



International Medical Corps staff members clean the area outside the reception center as part of hygiene-focused activities.

Since April, increasing anti-migrant sentiment, demonstrations and xenophobic incidents targeting foreign nationals in South Africa have spurred almost 100,000 Zimbabweans to return home, placing significant pressure on government reception and reintegration systems in Zimbabwe.

The country in late June activated national emergency response mechanisms through the Department of Civil Protection (DCP) to coordinate the reception and reintegration of returning nationals. Provincial- and district-level civil protection structures have been activated, while daily coordination meetings continue to support response planning and implementation. The DCP has emphasized the importance of coordination through established government structures to ensure a coherent and complementary response.

Most returnees arrive through Beitbridge Border Post, where authorities and humanitarian partners provide registration, health screening, food assistance, temporary shelter, transportation and protection services. Women and children account for 70% of the returnees.

The reception center is experiencing severe congestion due to the high volume of arrivals. Existing accommodation capacity has been exceeded, and authorities have begun preparing additional nearby spaces to accommodate overflow populations. Overcrowding is affecting registration processes, bus departures, service delivery and living conditions, creating heightened public health and protection risks. Needs include the following.

Protection. Protection concerns remain significant among returning populations. Many returnees report experiencing harassment, forced evictions, violence, detention and loss of livelihoods while in South Africa. Women, children and undocumented migrants remain particularly vulnerable. Eight unaccompanied children have been identified at the reception center, while inadequate lighting continues to heighten risks concerning violence against women and girls, and protection. Key needs include psychosocial support, family tracing and reunification, protection monitoring and assistance with civil documentation.

Health and Nutrition. Health services are under increasing pressure as arrivals continue. Common conditions include diarrhea, respiratory infections, hypertension, musculoskeletal pain and ART-related needs. Overcrowding, limited mental health services and challenges in maintaining tuberculosis and HIV treatment referrals remain concerns.

FAST FACTS

- Escalating anti-migrant sentiments and localized violence in South Africa since April have triggered a large-scale return of Zimbabwean migrants.
- The government on July 14 said that almost 100,000 Zimbabweans had returned so far.
- More than 20,000 Zimbabweans are reportedly awaiting transportation support at Zimbabwean diplomatic missions and assembly points across South Africa. Returns are likely to continue in the coming weeks.
- Women and children account for approximately 70% of returnees, highlighting significant protection and reintegration concerns.

OUR RESPONSE

- We are coordinating with government and humanitarian partners to identify and address response gaps.
- We are leading the response around water, sanitation and hygiene needs at Beitbridge Reception Center.
- As part of these efforts, we have so far provided safe drinking water to 15,792 returnees and supplies for approximately 400 bacteriological water-quality tests.
- We have installed two 5,000-liter water tanks, four water points, a storage platform and a new pipeline. We also have rehabilitated two ablution blocks and installed five mobile toilets.
- We have installed two high-capacity floodlights to improve site safety and security.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). Overcrowding at the reception center places significant strain on WASH infrastructure. Only 30 toilets are currently available, half the amount that is needed. Open defecation has been reported, increasing risk of communicable diseases. Additional water points, handwashing stations, waste-management support and sanitation facilities are urgently required. Poor lighting around sanitation areas further increases both public health and protection risks.

Food Security and Nutrition. Though the government continues to provide three meals per day at the reception center, with support from partners and private-sector donations, food stocks remain under pressure as arrivals increase. Additional support is needed to sustain food assistance and provide food or voucher support for returnees travelling to their final destinations.

Civil Documentation and Reintegration. Many returnees have lost identity documents, limiting access to public services, education and other reintegration opportunities. The Registrar General's Office is facilitating temporary documentation and replacement processes.

International Medical Corps Response

International Medical Corps is closely monitoring the evolving situation and coordinating with government authorities, as well as with UNICEF, UN agencies and other humanitarian partners to support a coordinated response to the influx of returning Zimbabwean migrants. With UNICEF support, International Medical Corps is leading key WASH interventions at Beitbridge Reception Center. We have already begun providing safe drinking water through water trucking and water-storage infrastructure, and have procured water-quality testing reagents to support routine monitoring and to ensure safe drinking water. In addition, we have completed assessments to identify critical sanitation gaps and priority rehabilitation needs.

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International Medical Corps will continue to expand its WASH response by rehabilitating existing ablution facilities, installing additional mobile toilets and ablution units, strengthening handwashing and waste-management systems, and providing cleaning materials, disinfectants and other essential commodities to support hygiene promotion and infection-prevention and control measures.

The humanitarian situation remains fluid, with additional returns from South Africa expected in the coming weeks. Continued pressure on reception capacity, health services, WASH infrastructure and transportation systems is likely unless additional resources are mobilized. Immediate priorities include expanding sanitation infrastructure, strengthening health services, addressing protection risks and supporting the safe transportation and reintegration of returnees. International Medical Corps will continue to coordinate closely with the DCP, IOM, UNICEF and other humanitarian partners to monitor emerging needs and support a coordinated humanitarian response.