

Forced Displacement, Zimbabwe

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Forum: ACT Zimbabwe Forum

Type of emergency: Xenophobia displaced persons in Zimbabwe

Date of emergency (if rapid onset):

1. The nature of the emergency

In South Africa, 3 vigilante groups have been calling for the forced removal of foreign nationals from their country. These groups are violent; they have looted small businesses belonging to foreigners, dragged people out of their homes, and attacked school children at schools they believed to be enrolling foreign children. It is estimated that over 3 million Zimbabweans reside in South Africa either legally or illegally. 30 June was the tipping point as the vigilante groups gave it as a deadline for all foreigners to leave South Africa; with the Government of the country not speaking out strongly against this xenophobia, Zimbabwe is experiencing an increasing influx of nationals forcibly returning from South Africa due to increasing violence, xenophobic intimidation and displacement. The situation is exacerbated by the thousands of Malawians who are fleeing into Zimbabwe and not proceeding to their country of origin. To date, more than 20 000 returnees have crossed the border, and there is no plan to accommodate, feed them and transport them to their villages or towns of origin when the buses offload them. Resultantly, these returnees are facing hunger, indecent and unsafe conditions as they await transportation in the country.

2. The impact and scale of the emergency

Zimbabwe is experiencing an increasing influx of nationals forcibly returning from South Africa due to increasing violence, xenophobic intimidation, displacement and other protection risks. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) Situation report of 26 June 2026 reported widespread violence, harassment, forced evictions, and loss of livelihoods, alongside arrests, detention, and denial of access to essential services, including healthcare and education for Zimbabwean nationals being returned ([IOM](#)).

It is estimated that between 1 and 3 million Zimbabweans are living in South Africa, with over 50% living illegally due to lack of proper documentation such as workers' permits and valid passports. A CITEZW report states that as of 30 June 2026, over 20 000 Zimbabweans were forcibly returned via the Beitbridge Border Post from June, and more are still coming ([ReliefWeb](#)). Unofficially, over 100 000 people have returned to Zimbabwe fleeing xenophobia.

Most returnees arrive at the Beitbridge border post with little or no resources and exposed to multiple vulnerabilities. The key challenges faced by returnees include a lack of safe and dignified accommodation at Beitbridge Border, inability to obtain immediate food and basic hygiene care packages, interruption of essential medical treatment, and lack of transport for onward travel from Beitbridge Border Post to their communities of origin. Cases of mental health, gender-based violence and protection have been reported. The returnees require support at reception centers to reduce the risk of destitution and to safeguard their protection concerns upon arrival.

Furthermore, Bulawayo Metropolitan Province has been designated as the primary reception and transit hub for Zimbabwean nationals returning to Bulawayo, Matabeleland North, and Matabeleland South Provinces. Returnees will require registration, temporary accommodation, humanitarian assistance, protection services, and onward transportation before reaching their final destinations. Ensuring a safe, dignified, and well-coordinated reception process requires adequate investment in food assistance, non-food items, temporary shelter, transportation, and protection services.

Without sufficient preparedness, returnees face heightened risks of homelessness, food insecurity, family separation, psychosocial distress, exploitation, and other protection concerns. The proposed intervention will strengthen the preparedness and response capacity of Bulawayo Metropolitan Province to effectively receive, assist, and facilitate the safe transit and reintegration of returning citizens while reducing humanitarian risks and promoting dignified return.

3. Local and national capacity

Coping Mechanisms

Following safety concerns and threats for Zimbabweans in South Africa, many have moved from their various places and provinces to the Zimbabwean Embassy in South Africa, where they are sleeping outside the Embassy in adverse weather with children, pregnant women, chronic illness conditions, and various vulnerable populations. They will have to be on the waiting list to get transportation from established repatriation centers and the Zimbabwe Consulate to the Beitbridge border post, where they are dropped at the established reception center, which also does not have capacity to accommodate the rate at which citizens are returning.

In Bulawayo, returning Zimbabwean nationals are often dropped at designated Command Centres, which are primarily hosted by local churches. Upon arrival, the immediate challenge is the provision of emergency meals, as there is no pre-positioned stock of food or food parcels to meet the sudden influx of returnees. Current assistance relies heavily on ad hoc donations from churches and well-wishers, which are insufficient to meet the growing demand. Consequently, many returnees are unable to access adequate food during the critical first hours and days of arrival.

