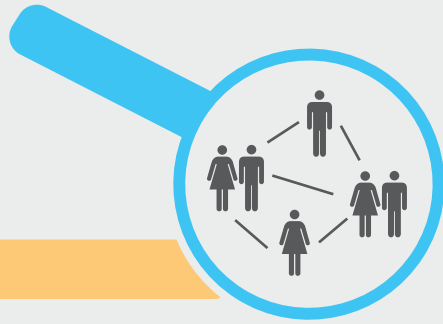


MIGRANTS IN COUNTRIES IN CRISIS

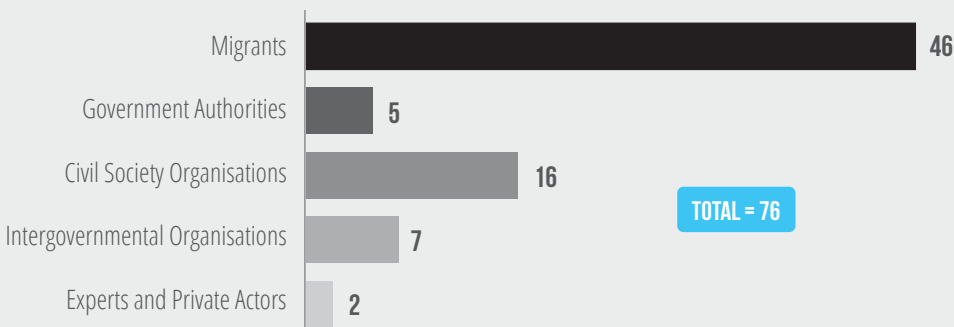
SOUTH AFRICA FACT SHEET



FOCUS

The impact and responses to xenophobic violence in South Africa by Zimbabwean informal migrant entrepreneurs

INTERVIEW DATA (JUNE-NOVEMBER 2016)



TIMELINE



MIGRANT RESPONSES

SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF MIGRANTS

- Migrants mostly work in low-skilled jobs
- Migrants start businesses in urban informal economy
- Migrant businesses attacked and looted
- Migrants remit funds to support families in Zimbabwe

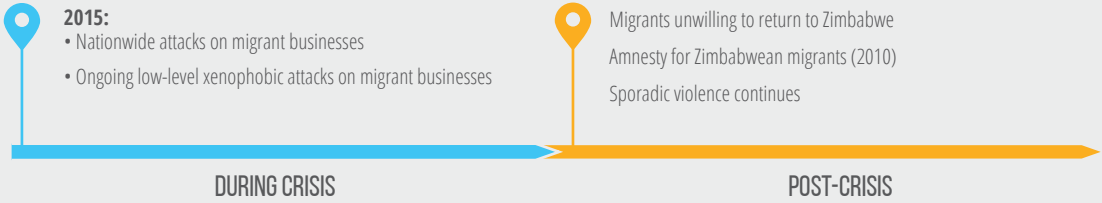
The economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe led directly to a major increase in mixed migration flows to South Africa. Migrants were drawn from every sector of society, all education and skill levels, equal numbers of both sexes, and all ages (including unaccompanied child migration). Many migrants claimed asylum in South Africa which gave them the right to work while they waited for a refugee hearing. Many others were arrested and deported back to Zimbabwe. Migrants who were unable to find employment in the formal economy turned to employment and self-employment in the informal economy. These migrant entrepreneurs used personal savings to establish small and micro enterprises in many urban areas. The businesses focused on retail trading, manufacturing and services and contributed to the South African economy in various ways, including providing employment for South Africans.

Nationwide xenophobic violence in 2008 targeted all migrants, irrespective of origin and legal status. From 2008 onwards, violent attacks on migrant-owned informal businesses began to escalate. This culminated in a second round of nationwide xenophobic violence in early 2015 when migrant-owned businesses were targeted by mobs. Migrants send essential remittances to family in Zimbabwe and return migration is not a viable or long-term response until Zimbabwe's economic crisis is resolved. As a result, informal migrant entrepreneurs have adapted to hostile business conditions by adopting a range of strategies to avoid and protect themselves and their businesses from xenophobia.



