

Two-year extension for Zimbabwe and Lesotho permit holders

By [Joseph Chirume](#)

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New permits to be issued to the approximately 233,000 existing permit holders.



Minister of Home Affairs Aaron Motsoaledi announced on Friday that holders of the Lesotho Exemption Permit and the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit will be allowed to remain legally in South Africa until 29 November 2025. Archive photo: Tariro Washinyira | GoundUp

Minister of Home Affairs Aaron Motsoaledi announced on Friday that new permits will be issued for holders of the Lesotho Exemption Permit (LEP) and the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit (ZEP), which will be valid for two more years, until 29 November 2025.

Motsoaledi faced a [litany of litigation](#) from civil society organisations challenging the decision to terminate the LEP (held by about 55,000 people) and the ZEP (held by about 178,000 people) by year end. The High Court had already [extended](#) the ZEP to 28 June 2024.

Permit holders will be entitled to work, seek employment and conduct business.

Motsoaledi said the new exemption permits to be issued will expire on 29 November 2025.

However, holders will not be entitled to apply for permanent residence status and the new permits will not be renewable. A permit holder can also not change their status in the country and must disclose or register all their minor children born and staying in South Africa.

“It is clear that the Minister knew that his original decision was unreasonable, impractical and unenforceable,” said advocate Simba Chitando, one of the lawyers who took government to court.

“ZEP holders have built homes, lives, families in South Africa – doing so perfectly legally. They must be given the opportunity to plan for their lives and not be treated as if they are surplus. It is the minimum of what the Constitution and the rule of law demand,” said Nicole Fritz of the Helen Suzman Foundation, which also [took Home Affairs to court](#).

Fritz welcomed the minister’s announcement.

“The announcement offers tremendous relief to [the permit holders] and their families who have lived in SA perfectly legally for the past 15 years, and have done so by scrupulously observing not only our immigration laws and regulations but all our laws, in that qualification for these permits has required police clearance,” she said.

“Still they have faced tremendous uncertainty and confusion since the minister announced, without notice, consultation or valid reason, the termination of the permits in 2021. This new decision announced today recognises the inherent dignity owed to people, and that is at the heart of our constitutional dispensation.”

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