

Causes of Irregular Migration of People from Zimbabwe to South Africa in the Post-Mugabe Regime

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Abstract

Irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa has continued, unabated, after the demise of the Mugabe regime. There is a need to understand the motivation behind this dramatic rise in irregular migration following Mugabe's decline. This paper explored the causes of irregular migrations from Zimbabwe to South Africa. The study adopted a case study research design. The target population constituted irregular migrants in Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. A sample of 10 respondents was selected using purposive sampling from Mwenezi district. Data were collected through interviews and secondary sources. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that contemporary irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa is driven by a combination of several political, socio-economic, and environmental factors such as poverty, low wages, the inaccessibility of passports and human rights violations. This study concluded that irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa is primarily a response to the political and economic instability in Zimbabwe, which is pushing desperate people to cross the border of South Africa illegally. Therefore, this research recommends that the circumstances that cause people to migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa must be addressed rather than focusing on enforcing strict immigration policies alone.

Keywords: *Irregular migration, Migration causes, Migration motivation, Migration drivers, Mwenezi district, Zimbabwe migration, South Africa immigrants*

1. Introduction

Irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa continues unabated. Over the past two decades, many qualified and unskilled Zimbabweans have left the country due to the country's protracted socio-economic and political crisis (Crush & Tevera, 2010; Derman & Kaarhuis, 2013). Nearly 3.4 million Zimbabweans, or around a quarter of Zimbabwe's population, have migrated to South Africa to escape poverty (Meldrum, 2011). Zimbabwe remains the largest contributor of irregular migrants to South Africa (Crush et al., 2015). The dawn of the new dispensation following the inauguration of Emmerson Mnangagwa as President of Zimbabwe in November 2017 revived the country's hopes for change and economic development. The new administration has taken over from the late former president, Robert Mugabe, who has held power by undemocratic means for almost four decades. Zimbabweans expected the nation to be restored after the 'Zimbabwe is open for business mantra'. Some believed that Zimbabwe, rising from being a basket case, will once again be the breadbasket of Africa. Sadly, all dreams have barely been lost in three years. The current government appears to be replicating the past, if not replacing the isocracy with a more autocratic regime.

The economy of the country is hit by hyperinflation of more than 700 per cent, unemployment, chronic poverty, and severe human rights violations (World Food Programme (WFP), 2020). The outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic has left more people without access to basic needs, such as food and medicines. Approximately 1.8 million Zimbabweans require food assistance and are living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per day (Elver, 2019). These economic woes are pushing people to embark on irregular migration in search of greener pastures in neighbouring countries. Zimbabwean migrants are present in more than 122 countries around the world, with most migration destinations being South Africa, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia (Chikanda & Crush, 2018). The majority of Zimbabwean migrants scattered in developed countries are skilled compared to less skilled migrants in neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia (Chaumba, 2015; Chikanda, 2011).

The post-Mugabe era saw a renewed exodus of migrants from Zimbabwe to neighbouring countries, particularly South Africa. The number of Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa ranges from 3 to 5 million (IOM, 2020; Crush et al., 2017). More than 460 000 Zimbabweans have migrated to South Africa since the general election in Zimbabwe in July 2018 (Moyo, 2019). The number of Zimbabweans crossing the border to South Africa has doubled from 400 to 800 every day, excluding irregular migrants who make up a more significant percentage of the unidentified population (Moyo, 2019). Many irregular migrants reach South Africa without legal documentation; thus, their exact number is unknown. The ongoing political and economic meltdown in Zimbabwe is involuntarily driving people to South Africa in search of economic independence and better living conditions. The unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is over 90 per cent, combined with hyperinflation over 700 per cent (Moyo, 2019; Trade Economics, 2020). Zimbabwe is the primary source of both irregular and regular migrants to South Africa (Crush et al., 2017).

