

MIGRATION FROM ZIMBABWE

Numbers, needs, and policy options



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CDE's 40-page publication 'Migration from Zimbabwe: Numbers, needs, and policy options' reports recent research on migration from Zimbabwe which was presented and discussed at a CDE workshop in November 2007. We hope that this short summary will stimulate interest in the longer report, where the complex issues are treated at greater length.

ACCORDING TO THE International Organisation for Migration (IOM) the South African authorities deported a total of 102 413 illegal migrants to Zimbabwe between January and June 2007, a monthly average of 17 000. This compares with a much lower (but still high) monthly average of 4 000 in 2004.

It is clear then that political instability and economic decline in Zimbabwe are driving cross border migration to South Africa at an accelerating rate. This movement of people in unprec-



edented numbers is also fuelled by South Africa's skills shortages and comparatively robust – in regional perspective at least – growth performance.

In the second half of 2007 the figure of 3 million Zimbabweans in South Africa was widely circulated in the media and by government spokesmen, but when pressed none of those quoted would admit to knowing the original source for this number. Although it is very difficult to estimate with confidence the numbers of Zimbabweans in South Africa, the best available research suggests that a figure of eight hundred thousand to a million could be more accurate than the larger figure of 3 million.

The Zimbabwe exodus poses numerous problems for South African immigration policy and its implementation. For instance Zimbabwean applications for asylum are the second largest component in a backlog which by 2007 had reached 144 000 despite what the department of Home Affairs called 'concerted efforts' to reduce it.

However there are opportunities as well as challenges for South Africa in receiving this influx of people. According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) of the 17086 evaluations of qualifications it performed between January and September 2007, 9756 (57%) were for the purpose of processing Zimbabweans' work permit applications. This suggests quite a high level of skills among the migrants.

In order to broaden and inform the policy debate on these challenges of Zimbabwean migration to South Africa, CDE commissioned research on several aspects of the issue. Here is what we found.

WHO ARE THE ZIMBABWE MIGRANTS IN JOHANNESBURG?

A survey of 4654 Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, conducted in mid-2007 produced the following key findings:

- 92% of the sample had migrated between 2000-2007
- The reason for leaving varied with the year of departure:
 - For 2002-2006, the majority cited political reasons
 - For 2007: the majority cited unemployment as a main driver
- The majority of migrants were aged between 21 and 40 years.
- The top need cited by migrants was for access to refugee status, with the second need being the expressed desire for assistance with setting up a business
- The majority of the sample possessed matriculation and over 30% had a post-secondary education
- The majority of respondents used informal remittance avenues (bus or taxi drivers) rather than formal banking channels

PATTERNS OF MIGRATION FROM ZIMBABWE

More women and children – increasingly including unaccompanied minors – are arriving in South Africa. The origins and destinations of migrants are showing more variation: arriv-



als from the more northern areas of Zimbabwe are reported as increasing, and a significant proportion of Zimbabwean arrivals now congregate in urban centres, as opposed to border areas. Many Zimbabweans rely on regular traffic of people and commodities to and from South Africa. Hampering this circular migration would make the situation in Zimbabwe worse. South Africa needs a clear line of authority and responsibility to deal with these issues, as well as the complicating factor of an increased volume of unaccompanied minors. At the moment however there is neither a national nor a regional (SADC) policy framework for this kind of situation, while no one government department seems to have responsibility for coordinating policy and implementation – including humanitarian issues – on undocumented migration.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Amid Zimbabwe's continuing political uncertainties, push factors of continued economic decay – inflation, shortages of all essential goods, rocketing unemployment, deteriorating social service delivery – will persist. South Africa's relatively robust economic performance will continue to exert a similar range of pull factors. Whatever the prospects of political settlement, recovery will be a long and difficult haul and cross border migration is set to remain a challenge to South African policy makers.

SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY RESPONSES TO ZIMBABWEAN MIGRATION

In spite of reports of increasing numbers of Zimbabwean migrants arriving in the country, national government has been relatively silent on a policy solution to this trend. The Minister of Home Affairs, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nkaqula, has acknowledged the need for a “new approach” towards irregular migration, recognising both the unsustainable costs of detention and repatriation, and the futility of these processes when deportees continue to return to South Africa. However, there have been no steps forward on this issue, and the asylum claims system appears to be carrying much of the weight of incoming migrants from Zimbabwe. Temporary residency permits were floated by the Department of Home Affairs in 2007, but the department has not followed through with this suggestion. Another policy avenue open to government is to revisit the SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons, a statement in favour of the principle of freer movement of people in the region. Any attempt to base policies on the ideals of the Protocol would in practice require these policies to take into account the uneven economic realities of the region and align them with South Africa's national interests, since it is the destination for most of the migration in the region.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Among the key points to emerge from CDE's work are:

Authoritative numbers on migration from Zimbabwe remain elusive. However survey evidence and deduction from what we know about Zimbabwe's population statistics suggest that the higher estimates – 3 million is one – are unlikely to be true figures and perhaps 1 million recent migrants is the best estimate we have at this moment.



Although there has been a rapid escalation in numbers since Zimbabwe's crises escalated in 2000, migration from Zimbabwe has been going on for a long time and is made up of many types of people in whose lives migration plays different parts. Some are seeking temporary refuge, others circulate between Zimbabwe and South Africa, trading or sending remittances, while still others remain and build lives here.

No immediate respite from continuing migration can be expected.

South Africa has assumed demanding obligations towards refugees and asylum seekers under international law, but according to critics is failing to discharge them effectively.

As much if not more than any public policy issue, migration management policies need to retain public confidence. However concerns for human rights and the skilled labour needs of the economy are often at variance with popular disquiet about border control, bogus claims to asylum, perceived preferential treatment for foreigners over locals and consumption of public resources, as well as competition in the labour market. These concerns have to be taken seriously even – especially – by those who are in principle in favour of migration (especially skilled migration) as workable and realistic policies

Crisis or no crisis, the differentials between South Africa and its regional neighbours – in economic opportunity, service provision and even social welfare – are not going away and neither is the in-migration attracted by these differentials. Many issues are raised by these facts. Consequently, there has to be a policy discussion about them that is rooted in realistic appraisal of South Africa's interests and capabilities and which is aimed at establishing broad-based public confidence in the country's migration policy. Some of the critical issues include:

- How do we deal with the gap between obligations and delivery in refugee and asylum matters? Is it purely a matter of bureaucratic capacity?
- Are the burdens of coping with an exodus from an increasingly intolerable Zimbabwe South Africa's alone or should they be internationalised?
- What are the realistic limits, costs and benefits of attempts to control people flows? For example does the failure of the 'arrest, detain, deport' policy mean we should look for alternatives or devote greater efforts – including re-assigning responsibility for it – to its operation?
- Are we making enough use of the skills Zimbabwean migrants have to offer to fill the skills gaps that are a constraint on South Africa's growth? Can we make greater and better use of them?
- What are the actual impacts of migration on crime, and service delivery including health, education and welfare – especially given the ease of integration of Southern African migrants and apparent ease in fraudulently obtaining identity documents?
- What do the migrants contribute to the South African economy?

The absence of convincing answers to these challenging questions about the Zimbabwean situation highlights a lack of realism and failure of leadership within South Africa on the crucial issues of regional migration. These shortcomings are summed up in President Mbeki's remarks to the National Assembly in May 2007:



As for Zimbabweans who enter South Africa legally, well, they enter South Africa legally and there wouldn't be any need to do anything about that, but as to this other influx of illegal people, I personally think it's something that we have to live with. ... You can't put a Great Wall of China between South Africa and Zimbabwe to stop people walking across ...

This rather passive attitude carries dangers with it. Experience from other countries – notably the UK and other European states – makes clear that failure to take charge of refugee and asylum issues and demonstrate the ability not only to be generous but administratively efficient in discharging obligations, risks discrediting all forms of migration in the eyes of the public.

Immigrants – at all skills levels – have contributed significantly to South Africa's economic success and could contribute much more. If a well-managed immigration policy is to facilitate that potential contribution, it is essential that every aspect of migration issues, humanitarian, emergency, economic and political should be managed with the decisiveness and effectiveness that brings public confidence. ■



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