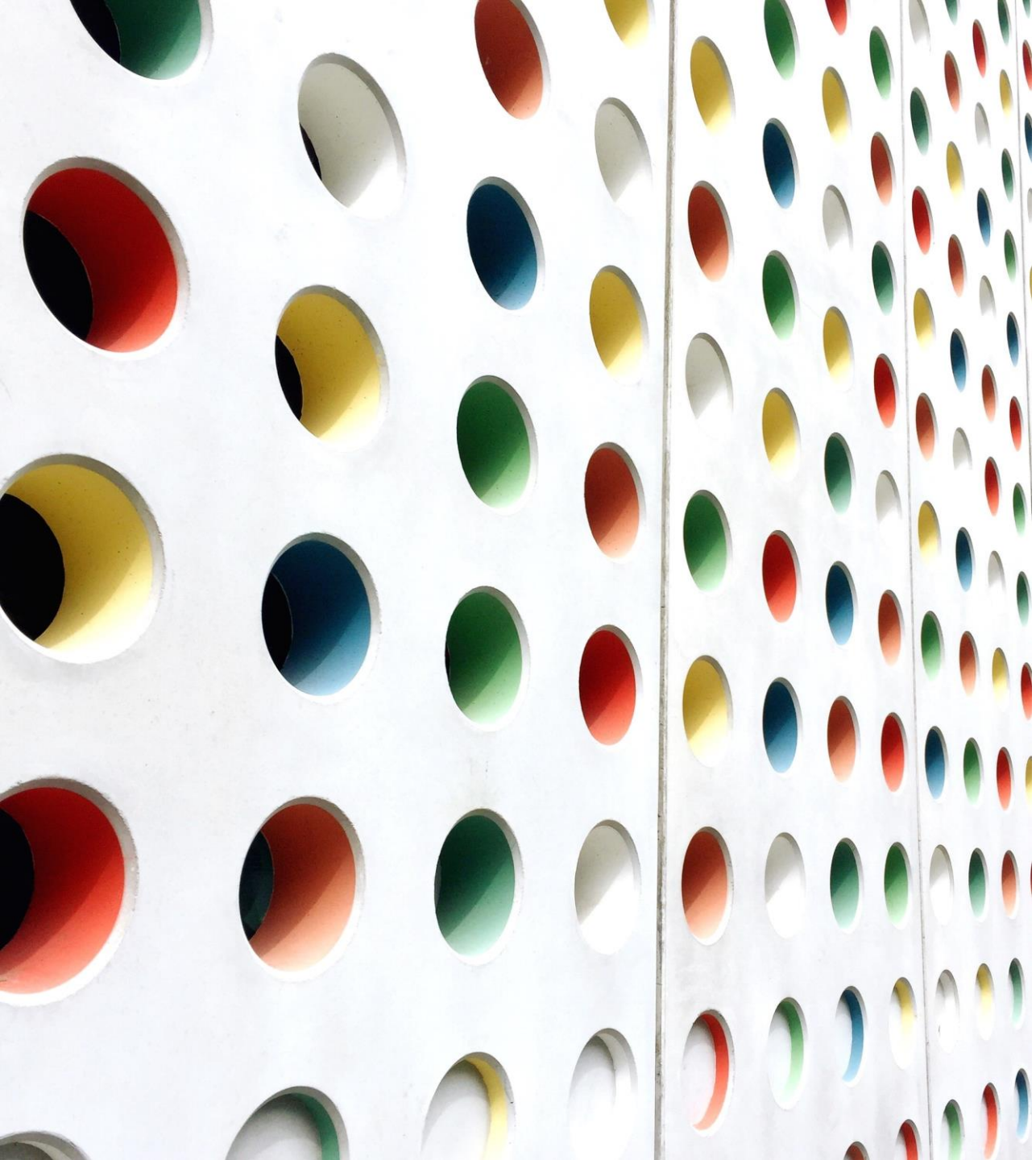


Migration Responses in Southern Africa

LOCARDIA SHAYAMUNDA

ARRUPE JESUIT UNIVERSITY

SAMIN SOUTHERN AFRICA MIGRATION NETWORK

Africa

- A rich continent with 54 countries including Madagascar

Southern Africa Migration Network