South Africa is the preferred destination for irregular migrants from Zimbabwe due to its relative economic strength (de Jager and Musuva, 2016). The district of Mwenezi was appropriate because it is situated 164 km from the border post of Beitbridge, which is the official entry point from Zimbabwe to South Africa; around two and a half hours drive to the border post of Beitbridge. Due to its proximity, many people are moving to South Africa with or without legal papers. The potential to gather rich knowledge as to why people move irregularly from Mwenezi was strong relative to other districts in Masvingo, which are located far from the Beitbridge border post. South Africa is a 'beacon of hope' for refugees from all over Southern Africa and beyond (Polzer, 2008). The influx of undocumented migrants from Zimbabwe is leading the Government of South Africa to enforce strict immigration rules to counter the mass exodus of Zimbabweans that is straining its economy (Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017). The steps introduced to monitor undocumented migrants include mass arrests and deportations of undocumented migrants (Crush and Skinner, 2017). Nevertheless, these stringent immigration measures have failed to stop irregular migrants. Instead, the social welfare of migrants in South Africa is deteriorating as the number of irregular migrants continues to rise (Crush et al., 2017).

The enforcement of restrictive policies against irregular migrants is draining considerable financial resources from the Government of South Africa, which is fomenting racism, general

hostility, stereotyping and xenophobic violence against Zimbabweans and other foreigners (Moyo, 2020; Landau, 2011). Unskilled and semi-qualified irregular migrants working in the informal sector are at high risk of xenophobia attacks in South Africa (de Haas et al., 2016). The Government of South Africa lacks accurate and credible statistics on the number, demographics, or location of Zimbabweans, which undermines the government's ability to prepare and offer appropriate services to this large population (de Jager and Musuva, 2016). The proximity of South Africa to Zimbabwe makes it a convenient destination for irregular Zimbabwean migrants. Rife corruption and poor border protection are both exacerbating the influx of undocumented Zimbabwean migrants into South Africa. It is essential to understand the reality of the situation regarding the reasons for illegal migration between these two neighbouring countries.

The concept of irregular migration entails overstaying a visa, crossing borders with fake documents, failing to comply with the legal conditions of the country of destination or children born to irregular parents (Vickstrom, 2014). Irregular migration may be the result of a change in personal opportunities, decisions or government policies that limit the ability of legal channels (Cheliatis, 2017; Anderson & Ruhs, 2010). Theoretically, this paper is based on Lee's 'Push and Pull' migration theory. The theory underpins that migration is caused by factors such as high unemployment, low incomes and inadequate health care systems and pull factors such as job opportunities, affordable medical services, and competitive wages (Lee, 1966; Muyambo & Ranga, 2020). In other words, the theory reveals that migration is driven by socio-economic, political, and environmental factors related to the source and destination areas (Maphosa & Ntau, 2018). Irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa fits the Lee model as migrants are motivated by more excellent job opportunities, affordable health care, peace, and freedom (de Jager & Musuva, 2016). Some factors such as network links, cultural congruity, and linguistic similarity are closely linked to the push and pull factors of Zimbabwean irregular migrants to South Africa. Networks, cultural and linguistic similarities act as exacerbating factors that lead many Zimbabweans to prefer South Africa as their destination rather than other neighbouring countries such as Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia (Muyambo & Ranga, 2020). Certain personal considerations, such as the experience of the real condition in the country of destination, play an irrelevant role when it comes to disgruntled Zimbabweans. The Lee's push and pull theory of migration is therefore engaging in explaining the on going movement of irregular migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa, as the trend is primarily driven by the political and socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe.

Irregular migration from Zimbabwe to South Africa in the post-Mugabe era is a new phenomenon which is currently underexplored. Research is needed on this topic to fill this research gap and understand why people migrate illegally despite strict border protection. This is essentially the first step towards addressing the problem of irregular migration affecting both Zimbabwe and South Africa. Therefore, this study intended to establish the causes of irregular migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa, particularly focussing on the case of Mwenezi district in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe.