Following registration, returnees are transferred to temporary accommodation facilities. However, these centres lack essential non-food items such as bedding, blankets, mattresses, towels, and hygiene supply necessary to ensure a safe and dignified reception. The absence of these basic items undermines the quality of humanitarian assistance and exposes already vulnerable individuals to further hardship.

Transportation presents another significant operational challenge. While returnees are accommodated temporarily, there are limited resources to facilitate their onward travel from reception centres to their communities of origin. This challenge is compounded by the need to trace family members, verify destinations, and support family reunification, particularly for unaccompanied children, older persons, and other vulnerable individuals who may have lost contact with their relatives during displacements.

Women, children, older persons, and people living with disabilities face heightened protection and health risks. Many arrive after spending several days in transit without access to bathing facilities, clean clothing, menstrual hygiene products, or other essential personal hygiene items. Children are often accommodated alongside elderly or ill individuals in overcrowded facilities, increasing their exposure to communicable diseases and other health risks. These conditions underscore the urgent need for improved water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services and protection-sensitive reception arrangements.

In addition, the traumatic experiences associated with displacement, forced return, loss of livelihoods, family separation, and uncertainty have left many returnees experiencing significant psychological distress. Strengthening psychosocial support services, including psychological first aid, trauma counselling, child-friendly spaces, and referral pathways for specialised care, is therefore essential to promote recovery, resilience, and successful reintegration.

Addressing these immediate humanitarian and protection needs through a coordinated, adequately resourced response will enable Bulawayo Metropolitan Province to provide a dignified reception process, reduce protection risks, and support the safe transition and sustainable reintegration of returning Zimbabwean nationals.

ii) Local and central government planning and work

Zimbabwe interministerial committee has been deployed from the central government to assess the situation at Beitbridge Border Post. A joint press statement was recently issued by the parent ministry and the Ministry of Information, updating the nation on the situation on the ground at the

border post. The Department of Civil Protection (CPU) conducts weekly update meetings with stakeholders on appropriate response strategies and produces situation reports every week.

(iii) Plans and work of national and international organizations, including the UN

The Civil Protection Unit, IOM, UNICEF, the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society, Health, Immigration and Zimbabwe Republic Police are working together to manage the flow, supporting with food, medical checks, non-food kits, counselling, and transport help to onward destinations like Harare, Masvingo and Mashonaland provinces. However, due to high volumes of citizens that are returning day by day, the capacity to support is overstretched. IOM is also producing a situation assessment report every week with support services they are providing and the existing gaps.

(v) Activation of the UN cluster system

The UN Clusters were decommissioned. All efforts are coordinated through the Civil Protection Unit.

Key needs and gaps

Displaced Zimbabweans coming back from South Africa need humanitarian support in Beitbridge, the border town, and in Bulawayo, the major receiving city. Through the Churches coordinating urgencies, the following has been identified as key needs: temporary shelter, food assistance, blankets and bedding, hygiene and dignity kits, transport assistance back to original homes, and registration and referral services. The support will also include Psychological First Aid to address emotional distress.

Please indicate whether you are considering:

	Indicate your intention with an X below
Rapid Response Fund (intended for small and medium scale emergencies)	X
Appeal (intended for large scale emergencies)	

Forum Capacity and members' intention to respond

ACT Member	Geographical focus	Sectors of expertise and experience
Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum of Zimbabwe (ECLFZ)	Bulawayo and Beitbridge	The Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (ECLF) has a strong background in conflict transformation, peacebuilding, and gender justice. It has created and run programs that help communities become stronger, support those affected by conflict and crises, and promote social unity. ECLF has led efforts to recover and rebuild after conflicts, enhancing reconciliation and community reintegration. Its work includes providing trauma-informed support and services to people dealing with violence and displacement, helping them heal and rebuild relationships. The Organisation has been providing reception support services for four years, including pre-departure information, initial needs assessment, care packages, cash assistance, food hampers, temporary shelter, transportation, family tracing, health signposting, redocumentation, and legal awareness. ECLF is prepared to assist returning Zimbabwean nationals in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province with their reception, protection, and reintegration.

Potential responses

ECLFZ proposes an emergency response for the safe reception of Zimbabwean nationals returning from South Africa, focusing on immediate arrival support. The action plan targets two key operational provinces: Beitbridge, the border town, and Bulawayo, the major receiving city.

Emergency support, Protection and safeguarding services

Temporary accommodation will be provided at reception centres. Bedding, hygiene items, and meals will be distributed, and transport to home locations. Psychosocial support and legal services will be available, along with registration for returnees to aid reintegration.