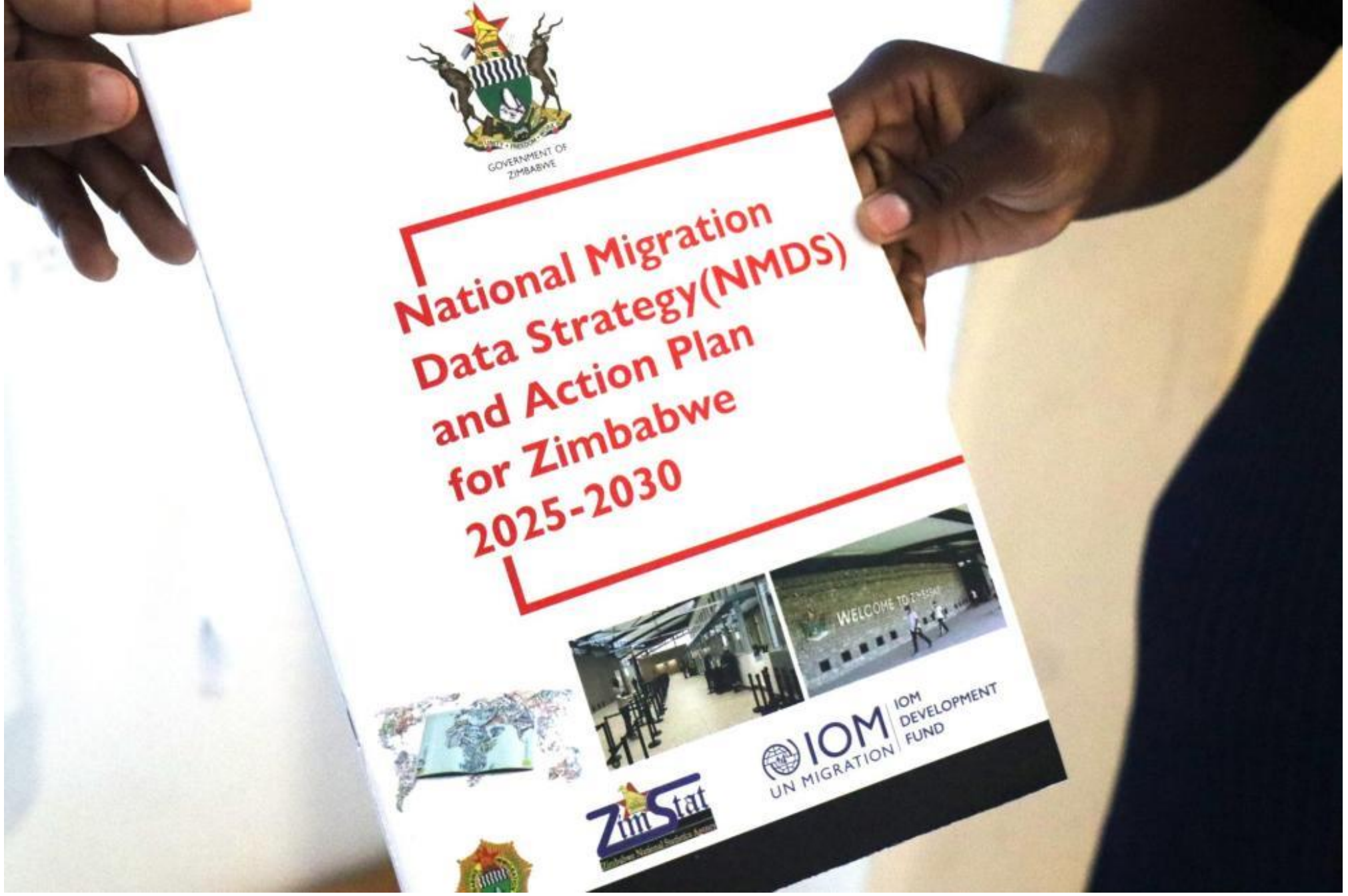
Zimbabwe National Migration Policy 2023

Migration in Zimbabwe: An ingrained aspect of society, significantly impacting households and community identities, recognized by the **National Migration Policy (NMP**) adopted in August 2023.