2. Methodology

The study employed case study design. This aimed at accessing in-depth information from the respondents with reference to the causes of irregular migration of people from Zimbabwe to South Africa. The target population of the study was irregular migrants located in the Mwenezi district of Masvingo. A sample of 10 irregular migrants was selected from irregular migrants in the Mwenezi district using purposive sampling. The researcher interviewed a couple of the respondents because he wanted to get a deeper understanding of their motives for venturing into irregular migration that could not be achieved with a larger sample. The next explanation is that the research was concerned with a deeper understanding of the case in its actual settings rather than with the generalizability of the findings. Thus, a small sample was necessary, cost-effective, and sufficient to address the research problem. Data were collected through interviews and secondary sources.

The respondents were asked unstructured questions in order to understand the reasons that drive them to move irregularly to South Africa. Interview questions centred on why migrants choose South Africa as their destination country, why they want to move to South Africa without proper documentation, employment status, survival challenges in Zimbabwe, and how they expect to regularise their status when they arrive in South Africa. Interviews run about 15 and 30 minutes. The researcher used his expertise and judgement to pick experienced participants based on their comprehension of the topic (Creswell, 2014; Bernard, 2009). Put differently; the researcher interviewed the respondents who suggested that they had already emigrated to South Africa without documents.

In addition to primary data, secondary sources were also crucial in complimenting the interviews. A thorough literature review was conducted. The literature analysed includes published journal papers on migration-related to the irregular flow of migrants from Zimbabwe to South Africa. Several documents concentrated on socio-economic issues, some on remittances and jobs. Only critical articles linked to the research problem of this paper were reviewed. The motives of migrants reported by other studies have been contrasted to the first-hand knowledge gathered from interviews with different participants in Mwenezi. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, and the results were reported chronologically in accordance with the study objectives. The reliability of the findings was strengthened by the tradition of critical flexibility, whereby prejudice was avoided by separating the opinions of the researcher and the perceptions of the respondents (Flyvbjerg, 2011). To maintain transparency, the researcher explained the method of data collection and analysis so that it can be tracked by the readers. The findings were compared with information found by other researchers in the literature analysed on irregular migration to determine relevance. The results of this study are, therefore, confirmable, as all steps to ensure trustworthiness have been exhausted.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Data

The respondents were irregular migrants residing in the Mwenezi district of Masvingo province. The respondents had varying backgrounds in terms of gender, employment, occupation, and age. The interviewees included 4 female and 6 irregular male migrants. The representation was well balanced as males constitutes the largest population of people who

migrate irregularly as compared to females participants. Five (5) of them were graduates with university degrees in various disciplines, in particular human resources, medicine and political science. Two (2) participants were trained nurses, while the other 3 were informal employees working in construction and painting.

3.2 Political Causes

Zimbabwe's political and economic instability is the underlying impetus for irregular migration from the country to South Africa. At the same moment, the deterioration of the political system denigrates the country's economic and social systems, undermining citizens' livelihoods (Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017). Zimbabwe's political climate today is characterised by widespread civil repression, inequality, and human rights violations. The creation of a full hegemony of the dominant party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), is destabilising every province in the country, exacerbating the issue of irregular migration and internal displacement (Potts, 2010). Masvingo is one of the provinces of Zimbabwe that has been plagued by civil instability since 2000 during the Fast Track Land Reform Program. Opposition political parties control the province; thus, critics are deemed dissidents and strictly attacked. ZANU-PF triggers political violence in a number of ways, including intimidation, kidnapping of opposition members, rape, and arbitrary beatings. The main goal is to suppress opposition opinions (Zanamwe and Devillard, 2018). One of the respondents interviewed stated that:

My life is in danger because I belong to the opposition MDC Alliance political party. Even donor food I am denied because it is said that I do not belong to ZANU-PF.

