



Migration Profile

ZIMBABWE

A. Executive Summary

Zimbabwe, once considered one of the breadbasket nations in Africa, able to feed its own population and assist other neighbouring countries, is now a food aid receiving countryⁱ. Zimbabwe was a destination country during the colonial era, attracting migrants from the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe who desired to settle there permanently, as well as people coming from the Southern African Region, who were recruited temporarily to work in mines, commercial farms, and domestic servicesⁱⁱ. Things changed drastically and the once prosperous country sank into economic depression to the extent that its national currency, the Zimbabwe dollar, was depreciated and replaced with the US dollar.

Since 1997, the financial crisis has affected Zimbabwe's macroeconomic condition, deteriorating progressively into a hyperinflationary environment and making its socio-economic conditions worse. In 2019, Zimbabwe plunged into its worst economic depression in a decade, experiencing real challenges in providing for people's needs, because of shortage of food, energy for homes, fuel, cash, and medicine. This new financial situation forced a substantial portion of the population to migrate internationally, and this phenomenon further decelerated the growth rate of the country, because most of the ones leaving were highly skilled Zimbabweans.

In 2018, Zimbabwe with its population of over 14 million people had a GDP of 24.31 (current USD, billion) with an annual growth rate of 4.8%, an inflation rate of 5.2%, and a poverty headcount ratio of 38.3%ⁱⁱⁱ.

Zimbabwe's path to economic recovery has further been slowed down as a result of droughts, the cyclone Idai, and the coronavirus pandemic. However, according to the 2021 World Bank report, the economy is recovering thanks to agriculture growth and to the base effect (the rule-based monetary policy will stabilise prices and improve food security); GDP is, therefore, expected to rebound to 5.1%^{iv}.

B. Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Zimbabwe is a landlocked country located in Southern Africa. It is bordered by Zambia, Mozambique, South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana. The country, once named Southern Rhodesia, Rhodesia and Zimbabwe Rhodesia, gained its independence from the UK in 1980 and was then called Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe has a territorial surface of 390,757 sq km, with an estimated population of 14,829,988 million people^v. The major ethnic groups include African 99.4%, (predominantly Shona and Ndebele), other 0.4%, and unspecified 0.2%^{vi}. Zimbabwe has three widely spoken official languages (Shona, Ndebele, and English) and thirteen minority official languages (Chewa, Chibarwe, Kalanga, Koisan, Nambya, Ndau, Shangani, Sign Language, Sotho, Tonga, Tswana, Venda, and Xhosa). The country has a literacy rate of 86.5% (age 15 and over, can read and write)^{vii}. As of 2019, its unemployment rate stood at 5.73%^{viii}. In 2015, its religion demographics estimate was 74.8% Protestant, 7.3% Roman Catholic, 5.3% other Christian denominations, 1.5% traditional, 0.5% Muslim, 0.1% other, and 10.5% none^{ix}.

II. International and Internal Migrants

In the 1980s, Zimbabwe after gaining its independence became an attractive place for foreign nationals as the newly elected leader of the nation, Robert Mugabe, preached hope and reconciliation following a bitter and protracted war for independence. During those years there was economic prosperity, but it was short-lived as the country started experiencing an economic decline in the late 1990s. According to the 2019 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) report, there were an estimated 411,300 international migrants living in Zimbabwe, and 87% of them were coming from five countries, Mozambique (160,000), Malawi (98,383), Zambia (26,909), the UK (15,561), and South Africa (11,571)^x. Data from the Department of Immigration Control shed light on the number of Temporary Employment Permits (TEPs) issued to foreign nationals. Between 2010 and 2016, the Government of Zimbabwe issued 18,436 TEPs to foreign nationals from 74 countries, but most of them were Chinese nationals (11,272) accounting for 71% and South Africans (1,859), followed by others coming from India and Zambia^{xi}.

Before 1980, the freedom of movement of most Africans in urban areas within Zimbabwe was restricted by colonial rule. However, after its independence, several factors contributed to rural-urban migration, which included the lifting of restrictions on rural-urban migration, the difference in economic opportunities and income between the towns and rural communal areas, government programmes which encouraged urban-based economic development, as well as the surge in public sector employment. In 2020, 32.24% of the Zimbabwean population lived in urban areas^{xii}. Border towns, like Matabeleland hosting Beitbridge that sees 7 million people passing through it yearly, are among the magnets for rural-urban migration in Zimbabwe, as many believe they can make a living from the millions of people who pass through these border posts^{xiii}.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

There is no clear data on the number of Zimbabwean emigrants. While IOM reports that an estimated 571,970 Zimbabweans were living abroad^{xiv}, the Afro Barometer indicates instead that they were approximately three to four million^{xv}. According to the migration Data Portal, Zimbabwe is the main sending country for immigrants residing in Southern Africa (911,981), a 14% of the total immigrant population in the region^{xvi}. The top 5 destination countries for Zimbabwean migrants are South Africa, the UK, Malawi, Australia, and Botswana. However, it is widely argued that the above statistics fall short of painting a true image of emigration from Zimbabwe, because of its circular and irregular nature; in fact, not all migrants are registered and some of those registered at times give false information. Due to its proximity to South Africa, Zimbabwe has been a transit area for migrants arriving from countries in the Horn and Central Africa such as Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, Tanzania, and others en-route to South Africa^{xvii}.

