

# A critical analysis of the recruitment and experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in the UK

## Abstract

This paper presents a critical analysis of the recruitment, living and working experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK since the late 90s to date, the general context of social work in terms of staff shortage, migration issues and the recruitment of overseas social workers in UK in general and in particular, those from Zimbabwe. The paper also highlights in more specific and general terms the experiences encountered by overseas Zimbabwean social workers in the UK. There is also focus on the social workers' resilience and determination to succeed in a foreign land, which helped them to adjust to the new environment and deal effectively with the professional and personal challenges they encountered. These include understanding children's social care system in UK, racism, discrimination and problems associated with their assimilation into the wider British society. The paper also highlights the fact that overseas social workers found crossing international borders to practice social work was not as easy as initially anticipated given the context specific nature of social work in the UK. The above was cited as one of the significant challenges faced by overseas Zimbabwean social workers in England. Their experiences, which were largely of a professional and social nature, were found to be varied and diverse, consistent with the forces of globalisation and social workers' migration trajectories. Their experiences help to shape policy making in future as well as help in conducting further research on their experiences and kindred issues.

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## Introduction

This paper seeks to provide a critical analysis of the recruitment, living and working experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK since the late 90s to date. The paper reviews information and evidence available in relation to the above group, how these social workers were recruited and have managed to cope with life in the UK and selected phenomena. To understand the recruitment process, personal and professional experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in England, one needs to also understand the background issues underpinning the above phenomenon. The above issues also have a bearing on wider migration issues as such as *push and pull factors* behind their decision to emigrate for greener pastures abroad in UK.

This paper is mainly based on the primary research by Chogugudza,<sup>1</sup> on the experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK and literature from other authors who have researched and written on similar issues in the UK. In this paper the focus is on overseas Zimbabwean social workers in the UK but the issues highlighted also affect other groups of international social workers in the UK. Overseas Zimbabwean social workers are part of a larger group of international social work professionals who have been recruited into the English children's social care system from different parts of the globe. It is important to note that a number of important texts have been intentionally omitted in the attempt to keep the focus on Zimbabwean social workers in UK. Information and evidence on the recruitment of overseas social workers in England in general is relatively new, limited but gradually developing. There is a scarcity of research and information in the public domain about the recruitment to England of African social workers from abroad particularly from the small southern African country of Zimbabwe. Only a small number of studies have begun to identify some of the challenges and benefits of

employing internationally educated social workers among others.<sup>2-4</sup>

According to Social Work Task Force,<sup>5</sup> staffing shortages mean that social work is struggling to hold its own as a durable, attractive public-sector profession, compromising its ability to deliver consistent quality on the frontline. There is wide agreement by scholars such as Evans,<sup>6,7</sup> White,<sup>8</sup> Lyons,<sup>9</sup> Hussein,<sup>3,10</sup> and Hanna<sup>11</sup> among others, that research in the broader area of overseas social worker migration is patchy and under-developed and needs further development.

## What is known about wider social worker migration

The migration of social workers from Africa, Europe or any other parts of the globe cannot be analysed in isolation, as it is essentially part of the wider international migration phenomenon. Unlike in the Health Sector, the migration of social workers particularly into the UK is a relatively recent phenomenon. While migration is as old as humanity itself, theories about migration are new.<sup>12</sup> Migration is the result of the interplay of various forces at both ends of the migratory axis. These factors are political, social, economic, legal, historical, cultural, or educational.<sup>13</sup> It is generally accepted that *push factors* are found in the sending countries and *pull factors* are found in the destination countries, hence the pattern has been from developing to developed rich western countries. Further, according to Yaro,<sup>14</sup> both forces must be operating for migration to occur and additionally, facilitating factors must be present as well, such as the absence of legal or other constraints that impede migration, factors usually controlled by governments.