On the other hand, the collapse of the judiciary system of Zimbabwe nurtures impunity. The judiciary is not autonomous, and this compromises justice when the perpetrators of violence are ZANU-PF cadres (Maphosa and Ntau, 2018). ZANU-PF perpetrators are immune to punishment, even in the highest courts of the land. Lack of political will by the new government elected in August 2018 exacerbates irregular migration to bordering countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho, and Mozambique. Another respondent said:

With the current situation in the country it is better to go to South Africa, maybe we can get a better life there. If you complain about misrule you will be arrested especially if you belong to the opposition party.

3.3 Accessibility of Passports

The national registration office in Zimbabwe, Makombe, has been experiencing a massive backlog of about 400 000 passports since 2018 owing to a scarcity of passport paper and toner. Hundreds of Zimbabweans are applying for passports to escape the country's extreme economic and political turmoil, but passport offices are overloaded (Xinhua, 2020). For example, only 60 passports are issued per day by the Central Registrar's Office in Zimbabwe, which is a redundant figure far below the number of applications accepted daily by the Office (Munhende, 2019). Weak administration, exacerbated by corruption, is pushing poor Zimbabweans to cross borders illegally in pursuit of better living standards. On the other

hand, irregular migration compromises the integrity and personal welfare of undocumented migrants (Maphosa, 2007). Many respondents have shown annoyance at delays in applying for passports, which takes indefinite time due to a shortage of foreign currency in the country. One of the graduate interviewees responded:

We also need to get passports but then you need to renew your expired passport and you come to the registrar office and they say to you we do not have the paper to print the passports so apply but it will come out after six months, so we will just go to South Africa without the papers because we need to survive.

Most citizens in Zimbabwe now survive on cross-border trade (Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017). When passports are not easily accessible, citizens would have no alternative but to cross borders illegally. The shortage of identification documentation owing to bureaucratic obstacles contributes to irregular migration, a recurrent trend needing urgent action to curb the potential mass influx of Zimbabweans to South Africa. The plight of undocumented migrants poses a variety of problems in South Africa as migrants increase the conflict over scarce resources. Nonetheless, the government of South Africa is inept to offer facilities to unknown migrant numbers owing to a lack of credible and accurate statistics on the number of irregular migrants in the country (Crush et al., 2017). Irregular migration from Zimbabwe put a heavy strain on neighbouring countries, including South Africa, and the problem can never spare the development of the entire SADC region.

3.4 Economic Causes

Motivations for irregular migration are connected to the extreme poverty in Zimbabwe (Zanamwe and Devillard, 2018; Dzingirai et al., 2014). Irregular migrants are typically individuals who have lost their jobs; or others who are struggling to find employment opportunities owing to the closing of industries (Raftopolous, 2011). Most irregular migrants come from communities or households where per capita consumption is lower than the poverty datum line of \$1.90 per day (Elver, 2019). The extent of poverty in Zimbabwe has grown to unprecedented levels. Approximately 80 per cent of the population in rural areas is abysmal, contrasted with fewer than 40 per cent of the population in urban areas (de Jager et al., 2016). Deprivation leads households to pursue irregular migration as a survival tactic due to delays in the issuance of valid travel documents. Some of the graduates also claimed: Finding a job in this country nowadays is a challenge. We have certificates but we do not have jobs so if we look for jobs in South Africa, we can better help our families.

There is a common belief that life is pleasant in South Africa. Irregular migrants interviewed have downplayed the difficulties that are expected to be encountered on the road to South Africa and on arrival. The respondents have claimed that they do not think much about prejudice or exclusion in South Africa, what they really want is to move out of Zimbabwe. In fact, remittances have been a vital stream of income for most households since the economic downturn (Crush et al., 2015). A survey conducted by Maphosa and Ntau in South Africa showed that 80 per cent of respondents sent money to their families in Zimbabwe (2018). Transfers in the form of remittances are ameliorating poverty in the country, as many people in the diaspora send money over informal and formal channels (Ratha, 2018). Official channels include money transfer agencies such as Western Union and MoneyGram. Standard

channels are primarily used by legitimate migrants who have travel documents. In the case of irregular migrants without legal documents, Mukuru.com is the general agent for sending money from South Africa to Zimbabwe because it does not require a lot of details about the sender (de Jager and Musuva, 2016).

