead-up to the 2026 IMRF.