



# Zimbabwe Country Strategy Evaluation

UNHCR Evaluation Office

## Evaluation Brief

**Purpose:** To provide evidence from UNHCR's interventions, determine how and why they did or did not improve the lives of refugees and asylum-seekers, and document lessons and recommendations to improve UNHCR Zimbabwe's actions over the next planning period

**Evaluation type:** Country Strategy Evaluation

**Methods:** Mixed methods including key informant interviews and focus group discussion.

**Implemented:** 2019-2022

**Scope:** Geographical, Zimbabwe

**Commissioned by:** Evaluation Office upon request from Zimbabwe operation and Regional Bureau for Southern Africa.

### Evaluation Context

Zimbabwe faces widespread food insecurity due to factors including macro-economic challenges and climate induced disasters such as cyclones, droughts, and floods. The country is also a source, transit, and destination country of mixed population flows. The Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) has consistently shown hospitality and maintains a favourable protection environment for displaced persons, refugees, and asylum-seekers pursuant to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity Convention with key provisions of these instruments set out in the Zimbabwe constitution and refugee act.

Zimbabwe does not fit the typical characteristic of a humanitarian crisis. The difference between humanitarian and development approaches is indistinguishable in contexts such as Zimbabwe where there is long-term protracted displacement with assistance provided over several years. The CO has been applying the nexus approach of addressing needs in the short term, while reducing the vulnerability of affected populations to those needs over the long term. There is an ongoing debate among aid agencies on whether a classic humanitarian architecture is necessary. The 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) had only one project submitted (by UNHCR) in relation to general protection

but this was not adopted by the GOZ, and a plan for 2022 was not developed.

The economic situation in Zimbabwe limits the capacity of the GOZ to allocate financial resources to the refugee programme beyond provision of infrastructure and general services but GOZ has included refugees and asylum seekers in the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2021-2025 and in sectoral plans (health, education, WASH and security) while statelessness was included in the 2022 census.

Zimbabwe has a well-established Refugee Coordination Model (RCM), which is anchored on a solid framework of refugee laws and policies. The GOZ made several pledges on refugees and statelessness at the Global Refugee Forum (GRF) including to review and update the legal and policy frameworks on refugees and asylum-seekers, (including amendment of the 1983 Refugee Act by 2021), to be consistent with international refugee and human rights law. However, this commitment is still in progress and has not yet been met.

In March 2019, Cyclone Idai affected more than 270,000 people in eastern Zimbabwe due to flooding; approximately 41,535 of this number were reported as still displaced in April 2021 though GOZ maintains that there are no IDPs in Zimbabwe. The GOZ has ratified the African Union Convention on the protection and assistance of IDPs (Kampala Convention). However, Zimbabwe is yet to incorporate key provisions of the convention into domestic law despite requirements to do so in both the convention and the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013).

In terms of the protection and assistance afforded to IDPs, the CO has focused on strengthening preparedness and response to provide protection and assistance for displacements and to clarify its role in relation to other actors in line with UNHCR's policies and procedures. However, since 2020, the CO has not been able to engage in direct assistance to IDPs and only undertook some of its coordination responsibilities as the coordinator of the protection cluster.

Zimbabwe was included as a priority country under UNHCR's #IBelongCampaign. Zimbabwe's new constitution made provisions for statelessness and, in

2019, the GOZ made seven commitments during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness at the Global Refugee Forum. However, the evaluation noted that only partial progress had been made on implementing these pledges and the CO had been unable to dedicate significant resources and consequently limited staff capacity to address the issue. There are also no reliable statistics for how many people are at risk of statelessness.

Partnership and engagement have mainly been with GOZ, implementing partners and donors. This narrow approach to partnership has limited the extent to which persons we serve are integrated into other agencies plans under the nexus approach to address their long-term development needs.

UNHCR Zimbabwe's annual operational plans intended to focus on all four UNHCR pillars – refugees, internally displaced persons (IDP), persons at risk of statelessness and returnees – but in practice, most work and funding has been focused on camp-based refugees. The CO has had stable funding ranging between 6.1 million in 2020 and 6.7 million each year in 2021 and 2022. Staff levels have also remained relatively constant at around 27 staff members with an increase in 2019 due to the increase in emergency response staff and 2022 in response to a surge in resettlement cases.

## Key Findings

*Transition from a refugee camp to a settlement, socio-economic inclusion and self-reliance of refugees is achievable.*

Socio-economic inclusion of refugees, and the transition from humanitarian assistance to self-reliance has been a high priority for refugees, the GOZ and UNHCR. The CO has attempted to shift from a care-and-maintenance approach to one emphasizing self-reliance by addressing needs in the short term while reducing the vulnerability of affected populations to those needs over the long term.

Progress in this has been through livelihood projects with strategic partnerships with the African Development Bank, World Vision and the World Bank who all provided financial and / or technical support for livelihood projects. The GOZ has in turn provided land and technical support while UNHCR and partners have provided additional technical support, capacity building and irrigation infrastructure. There has also been financial and technical support from UNHCR at the regional and headquarter levels which have helped to maintain a level of investment in livelihood activities.