Informal networks include the posting of goods and packages by cross-country trucks and bus drivers. The economic difficulties in Zimbabwe continue to drive the flight of professional and semi-qualified citizens to South Africa in pursuit of jobs (Zanamwe and Devillard, 2018). Unemployment, the share of the unemployed but accessible to and finding employment, induces the working-age population, particularly the youth, to emigrate to South Africa (UNDESA, 2017). One of the interviewees stated that:

If you go to South Africa, you will not have to worry about making money plus things are cheap. Things here are more expensive so even suffering in South Africa is better than suffering in your own country.

3.5 Social Causes

The increasing collapse of basic infrastructure such as health and education systems in Zimbabwe has driven stranded citizens to migrate to the diaspora in pursuit of improved living standards in places such as South Africa, Botswana, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada (de Jager and Musuva, 2016). The migration of qualified employees, including health staff, lecturers, and students, is primarily a response to the rapid downturn in the economy, which had a detrimental effect on job conditions and remuneration (Landau, 2011). Attractive pay and job opportunities abroad have an adverse impact on the brain-drain phenomena when many professionals leave the country. Zimbabwe is now a training ground for neighbouring countries such as South Africa, the main destination of many Zimbabwean graduates (Potts, 2010). A survey conducted by Tawodzera in various universities in Zimbabwe indicates that more graduates are planning to migrate to the diaspora after graduation (2017). Students in Zimbabwean universities are likely to migrate more than students elsewhere in the SADC region.

Social networks have a major part to play in triggering irregular migration to South Africa. According to the principle of social capital, migration will not take place in a social vacuum; the destination countries would therefore be determined by networks and relations (Muyambo and Ranga, 2020). Social networking systems, including family ties and friendships, facilitate the process of irregular migration (Tawodzera et al., 2015). Stranded people in Zimbabwe are under pressure from friends and families with whom they communicate, which makes them want to cross the border illegally. Explaining why some people end up being irregular migrants, the interviewees said:

By talking to people living in South Africa you will find that life is good there, so if you have someone you know who is there it is easy to cross because you can find a place to stay while you are looking for a job.

3.6 Environmental Causes

Current food insecurity challenges in Zimbabwe have worsened irregular migration. A poor agricultural season in 2019 due to the El Niño induced drought worsened food insecurity; as a result, miserable poverty has hit many households. According to the WFP (2020), 1.8 million people are food insecure across all the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. Poverty is also triggering a major deterioration of the economic and social services that support people's livelihoods, such as the health and education sectors. Irregular migration remains the only route to avoid severe poverty in the country. Asked why they are having to resort to irregular migration, the respondents said:

The famine is severe here in Masvingo province because there is not enough rain to get a good harvest, so we have to go out to look for food for the families who are starving here.

Respondents felt that migrating to South Africa is the immediate solution to earn a living as the food crisis in Zimbabwe is worsening due to price hikes of basic commodities. They indicated that, sometimes, they would only cross the border to buy bulk food groceries as they cannot afford to buy the same quantities in Zimbabwe. However, irregular migrants create intense pressure on scarce resources in South Africa which incites conflict and hatred. Tawodzera et al. (2015) posit that migrants scattered across various cities of South Africa have contributed to the problem of urban food security because many irregular migrants force themselves into large cities like Cape Town, Pretoria, and Johannesburg. Cognisant of that, after a cost-benefit analysis, poor households in Zimbabwe migrate to South Africa to cushion themselves from poverty and food shortages. The lack of institutional and political will to ameliorate poverty in Zimbabwe is endangering continuous irregular migration, further posing grievous constraints on the economy of South Africa that would likely destabilise the relations of the two sister countries. Labour migration is a response to food insecurity as migrants anticipate remitting to their families once they settle in South Africa.