Policy Shift: Transition from viewing migration as a crisis to a development opportunity, aligning with the National Development Strategy (NDS1) and international frameworks.

Comprehensive Scope: Addresses various migration aspects, including labor, irregular migration, climate-induced movement, migrant rights, and diaspora engagement, positioning the diaspora as partners in development.

Real-world Implications: Imagined scenarios highlight the NMP's focus on dignity, psychosocial support, safe migration pathways, and community dialogue.


GOVERNMENT OF ZIMBABWE
National Migration Data Strategy(NMDS) and Action Plan for Zimbabwe 2025-2030
WELCOME TO ZIMSTAT
IOM UN MIGRATION
IOM DEVELOPMENT FUND
ZimStat

Community Psychology Perspective

- **Empowerment**: Migrants engaged in shaping policy; opportunities for participatory mechanisms were identified.
- **Prevention**: Addressing vulnerabilities related to misinformation, livelihood opportunities, and climate change.
- **Belonging**: Importance of community support and reducing stigma around refugees for successful integration.

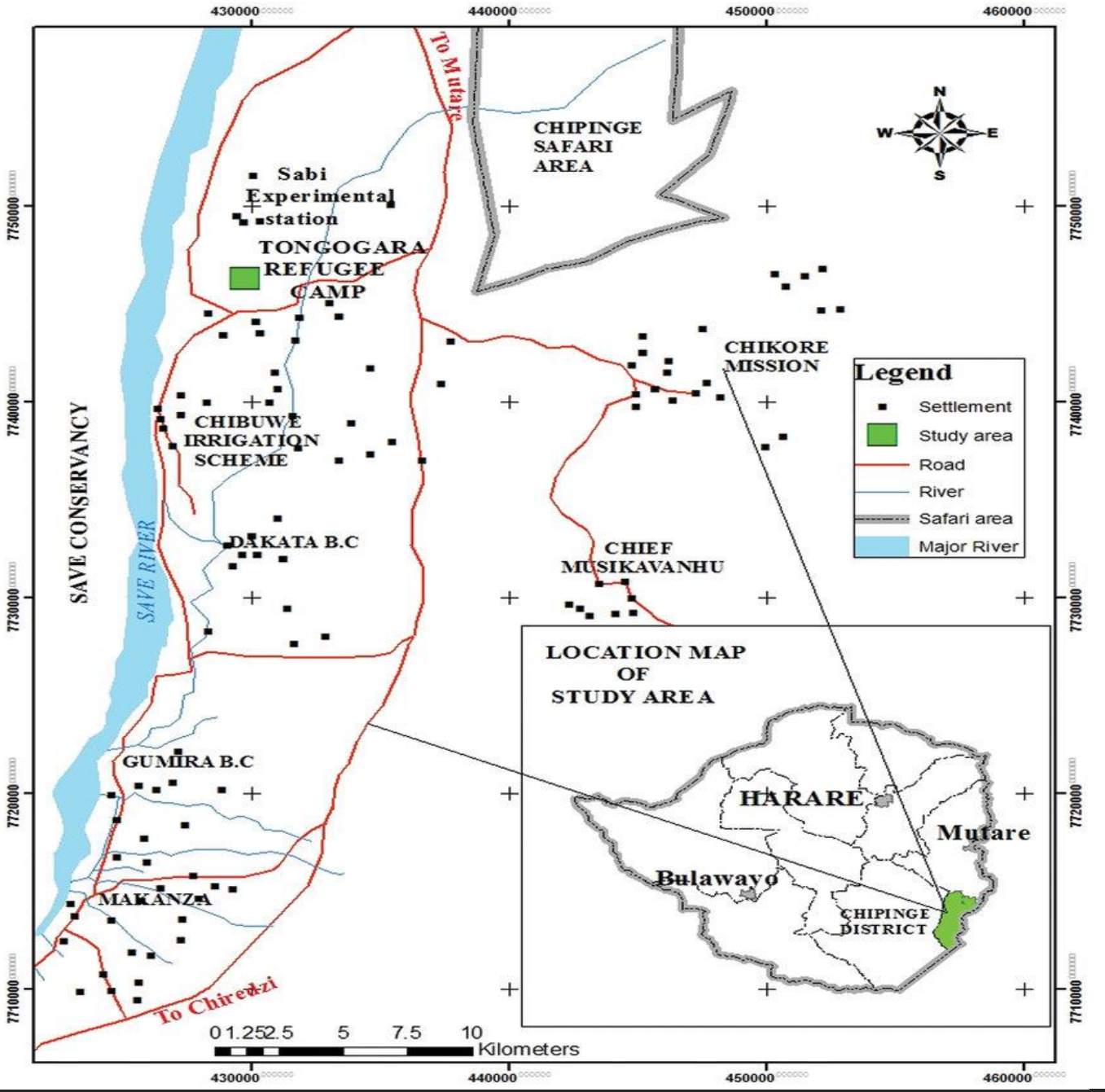
Continuation

Diaspora Engagement: Emphasizes collaboration and knowledge exchange; structured channels facilitate contributions back to local communities.

Implementation Challenges: Effective communication and training for frontline officers critical for policy realization; requires robust engagement with the community and civil society.

Holistic Vision: The NMP recognizes the complexities of migration, aiming for a system that supports dignity, empowerment, and shared progress, aligning with national and global standards for future growth.

Refugees in Zimbabwe



Map showing the Settlement area in Zimbabwe

SAMIN Zim Chapter visited Tongogara Settlement in March 2026

Tongogara Settlement Area

Settlement establishment	Early 1980s as a Refugee camp
Surface area of the settlement area	870 ha