The first group of skilled emigrants (mostly white people) left the country immediately after independence in the early 1980s. The second one has occurred from 1990 until now and is considered a real “brain drain”, as thousands of highly skilled Zimbabweans are fleeing the country as a result of the economic decline and political unrest. The hardest-hit sectors are the educational and health departments, closely followed by the accounting sector. A study conducted by Afro Barometer revealed that 64% of respondents with post-secondary or secondary qualifications (55%) are far more likely to emigrate^{xviii}. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimated that the emigration of doctors had reached 51% and the main receiving countries had been South Africa, the UK, the United States of America, and Australia^{xix}. Zimbabwean teachers constitute the largest group of migrants going to South Africa (61%)^{xx}. The 2021 human flight and brain drain in Africa indicates that Zimbabwe is above the world average of 5.25 index points, being currently at 7.1^{xxi}.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced persons, asylum seekers, and refugees, climate displaced people)

Recently, natural disasters have been the main driver of internal displacement in Zimbabwe. As of December 2020, there were 21,000 internal displaced persons (IDPs) in Zimbabwe^{xxii}. Natural hazards, like for example cyclone Idai in 2019, consecutive failed rainy seasons, droughts, floods, have seriously affected livelihood, resulting in protracted rural-urban internal displacement. Cyclone Idai is considered one of the deadliest and massive weather events that have ever hit the region. The storm caused a massive displacement and impacted refugees across the country. 128,270 people were affected by cyclone Idai in 12 districts of Zimbabwe^{xxiii} and 4,000 houses were destroyed completely or unfit to be lived in^{xxiv}. Most IDPs (97%) at the time resided in host communities, while a small percentage (3%) sought shelter in four established IDPs camps^{xxv}; however, only 18% of the affected population received emergency support. Also, in February 2017 the tropical cyclone Dineo hit the Tsholotsho District in Zimbabwe, killing 7 people and destroying more than 4,000 houses and government structures, forcing people to move^{xxvi}.

Zimbabwe hosts refugees mostly arriving from the Great Lake Regions. Zimbabwe adopts the camp model to handle refugees. There are two refugee camps in Zimbabwe: the Tongogara refugee camp in the Manicaland Province and the Harare refugee camp. According to the 2021 UNHCR report, there were 22,600 people of concern in Zimbabwe, more than 53% of them coming from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (12,020), Mozambique (3157), Rwanda (850), Burundi (964), and others (609)^{xxvii}. Nationals from the Great Lake regions made up more than 85% of asylum seekers and refugees in Zimbabwe, which is also home to a small number of refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia.

Between 2018 and 2020, a total of 91,413 Zimbabwe migrants (19,630 females, 66,140 males, and 5,643 accompanied and unaccompanied minors in irregular migration flows) returned from Botswana and South Africa^{xxviii}.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

Zimbabwe is a tier 2 country in the Trafficking in Person (TIP) report. Despite its efforts in combating trafficking, which included training of 264 detectives on anti-trafficking law and victim protection, and the incorporation of a module on the anti-trafficking law for new police recruits from 2019, Zimbabwe does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking. For example, the draft amendments to the 2014 trafficking in Persons Act to bring the law in line with international standards by 2020 has not yet been ratified, and the government failed to provide adequate funding to its NGOs partners on which it relied to provide protection services to victims^{xxix}.

According to the 2020 United States Department of States Trafficking in Person Report (TPR), “Zimbabwe is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children trafficked for forced labour and sexual exploitation”. This report shows that children are being smuggled from Mozambique into Zimbabwe and are forced into street vending^{xxx}. Porous borders, economic hardship and opportunity deprivation have made Zimbabweans vulnerable to false promises of having a better life elsewhere. There are reports of Zimbabwean women lured to China and the Middle East for work^{xxxi}. Traffickers entice Zimbabwean men and women into hard labour conditions in agriculture, construction, information technology and hospitality, mostly working in neighbouring countries. Some of them subsequently become victims of forced labour and some women are also involved in sex trafficking. Many Zimbabwean adults and children get into South Africa, where traffickers exploit them in labour and sex trafficking^{xxxii}.

VI. National Legal Framework

In addition to its national legal framework governing migration, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the continental, regional and international legal framework regulating and protecting the interest of people on the move.

On the national front, the 1997 Immigration Act, amended in 2001 and administered by the Minister of Home affairs, regulates both entry into and exit of nationals and foreign nationals from Zimbabwe. There has been a considerable evolution in the migration trajectory in Zimbabwe. This has prompted the government to respond by joining forces with IOM to form

a new national migration strategy that culminated after several workshops in the drafting of a National Migration Management and Diaspora Policy. The national migration strategy involves officials from the Migration and Development Unit of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Investment Promotion, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Justice^{xxxiii}, the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, and IOM. The Draft policy focuses more on mitigating the challenges the country is facing with the large emigration and cross border movements. It aims at the retention and return of highly skilled Zimbabwean nationals and also to promote strategies aimed at opening new channels for legal migration of low and semi-skilled workers^{xxxiv}. The Draft policy foresees the ratification of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Person especially Women and Children, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air^{xxxv}.

