



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE37450 – Mahungwe
ethnic group – Botswana – Mozambique –
South Africa – Asylum seekers

1 October 2010

1. Please provide brief background information on the Mahungwe ethnic group.

Sources indicate that the Mahungwe is one of many subgroups comprising Zimbabwe's majority Shona ethnic group.

The World Directory of Minorities states that the Shona-speaking people who form about 77 per cent of the population in Zimbabwe were not a group consciously sharing a cultural or a political identity until the past hundred years. Shona identity was largely the creation of colonial missionaries and administrators who “set about categorizing Shona into clusters or sub-tribes on the basis of largely spurious inferences”. One of the largest blocs in the emergent sub-groupings and hierarchies are the Manyika.¹ Other English language sources refer to the Manyika as the Manhica or Manyica.

“Mahungwe” is referred to as a Manyika dialect in a scholarly article from 1994,² and another authoritative text notes that one of the two primary Manhica dialects is “Maungwe (Hungwe), spoken in the Makoni kingdom”.³

This categorisation suggests that speakers of Mahungwe (or Maungwe or Hungwe) form a somewhat distinct cultural entity within the Manhica subgroup. However, the only direct reference found to the Mahungwe ethnic group names it as parallel to the Manyika, rather than a subgroup of it: a scholarly article in the *Journal of African History* makes passing reference to the Mahungwe as one of several subgroups of the Maswina, stating that “the ‘Maswina’ are divided into smaller sections such as the Karanga, Mazezuru, Mahungwe, Manyika, Korekore, and so on”.⁴ “Maswina” is an alternative, and possibly largely obsolete, term for the Mashona or Shona.⁵

¹ ‘Zimbabwe’ in *World Directory of Minorities* 1997, (ed.) Minority Rights Group, pp. 529-30 – Attachment 1.

² Lafo, M. 1994, ‘Shona Class 5 Revisited: A Case Against *Ri- as Class 5 Nominal Prefix’ in *Zambezia*, vol. XXI (i), at p.58 http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/44/88/36/PDF/shona_cl5.pdf – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 2.

³ Olson, J. S. 1996, *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*, pp. 368-9 – Attachment 3.

⁴ Msindo, E. 2007, ‘Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950 to 1963’, *Journal of African History*, vol.48, p. 279 <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1025/1/Ethnicity.pdf> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 4.

⁵ Reference is made to “[t]he people called ‘Mashona’ or ‘Maswina’” in Werner, A. 1917, ‘The Language of Southern Rhodesia’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, vol.1, p.106 <http://www.archive.org/stream/bulletinorient01univuoft#page/n119/mode/2up> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 5.

From these circuitous references, it would appear that speakers of the Mahungwe or Maungwe (Hungwe) dialect or dialects may constitute or significantly overlap with the Mahungwe ethnic group; however, this remains unclear.

In Zimbabwe's government-owned newspaper, *The Herald*, references were found to the Muangwe tribe of the Rusape district,⁶ "the Maungwe people in the Makoni area of Manicaland"⁷ and "the Maungwe area now known as Makoni."⁸

Searches located no further information on the cultural, social or political constructs of a Mahungwe ethnic group.

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5. Please provide information on Zimbabwean nationals applying for asylum in South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique, including whether it is common for them to do so, and if not why not.

Sources indicate that Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa have each received documented and undocumented arrivals from Zimbabwe in recent years, including asylum seekers. Each country is party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees and has a system for granting refugee status or asylum.

Botswana

Botswana, one of southern Africa's most prosperous nations, has undocumented foreign nationals unofficially estimated to number in the hundreds of thousands and, reportedly, most are from Zimbabwe. Those with a passport are allowed a maximum 90-day annual stay in Botswana and extensions can be granted on written requests.⁹ According to the World Refugee Survey, Botswana hosted approximately 20,000 Zimbabwean refugees and asylum seekers in 2008; there were no reports of refoulement, but figures from the International Organization for Migration indicated that Botswana had deported an average of 4,000 Zimbabweans a month during the first half of 2008.¹⁰

The US Department of State, reporting on human rights practices in 2009, observed that Botswana's system for granting refugee status or asylum is "accessible but slow". Newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers, primarily from Zimbabwe, were held in the Center for

⁶ Mapimhidze, R. 2004, 'Referral Centre for Abused Girls', *The Herald*, 6 March – Attachment 6.