Current population living on the settlement area	11 683 (biometrically registered)
Number of households	3420
Number of educational centres	2 (Tongogara Primary School (Infants and Junior) and St. Michael's Secondary School
Health Centres	1
Irrigation schemes	4 (75 ha in total)
Libraries	2
ICT Centres	2

Study by ZCC, 2026

Continuation

Description	Number
Number of Internet service providers	25
Number of Financial Institutions	3
Number of Police instalments	1
Geographic location	Chipinge (Chipangayi area)

Study by ZCC, 2026

Refugees in Zimbabwe

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The country has a long history of receiving refugees from other African countries:

- In 1984 – accommodated Mozambicans fleeing civil war
- Then refugees and asylum seekers from DRC, Burundi, Sudan, and Rwanda

- Approximately 74% of the refugees and asylum seekers are from DRC
  - Followed by Mozambique, Burundi, and Rwanda, and other countries
  - The government of Zimbabwe works with UNHCR, humanitarian, and development partners
  - Emphasis now is on integration and self-reliance

Strategic Protection Implementation Approach

- The Government implements a seamless Whole of Government Approach (WGA) and
- Whole of Society Approach (WSA) in protecting refugees

- Interventions range from:
  - Settlement coordination and management
  - Security
  - Water and sanitation
  - Shelter
  - Health
  - Social protection
  - Self-reliance and livelihoods
  - Protection
  - Education etc.,

Population per age group and gender

Age Group and Gender	0-4	5-11	12-17	18-59	+60	Total
Females	838	1115	820	2651	89	**5513**
Males	901	1184	867	3148	70	**6170**
TOTAL	**1739**	**2299**	**1687**	**5799**	**159**	**11683**

Statistics by ZCC, 2026

According to UNHCR, the country hosts 22,400 refugees and asylum seekers

LEGAL STATUS

Legal Status	Male	Female	Total
Refugees	4183	3792	**7975**
Other of concern/Rejected cases	376	393	**769**
Asylum Seekers	1594	1345	**2939**
Grand Total	**6170**	**5513**	**11683**