If you are a foreigner, you will always be affected by xenophobia every day [...]. Local people end up looting our things [...] and they just take what they want.

(Zimbabwean Entrepreneur, Male, Cape Town)



INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

In the post-apartheid period, South Africa has been plagued by extremely high levels of xenophobia which has led to at least two major outbreaks of violence against migrants in 2008 and 2015 who were attacked and murdered and had their property and businesses looted. During nationwide xenophobic violence, civil society organisations have rallied to provide material support for the victims of violence as well as organised street marches and rallies denouncing xenophobia. Human rights organisations, the UNHCR and IOM have played a role in protecting the victims of xenophobic violence, in arranging voluntary repatriation and in educational campaigns to address the problem of xenophobia. Civil society organisations and intergovernmental organisations have found it more difficult to respond to low-level violence on an ongoing basis. The official government response to the attacks on migrant and refugee-owned businesses is that criminality rather than xenophobia is to blame.

Migrants complain that neither the South African nor Zimbabwean governments are doing anything to protect them or adequately respond when they are attacked. They also say that xenophobia has become institutionalised in South Africa, particularly in the police, and that this partly explains the lack of protection. New proposals in the South African Green Paper on International Migration will deny asylum-seekers the right to work and pursue their own livelihood and detain them in centres close to the borders while their claims are adjudicated. However, special permits are proposed for migrants from SADC countries to allow them to migrate legally to South Africa. If implemented, this would improve the legal status of informal sector entrepreneurs from neighbouring countries at least. However, the Green Paper does not address the crisis of xenophobia or provide practical policy proposals to deal with the problem.

LEGAL SITUATION OF MIGRANTS

- Mixed migration flows of asylum-seekers and economic migrants
- Asylum-seekers have right to work and earn income
- Large-scale deportations of migrants to Zimbabwe
- Zimbabwean irregular migrants and asylum-seekers granted legal status



People listen to the government. They keep saying that foreigners are bad. What do you expect the people to do? The people follow their government.

(Zimbabwean Entrepreneur, Male, Cape Town)



POLICY LEARNING

Xenophobia is a growing problem globally as migration flows increase and citizens become increasingly hostile to their presence. The South African experience provides important policy lessons for addressing the crisis of xenophobia. First, large-scale deportations of migrants to Zimbabwe were both costly and ineffective. Second, an immigration amnesty which gave four-year residence and work permits to 275,000 migrants unclogged the asylum-system and gave many the legal right to work and establish and grow their small businesses. Third, it is important that there is an acknowledgement of the extent and depth of xenophobia and that the issue is both owned at the political level and addressed in a proactive manner including demonstration of the benefits of migrant entrepreneurship, educational programmes to contest xenophobic stereotypes, and vigorous public prosecution of the perpetrators of xenophobic violence. International agencies, civil society organisations and migrant associations can play a significant role in addressing the crisis of xenophobia by protecting and empowering migrants.

With regard to migrants and refugees working and running small businesses in the informal sector, it is important that national and municipal policies are not driven by false stereotyping and official hostility. This would mean a number of policy reforms. First, policy needs to recognise that informal entrepreneurs make a valuable contribution to local economies through providing employment, paying for municipal licenses, renting business properties from South Africans, supporting formal sector locally-owned wholesalers and supermarkets, paying VAT and providing cheaper goods to poor consumers. Second, harassment and extortion by officials and the police needs to be eliminated by sanctioning such actions. Third, all informal entrepreneurs, including South Africans, need better protection from crime and looting but migrants need special protection when xenophobic mob violence and destruction breaks out. Fourth, migrant entrepreneurs need an enabling financial environment which would give them greater access to formal banking facilities. And finally, current policy proposals to make it more difficult for migrants and refugees to set up and run informal enterprises need to be revisited.



Here we live with xenophobia every day. We see it happening and there is nothing that we can do.

(Zimbabwean Entrepreneur, Female, Johannesburg)



They [the government] said the appropriate response [to xenophobia] is multi-agency enforcement to identify and address and detain and deport undocumented migrants and the justification was that South Africans are concerned about large numbers of undocumented migrants and involvement in crime and threats to social cohesion.

(Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR))

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Southern African Migration Programme