The objective has been to increase economic self-reliance of refugees and enhance socio-economic integration. However, due primarily to inadequate investment and limited capacity, progress has been limited to subsistence production with continued high reliance by persons we serve on UNHCR for provision of basic services. More consistent investment at the right level, guided by evidence-based analysis and adequate technical support are still required if this objective is to be achieved.

*Shared responsibility - an important factor in addressing refugee needs sustainably.*

UNHCR Zimbabwe country operation has been instrumental in establishing strategic and meaningful partnerships with GOZ, implementing partners and some donors though the CO has not adequately engaged with UN agencies and other key stakeholders in country. The CO acknowledges the need to expand partnership and coordination particularly with the UN in Zimbabwe under the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. This is particularly important as there will be an increasing need for UNHCR to work through other agencies in the context of diminishing funding and as the needs of refugees move towards development sectors where UNHCR will need to leverage strategic partnerships in the development sectors. To this end, UNHCR has played a more active role in the UN Country Team as recommended in the Cyclone Idai evaluation though more is needed in terms of establishing strategic partnerships.

*Agility in balancing between direct implementation and leveraging partners capacity in IDP and statelessness support is required.*

Despite high levels of commitment by UNHCR and key partners, financial resource constraints and lack of dedicated technical capacity have limited the CO's capacity to lead the protection cluster for IDPs and enhance advocacy on statelessness. UNHCR's protection and assistance response to internally displaced people (IDPs) since Cyclone Idai has raised key policy implementation challenges. The issues relate primarily to UNHCR's capacity to deliver on its cluster coordination mandate on climate-induced internal displacement in a situation compounded by the lack of funding and consequently inadequate capacity. The situation is made more challenging by the fact that the GOZ maintains the position that there are no Zimbabweans who are still displaced. There has been no funding or dedicated staff to support UNHCR's role on IDP and statelessness. Given these constraints and the Zimbabwe context, UNHCR should work more closely through partnership as opposed to taking a leadership role in addressing IDPs and statelessness.

## Recommendations

**Transition from refugee camp to holistic and comprehensive service center approach.** Zimbabwe offers a conducive environment for transitioning from a refugee camp to a service centre where refugees are socio-economically integrated into the community. This has been going on steadily and needs to be accelerated to capitalize on refugees prioritized needs and the high-level commitment from GOZ. This should go hand in hand with continued support for GOZ to integrate refugees into national systems at centralized and decentralized levels.

The transition should be informed by a clear strategy and workplan which should outline clear responsibility-sharing to ensure use of strategic partnerships with development partners and UN agencies, avoid gaps and duplication of responsibilities. UNHCR on its part should be guided by the finalization of the current draft livelihood strategy in line with regional and global guidance. The strategy should include a clear and well-monitored graduation approach and a cost-benefit analysis / return-on-investment to ensure that the livelihood opportunities translate into self-reliance.

**Structural review, prioritization, and strategic positioning.** As the transition continues and refugees become more self-reliant, integrated into the community and GOZ services, periodic mapping, and review of the capacities and staffing required to deliver the different phases of the transformation will be needed. The review of UNHCR and partners' organizational structure will be required to ensure adequate capacity in Tongogara Refugee Camp and surrounding districts and to reflect the priorities and commitments made. Some of the main priorities for technical capacity for the transition that are currently inadequate are on irrigation, development, livelihood and value chain development, community engagement, M&E. UNHCR should also intensify efforts to diversify funds with multilateral and bilateral donors and joint programs to maximize on development funds available in the country and region.

**Review of UNHCR's coordination role on IDP.** UNHCR should, as recommended by the Global Protection Cluster, lead discussions on the reformulation or deactivation of the protection cluster and establishment of an alternative coordination structure for protection and human rights issues in Zimbabwe that may not be led by UNHCR. UNHCR should continue to engage in the new mechanism working through other partners but not as the coordinator.

**Advocacy for conducive legislation for enhancing durable solutions.** UNHCR Zimbabwe should, in conjunction with

other UN agencies maintain advocacy, engagement and technical support for the implementation of GOZ commitments for refugees and persons at risk of statelessness in line with commitments made at the GRF and high level forum on statelessness. There country offers a conducive environment for further legislative changes to align with the positive environment that can be leveraged through strategic joint action that UNHCR can contribute to.

**Resource mobilization and allocation.** UNHCR should prioritize funding for refugees self-reliance primarily through livelihood projects. The approach of sourcing local or regional financiers, accessing UNHCR global funds and increasing the allocation of livelihood funds in UNHCR Zimbabwe's portfolio should be maintained. Increased focus on opportunities from the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus approach and strategic partnerships particularly with development agencies (UN and non-UN) should be fully explored. Whenever feasible, resource allocation should be informed by studies and analysis that will lead to more efficient use of available resources.

**The evaluation report can be found [here](#)**

For more information, please contact Fiona Gatere (gatere@unhcr.org) at the Evaluation Office