Vulnerable population

Category	Males	Females	Total
Unaccompanied children	35	47	**82**
Separated children	21	41	**62**
Orphaned children	60	68	**128**
Persons with disabilities Adults	88	88	**176**
Children	47	24	**71**
Older Persons	123	157	**280**
Grand Total	**374**	**425**	**799**

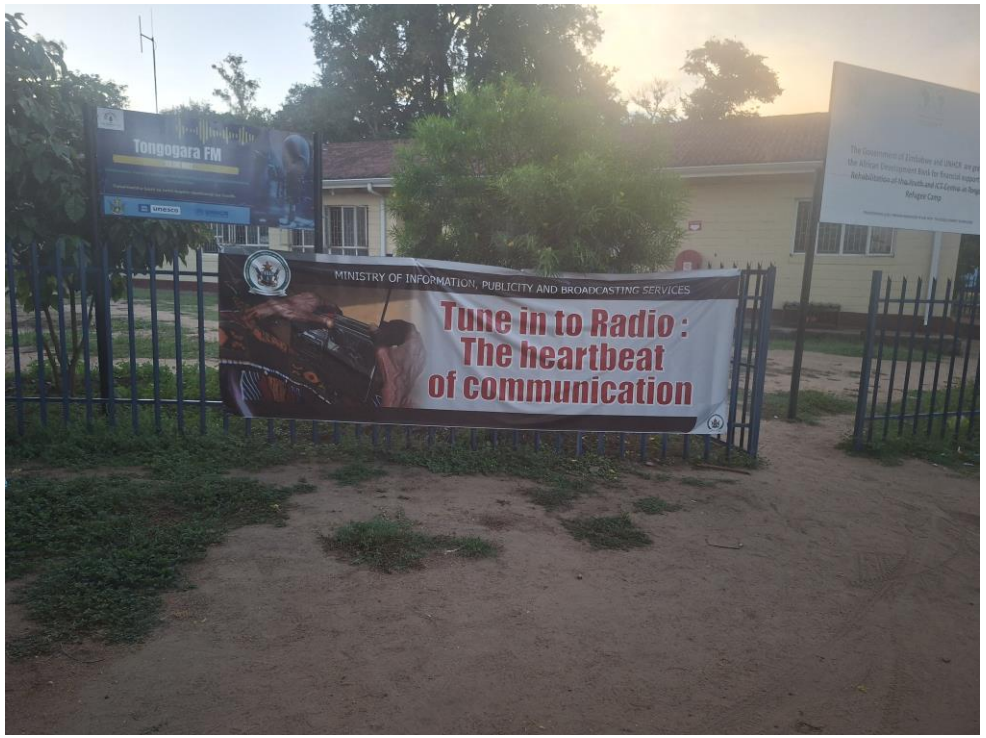
Global Refugee Forum Pledges

- To operationalize the realization of the Global Compact on Refugees adopted in 2018:
- Gvnt of Zimbabwe submitted pledges at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023
- These include:
  - To enhance self-reliance for refugees, asylum seekers, and host communities by 2027
  - Strengthen the inclusion of these in sports and cultural programmes
  - Promote and increase access to tertiary education by establishing a technical/vocational training centre/innovation hub with blended learning programmes

➢ **Achievements at a glance:**

- ➢175 ha irrigation scheme for 647 HHs, each with an average of 0.2 ha. established
- ➢Daily 3,647 cubic liters of water supplied
- ➢A Radio station called FM Tongogara
- ➢86 refugee youth enrolled at various universities
- ➢60 stalls smart and green vegetable market – benefiting 103 HHs
- ➢240 HHs established small businesses (grocery shops. Cosmetology shops, grinding mills, garment-making shops, hardware, and boutiques

Radio and Vocational Training Centre



Continuation

- Diversified livelihoods projects like:
  - Poultry
  - Piggery and
  - Fishery projects
- Tongogara Judo Team – 34 athletes recognized and integrated by the Judo Association of Zimbabwe. Participating in Judo for peace regional programmes in Southern Africa
- Tongogara Karate club known as Funakoshi Eagle Club – 35 athletes affiliated to Japan Shotokan Karate Association
  - Competing at all national competitions
- 15 business premises operated by refugees – connected to the national grid
- Financial inclusion:
  - Ecocash
  - Omari
  - Mukuru agents
- Operate a Mukuru Orange Booth in Tongogara Refugee Settlement