4. Discussion

The movement of irregular migrants from Zimbabwe to neighbouring countries is ample proof that the ongoing socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe is getting completely out of hand (Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017). Zimbabwe has ceased to be the recipient of migrants across Southern Africa in two decades to be a global sending country (Crush and Ramachandran, 2015). Perennial infighting between ZANU-PF and the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance; the largest opposition group has culminated in large waves of irregular migrants fleeing repression, violence, and unlawful arrest. ZANU-PF has a history of brutalising opposition supporters to preserve its political dominance. Teachers and nurses make up the greatest number of irregular migrants who migrate to South Africa, putting the social care system in desperate need of human capital. Even highly qualified citizens with valid travel documentation like passports and visas frequently turn to irregular migration to save their lives from persecution. Many young people see South Africa as a country of hope. They are distressed by the economic crisis in Zimbabwe. They want to work to create a life, but the nation has few opportunities, and they are willing to do whatever it takes to stay in South Africa. Most irregular migrants are young people between the ages of 18 and 35, hence migrant-sending households are extremely susceptible due to the loss of the energetic

working force of young women and men. The country's potential for economic reconstruction is therefore slowed by the loss of productive labour to neighbouring countries, especially remote parts of the country reliant on agriculture such as Mwenezi district.

Irregular migration has been a way of life for many families in Zimbabwe, with around 84 per cent of households having at least one family member staying in South Africa (Chikanda and Tawodzera, 2017). Via networking, migration euphoria is spread among cultures that allow many citizens to migrate without considering risks associated with illegal migration. Many irregular migrants were deported, others remanded, and crocodiles along the Limpopo river devoured some as they tried to evade the Beitbridge border to South Africa. The deterioration of the social services in the country is leading vulnerable people to risk their lives through irregular migration to South Africa. Climate change in the form of extreme droughts has intensified food shortages and hunger throughout the provinces of Zimbabwe. Due to drought, cattle are starving, crops are wilting, and supplies of clean water are low, causing citizens to abandon their homes in search of green pastures. The agriculture sector, which used to be the main job centre for non-skilled employees, is no longer drawing more labour than before due to drought (Tawodzera, 2017). Lack of sufficient food in provinces close to border posts such as Beitbridge, Masvingo and Bulawayo, where famine is a yearly tragedy, forces people to cross borders to seek employment. The plight of climate change-induced mobility is not only peculiar to Zimbabwe and South Africa, but also to the SADC as a region due to its geographical location.

5. Conclusion

Zimbabwe's political, socio-economic, and environmental problems cause many residents to migrate irregularly to South Africa to protect their livelihoods. Due to the ongoing political and economic instability in Zimbabwe, the phenomenon of irregular migration is likely to increase. This paper looked at the motivations for citizens to emigrate illegally to South Africa. Some of the factors mentioned include delays in the issuance of travel documents, such as visas, rising unemployment, violence, political chaos, and drought. Without looking at various factors that encourage people to migrate at a particular moment, the problem of irregular migration cannot be understood. However, the life of many migrants from Zimbabwe is not always pleasant in South Africa. The welfare of irregular migrants in South Africa is at stake due to mounting hatred and xenophobic attacks as natives perceive foreigners as security threats who also steal their jobs away. Massive irregular migration presents several negative impacts on the economy of Zimbabwe such as brain-drain. In South Africa, irregular migrants from Zimbabwe strains the country's economy through increasing pressure on social services and costs accompanied during massive deportations. This paper recommends the sustainable management of irregular migration through the integration of undocumented. Integration protects the welfare of migrants in destination societies and minimises the euphoria for irregular migration. The Government of Zimbabwe should address the current political and economic impasse to reduce the number of irregular migrants fleeing to neighbouring countries in search of better living conditions. As such, the sustainable way of handling the conundrum of irregular migration is not through the enforcement of stringent immigration policy alone, but through organised management, as migration is a never-ending catastrophe due to globalisation which brought accessible communication and transportation. Therefore, understanding the motivations of irregular migration will go a long way in the

management of this phenomenon which could potentially lead to sustainable development in the entire SADC region.

About Author

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