⁷ 'Chedonje School Comes Out Tops At Dance Fest' 2009, *The Herald*, 30 November – Attachment 7.

⁸ Murwira, Z. 2007, 'Amicable Resolution Needed in Chieftainship Talks', *The Herald*, 22 August – Attachment 8.

⁹ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) 2010, 'Botswana: Technology to catch undocumented migrants', UNHCR Refworld website, 1 March <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b960e3ec.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 30.

¹⁰ United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2009, *World Refugee Survey 2009 – Botswana*, 17 June <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2a0c.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 31.

Illegal Immigrants until the governmental Refugee Advisory Committee made a status recommendation; fewer than 100 persons were granted refugee status in 2009.¹¹

Those granted refugee status were transferred to the Dukwe Refugee Camp where almost 3000 lived in “generally adequate” conditions. Approximately 600 registered refugees were living and working outside Dukwe Camp at the beginning of 2009, on special residency permits for a one-year period with the possibility of renewal. However, in June 2009 the government decided to further restrict the ability of registered refugees to live and work outside the camp, with only exceptional cases such as those refugees enrolled in higher education or with “unique skills” being permitted to continue to reside outside the camp.¹²

Freedom House recently reported that illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe were facing increasing xenophobia and are subject to exploitation in the labor market. Freedom House observed that Botswana is building an electric fence along its border with Zimbabwe, “ostensibly to control foot-and-mouth disease among livestock, but the barrier is popularly supported as a means of halting illegal immigration”.¹³

Mozambique

Zimbabwe is not one of the main source countries of asylum seekers in Mozambique, the majority originating from the Democratic Republic of Congo, followed by those from Burundi and Rwanda. Mozambique currently hosts 4,176 asylum seekers, most of whom live in Maratane refugee camp. Asylum seekers are free to move outside the camp after the eligibility interview if they are able to support themselves.¹⁴

In July 2010, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees observed that Mozambique had “shown some reluctance in accepting asylum requests of individuals of certain nationalities” including Zimbabweans. Access to asylum procedures for Zimbabweans continued to be limited, for the Mozambique government had taken the position that the situation in Zimbabwe did not produce a refugee flow. Over a hundred cases of Zimbabwean asylum-seekers who were interviewed by the agency responsible for the reception, registration, accommodation and assistance to asylum seekers and refugees in Mozambique in 2008-2009 were never submitted for a decision on refugee status, “thus leaving Zimbabwean asylum-seekers in a legal limbo”.¹⁵

The US Department of State advises that the Mozambique government provided only “modest assistance” to Zimbabwean citizens entering Mozambique, for it considered them economic

¹¹ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Botswana*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 32.

¹² US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Botswana*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 32.

¹³ Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Botswana (2010)*, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7787> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 33.

¹⁴ UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2010, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Compilation Report – Universal Periodic Review: Mozambique’, July, pp. 1-3 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4c3abd512.pdf> – Accessed 23 September 2010 – Attachment 34.

¹⁵ UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2010, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Compilation Report – Universal Periodic Review: Mozambique’, July, p. 6 <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4c3abd512.pdf> – Accessed 23 September 2010 – Attachment 34.

migrants. Movement within the country was limited for refugees who must request authorisation to move outside the region in which they have been registered or if they reside in the refugee camp and wish to leave the camp's boundaries.¹⁶

Discrimination by police against Zimbabwean immigrants was reported during 2009.¹⁷

South Africa

Independent organisations estimated there were one to three million Zimbabweans in South Africa, and the South African Department of Home Affairs struggled to keep up with processing claims for asylum. Non-governmental organisations found that asylum seekers faced discrimination at health care facilities and by law enforcement representatives.¹⁸

Refugee advocacy organisations have claimed that police and immigration officials have abused asylum seekers and forcefully repatriated some asylum seekers, particularly Zimbabweans, or sought bribes from those seeking permits to remain in the country. Following a wave of xenophobic violence against Zimbabweans and other foreign African migrants in South Africa in 2008, Zimbabwean asylum seekers have remained vulnerable to attacks, reportedly sparked by competition for work.¹⁹

The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants reported in June 2009 that South Africa had a backlog of about 40,000 Zimbabwean asylum applications. According to the report:

Authorities deport Zimbabweans daily for illegal entry regardless of their protection claims and routinely refole African asylum seekers upon arrival at airports without formal opportunity to apply for protection. Authorities deport other refugees and asylum seekers for common crimes or failure to pay bribes. Many refugees and asylum seekers returned to their countries out of fear of xenophobic violence on the part of South African nationals and harassment and detention by South African officials.²⁰

The law prohibits asylum seekers from travelling outside of South Africa without approval from the Department of Home Affairs and failure to comply can result in detention upon return until the claim is resolved.²¹

Human Rights Watch observed in December 2009 that the South African asylum system had failed for some years to provide protection to asylum seekers due to systematic problems, and had been stretched past its capacity by the more recent influx of asylum seekers from Zimbabwe: over 115,000 Zimbabweans applied for asylum in 2008 and estimates in late 2009

¹⁶ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Mozambique*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 35.