Strategic Focus

- **Transformation Agenda**:
  - Envisioned that the settlement gradually transition into a service centre for refugees and the host community
  - Agenda for “Transformation towards the Tongogara We Want”
  - Have an integrated settlement with modern infrastructure, educational facilities, commerce, and creativity
- **To achieve these – key strategic focus include:**
  - Establish a multi-campus Technical and Vocational Education and Training Centre
  - Upgrade Tongogara Clinic into a polyclinic
  - Promote climate agriculture – expand irrigation scheme for 200 ha introduce high- value crops for export market
  - Woodlots across the settlement – climate action
  - Construction of resilient and durable housing units
  - Strengthen family empowerment compared to group-centred projects
  - Modernize settlement-based schools
  - Establish a sports pavilion with modern soccer arena

Youth-led Organisation

Refugee-led Organisations

Clinic and Primary School

Business Premises

Challenges faced by Refugees in Zimbabwe

- Zimbawe has made several strides in refugees protection, several challenges remain:
  - limited economic opportunities
  - Poverty and vulnerability
  - Environmental pressures
  - Encampment and freedom of movement
- Important policy question:
- **How can countries provide protection and assistance while also promoting refugees' independence, mobility and long-term integration?**

- Serious funding challenges affecting:
  - Water provision
  - Health
  - Education, and
  - Other protection interventions

Recent study by ZCC, 2026

Dealing with Flight and Migration in Africa: Zimbabwe and South Africa

- Flight and migration are important features of:
  - Africa's social, economic, and political landscape
- Across the continent:
  - Millions of people move **within and across** national borders every year.
- Voluntary and forced migration
  - Distinction between migration and forced displacement

- Countries develop different approaches to manage these movements
  - Designated settlement areas or live in urban areas
  - **Both approaches create both opportunities and challenges**
  - **Zimbabwe and South Africa provide useful examples**

Flight and Migration in Africa

- People move across Africa for many different reasons:
  - Armed conflicts, political instability, and economic inequality
  - Climate and environmental pressures are also becoming increasingly important
  - Migration can bring significant benefits:
    - Skills, labour, entrepreneurship, and cultural diversity
  - Migration can also place pressure on already limited resources
    - If poverty and inequality are already high – refugees unfairly blamed for broader social and economic problems
    - Contribute to discrimination, social tension, and, **in extreme cases**, **xenophobic violence.**

South Africa: A Major Destination for Migration

- Major migration destination on the African continent
  - relatively large economy and employment opportunities
  - Also hosts refugees and asylum-seekers
  - South Africa does not operate a general refugee-camp model
  - Most refugees and asylum-seekers live in urban communities.
  - In 2025, South Africa hosted more than 167,000 refugees and asylum seekers, (UNHCR)
  - People from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, South Sudan, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe

Xenophobia in South Africa

- The most serious challenges associated with migration in South Africa is **xenophobia**
  - SA experienced several major episodes of xenophobic violence.
  - 2008 most significant episode that swept across the country
    - Attacks on foreign nationals,
    - Businesses and homes destroyed
    - +17,000 people displaced (UNHCR, 2008)

Further xenophobic episodes

2015

- Xenophobic violence in KwaZulu-Natal and other areas killed people and displaced more than 5,000 foreign nationals

2019

- Renewed violence in Gauteng affected foreign nationals, including refugees and asylum-seekers.
  - According to UNHCR, 2019 - at least 1,500 foreign nationals were forced to flee their homes during that period

*Xenophobia incidents - not simply a migration-management issue, but are a **human rights, protection, and social cohesion issue***

Human Rights Watch, 2026

2026 New Wave of Xenophobic attacks

A sharp rise in anti-immigrant sentiment and vigilante-led harassment targeting foreign nationals.