The 2013 Constitution states that the right to have access to basic health-care services is given only to citizens and permanent residents. Refugees and other migrants are excluded. However, the law further remarks that any person living with a chronic disease, including migrants, also have the same right, and children below the age of 18 and the elderly have the right to health-care services^{xxxvi}. Section 65 of the 2013 Constitution recognises the right to fair and safe labour practices and standards for everyone, citizen or non-citizen^{xxxvii}, and this automatically covers migrant workers. Section 64 further emphasises “the right of everyone to choose and carry on any profession, trade or occupation” in Zimbabwe^{xxxviii}. This protects the employment rights of workers from undue restriction, unfair and unsafe treatment, and unjust discrimination. The law also provides migrant workers the possibility to form, join and participate in trade unions.

At the continental level, Zimbabwe ratified the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. Zimbabwe is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), whose treaty advocates for the suppression of obstacles to the free movement of people, as well as the recognition of the establishment and residence among member states.

At the regional level, Zimbabwe has a Bilateral Labour Agreement with South Africa for the facilitation of the recruitment for commercial farms in the Limpopo Province in South Africa. Zimbabwe is also a member of the Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa, which aims at promoting cooperation among SADC member states on migration-related issues, thus enhancing their capacity to manage migration within a regional context.

On the international front, Zimbabwe is a party to the international convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1967 New York Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Rights

of the Child. These international agreements protect all human beings regardless of their nationality.

VII. Main Actors

The State

The Zimbabwe National Statistic Agency (ZIMSTAT) is responsible for the population census in Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage is in charge of the identification of all people living in Zimbabwe. The Ministry of Home Affairs is also responsible for maintaining public order and security, also because the Police Department is part of this Ministry. It also controls the entry and exit of people across the Zimbabwe borders and is responsible for the issuance of personal documents like passports, refugee permits, etc. Refugee protection is governed by the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The National Plan of Action is the implementation tool of the Trafficking in Person Act which is grounded on prosecution, prevention, protection, and partnership. The Zimbabwe Refugee Committee (ZRC) is the national body mandated under the Refugee Act to conduct refugee status determination^{xxxix}.

The Catholic Church

The Catholic Church in Zimbabwe plays a pivotal role in assisting migrants and refugees thanks to its humanitarian efforts. One can mirror the humanitarian activities of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe through its projects, involving agencies like JRS, Caritas, and CRS. Through its pastoral programs, JRS provides skill training to refugees in one of the biggest refugee camps in Zimbabwe, the Tongogara refugee camp, and also to local Zimbabweans. Training is in the fields of motor mechanics, carpentry, agriculture, computers, hairdressing, cosmetology and sewing. JRS also provides teaching equipment, infrastructure, and uniforms to the secondary school in Tongogara.

CRS provides orphans and vulnerable children with education opportunities, income-generating activities, and psychosocial support. CRS, in collaboration with the World Food Programme (WFP), has provided 3,099 malnourished HIV and TB patients, pregnant and lactating mothers, and children under 5 with food^{xl}. This organisation also offers programmes to help victims of sexual violence resume their normal life through counselling, medical assistance, and legal support. After being hit hard by drought that destroyed their crops and their source of livelihood, Caritas Zimbabwe working together with Caritas Internationalis and WFP distributed food to 300,000 drought affected persons.

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), a commission of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, assists the vulnerable in cases of human rights abuses, through sensitisation campaigns aimed at educating people on their rights in Zimbabwe^{xli}.

International Organisations and other organisations

The key players of migration-related issues in Zimbabwe are the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR). IOM Zimbabwe is recognised by the Government of Zimbabwe as the principal international inter-governmental organisation addressing the entire spectrum of migration issues. UNHCR also plays an essential role in migration-related issues in the country, by assisting refugees, asylum seekers, and community members in the areas of education, health, food security and nutrition, protection, water sanitation, and hygiene, camp coordination and management, access to energy, and community empowerment and self-reliance.

Other migration-related UN agencies in Zimbabwe include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), working in the area of creating sustainable growth to improve people's lives, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) assisting refugee children with access to education, WFP which helps food-insecure people including refugees to meet their basic food and nutrition requirements, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) working in the areas of advocacy and promoting detainee welfare including migrants, supporting health services and restoring family links separated by disaster. Mercy Corps provides assistance and relief to people affected by natural disasters, like Cyclone Idai, and GOAL which is designed to build resilience and sustainable livelihood by improving health, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) and nutrition systems, supporting refugees and strengthening the value chains needed to foster long-term financial security.

Christian Care, created by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, is tasked with improving the lives of the disadvantaged, including refugees, through disaster relief programs, integrated rural development programs, advocacy, and income-generating projects. There is also the Legal Resources Foundation helping refugees with advocacy. Even though they do not specialise in providing legal aid for refugees directly, they could potentially advise on a case or help in finding a suitable lawyer or organisation to provide support.

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D. Endnotes

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