¹⁷ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Mozambique*, March, Section 6 – Attachment 35.

¹⁸ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – South Africa*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 36.

¹⁹ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – South Africa*, March, Section 2d – Attachment 36.

²⁰ United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2009, *World Refugee Survey 2009 – South Africa*, 17 June <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2b22.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 37.

²¹ United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2009, *World Refugee Survey 2009 – South Africa*, 17 June <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2b22.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 37.

indicated that up to 1.5 million Zimbabweans may have been in South Africa at that time. According to Human Rights Watch:

Of those Zimbabweans who have applied for asylum, only 1.5 percent were approved for refugee status in 2006 and 2007. The South African government has portrayed undocumented Zimbabwean migrants, and many formal asylum seekers, as ordinary economic migrants, without valid claims to international protection. Moreover, as Human Rights Watch has documented, South Africa's dysfunctional asylum system fails to adequately examine many applications and unjustly rejects many asylum seekers with legitimate refugee claims.

...

The bureaucratic hurdles asylum seekers face place thousands in a kind of extended limbo, as the robust legal protection offered to recognized refugees under South African and International law is continually delayed.²²

Attachments

1. 'Zimbabwe' in *World Directory of Minorities* 1997, (ed) Minority Rights Group, pp. 529-31, Minority Rights Group International. (MRT-RRT Library)
2. Lafo, M. 1994, 'Shona Class 5 Revisited: A Case Against *Ri- as Class 5 Nominal Prefix' in *Zambezia*, vol. XXI (i), at p.58 http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/44/88/36/PDF/shona_cl5.pdf – Accessed 28 September 2010.
3. Olson, J. S. 1996, *The Peoples of Africa: An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*, Greenwood Press. (MRT-RRT Library)
4. Msindo, E. 2007, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950 to 1963', *Journal of African History*, vol.48, pp. 267-90 <http://eprints.ru.ac.za/1025/1/Ethnicity.pdf> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
5. Werner, A. 1917, 'The Language of Southern Rhodesia', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies, University of London*, vol.1, pp.106-8 <http://www.archive.org/stream/bulletinorient01univuoft#page/n119/mode/2up> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
6. Mapimhidze, R. 2004, 'Referral Centre for Abused Girls', *The Herald*, 6 March. (FACTIVA)
7. 'Chedonje School Comes Out Tops At Dance Fest' 2009, *The Herald*, 30 November. (FACTIVA)
8. Murwira, Z. 2007, 'Amicable Resolution Needed in Chieftainship Talks', *The Herald*, 22 August. (FACTIVA)
9. Deleted.

²² Human Rights Watch 2009, *No Healing Here – Violence, Discrimination and Barriers to Health for Migrants in South Africa*, 7 December <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/12/02/no-healing-here?print> – Accessed 28 September 2010 – Attachment 38.

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30. Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) 2010, 'Botswana: Technology to catch undocumented migrants', UNHCR Refworld website, 1 March <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4b960e3ec.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
31. United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2009, *World Refugee Survey 2009 – Botswana*, 17 June <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2a0c.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
32. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Botswana*, March.

33. Freedom House 2010, *Freedom in the World – Botswana (2010)*, June <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2010&country=7787> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
34. UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2010, ‘Submission by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ Compilation Report – Universal Periodic Review: Mozambique’, July <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4c3abd512.pdf> – Accessed 23 September 2010.
35. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – Mozambique*, March.
36. US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2009 – South Africa*, March..
37. United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants 2009, *World Refugee Survey 2009 – South Africa*, 17 June <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a40d2b22.html> – Accessed 28 September 2010.
38. Human Rights Watch 2009, *No Healing Here – Violence, Discrimination and Barriers to Health for Migrants in South Africa*, 7 December <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/SA.pdf> – Accessed 28 September 2010.