Groups:

- Operation Dudula and March and March led public protests and issued eviction ultimatums.
- Recurring post-apartheid crisis following major outbreaks in 2008, 2015, and 2019.

Root Causes

Economic Scapegoating: Blaming foreign workers for high domestic unemployment and low wages.

Public Resource Strain: Accusing migrants of overburdening public infrastructure, healthcare clinics, and public schools.

Crime and Governance: Unfounded generalizations linking foreign nationals to high local crime rates and failed service delivery.

Social Frustration: Deep socio-economic inequality created fertile ground for populist anti-migrant rhetoric

2026 Xenophobic/Afrophobic Attacks

NATURE OF THE ATTACKS

Harassment & Intimidation: Digital campaigns and street notices demanding foreign nationals leave by set deadlines.

Physical Violence: Clashes, assaults, and fatal shootings reported in business districts and townships.

Denial of Services: Vigilantes illegally blocked migrants from accessing public hospitals and stormed classrooms to remove foreign children.

Property Destruction: Looting and torching of foreign-owned shops and informal shacks.

DIRECT IMPLICATIONS

Mass Displacement: Tens of thousands of refugees and migrants forced into temporary or makeshift camps.

Legal and Bureaucratic Trap: Many stranded foreigners faced "**landlocked**" **legal penalties** under immigration acts if they tried to leave or stay without valid papers.

Repatriation Efforts: Neighboring countries (such as Mozambique, Ghana, Nigeria & Zim) stepped in to evacuate and repatriate their imperilled citizens.

Composition of Government-Assisted Returnees

Category	Number
Men	10,437
Women	13,558
Boys	8,937
Girls	9,399
Unaccompanied boys	4
Unaccompanied girls	4
Total	**42,339**

Support provided

- Returnees received food, clothes, bus-fares
- A database was created for all returnees
- Silveira House created a temporary transit site for Harare Returnees
  - Created a database, offered safe space, and training
- CCJP Harare applied for financial support to Misereor for reintegrating returnees
- SAMIN Zimbabwe Chapter is conducting a study – results of which will inform further steps in terms of support

Broader Regional & Political Fallout

Diplomatic Strain: Damaged foreign relations between South Africa and neighbouring African states.

International Backlash: Formal petitions filed (such as to the ICC) calling for investigations into systemic rights violations.

Policy Challenges: Heightened pressure on the South African government to balance border management while protecting human rights and preventing state failure to secure vulnerable populations.

Comparing Zimbabwe and South Africa

Zimbabwe	South Africa
Significant refugee population concentrated in Tongogara Refugee Settlement	Refugees and asylum-seekers primarily live in urban communities
Strong involvement of government and humanitarian agencies in settlement-based assistance	Greater emphasis on urban-based integration
Focus on protection, basic services and self-reliance	Focus on urban integration, protection and access to services
Refugees face challenges relating to livelihoods and long-term self-reliance	Migrants and refugees face xenophobia, documentation challenges and socio-economic pressures
Host-community support is important around refugee settlements	Social cohesion is a major issue in diverse urban communities

Neither approach is without challenges

Lessons for Africa

1. **Refugee protection must go beyond emergency assistance**
2. **Host communities must be included**
3. **Economic inclusion is critical**
4. **Xenophobia must be addressed at its roots**
5. **Regional cooperation is essential**
6. **Refugees should be viewed as contributors**

Conclusion

- **Africa's future will continue to be shaped by flight and migration**
  - Conflict, economic inequality, climate change, employment opportunities, and regional integration will continue to influence where and why people move.
  - Zimbabwe's experience demonstrates the importance of providing protection, humanitarian assistance, and opportunities for self-reliance to refugees.
    - But long-term solutions require greater attention to education, livelihoods, community empowerment, and integration
  - South Africa presents a different experience.
    - Its urban refugee model provides opportunities for interaction and economic participation, but migrants and refugees remain vulnerable to discrimination and xenophobia.
  - Migration is **protecting human dignity while building communities in which both migrants and host populations can live safely and contribute to society**

THANK YOU

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