Overseas Zimbabwean social workers are not immune from the same factors experienced by other immigrants from various parts of the developing world. The social work profession from whichever geographical location has not only become part of the global migration phenomenon but a conspicuous feature of the process of globalisation

as well. Social workers from Zimbabwe, perceived as knowledge carriers, can therefore be seen as part of the global migratory trend of the profession in crossing international frontiers.<sup>1</sup>

### Why social workers migrate abroad

One of the main reasons why social workers across international borders to the UK is to fill vacant posts, especially in the Children's Social Care sector, where in some parts of England there has been a longstanding shortage of frontline social workers. McAlister<sup>15</sup> contends that due to the nature and extent of the problems facing the children's social work profession, the vacancy rates have continued to increase. Despite recent improvements in the number of people training to be social workers, the profession continued at that time to be listed on the official shortage occupation list and the number of vacant jobs remained relatively high compared to other public-sector professions. This shortage as described above is the pull factor for most of the social workers recruited from developing countries including Zimbabwe.

### Overseas social worker recruitment in England

Overseas Zimbabwean social workers have been part of the wider international recruitment of social workers. An analysis of the available literature suggests that the recruitment of overseas social workers to the UK rose in the late 1990s to the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with large numbers of social workers initially coming from countries such as South Africa, the USA, Australia, India, Canada, and New Zealand.

According to Hanna<sup>11</sup> the recruitment of international social workers to the UK has tended to be predominantly from English speaking countries, but there are indications of an increasing trend towards the recruitment from other EU countries in recent times, relative to the previous pattern of recruitment of social workers from countries in the Commonwealth or the USA. However, there is also evidence to suggest the recruitment of social workers from developing countries such as Zimbabwe, India and South Africa as indicated in the table below.

According to an August 2011 Freedom of Information Act Request by Charles Bell, there were 6,682 internationally qualified social workers on the GSCC register. The IQ (Internationally Qualified) Qualifications by Country of Training file provides details by country. This information was accurate as at 24 August 2011.

Below is a Table 1 showing top source countries of Social Workers to the UK.

In 2017, more than 450 social workers from overseas came to work in the UK from places like Zimbabwe, Romania, Portugal, Australia and India. This group marks a small but important part of the overall social work workforce—there are more than 26,000 children and families social workers in England alone. But it is also growing, with figures obtained by Community Care from the UK social work regulators showing the numbers of annual overseas registrants more than tripled, from 113 to 473, between 2012 and 2016. The most significant increase has been in England, where the number of overseas social workers registered with the HCPC rose from 79 to 416 over the four-year period, partly due to some local authorities stepping up efforts to recruit from abroad after finding it difficult to attract experienced social workers.<sup>16</sup>

The trend of international recruitment of social workers in England has probably continued in the last few years, though with changes

in sending countries. In as much as the recruitment of international social workers is significant for local authorities experiencing acute shortages of childcare social workers, overseas recruitment nevertheless remains controversial in many ways and debates continue around the issue.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1** GSCC: The IQ (Internationally Qualified) qualifications by country of training (2011)

GSCC: Top countries supplying social workers to England	Number of social workers
1. South Africa	1130
2. India	1089
3. Australia	937
4. USA	891
5. Germany	452
6. Romania	431
7. Canada	340
8. Zimbabwe	322
9. New Zealand	305
10. Poland	218
11. Ghana	172
12. Spain	136
13. Nigeria	120

The recruitment of social workers from overseas is increasingly a global phenomenon, but there are currently no international equivalence requirements for social workers according to the International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work.<sup>17</sup> This means that each country determines their own standards and requirements in relation to social work qualifications. Zubrzycki<sup>18</sup> argue that while every social worker should take individual responsibility in relation to the above matters, it is important that recruiting agencies become aware of how equivalence issues can undermine a worker's professional identity, status and their opportunity for career progression.

### Recruitment processes for overseas social workers in England

Social work and social care vacancies in England have been partly filled by international labour migration. Some staff are primarily recruited from their home countries; others are recruited after arrival in the UK. The business of recruitment is often undertaken by commercial employment agencies, which may assist with visa arrangements, subsidise travel costs and provide support upon arrival in the UK.<sup>3,19</sup>

Some local authorities in the UK have directly recruited cohorts of social workers from overseas, employing, and supporting them as a group.<sup>19</sup> Other social workers may migrate to the UK and then look for employment upon arrival.<sup>20</sup>

White<sup>8</sup> discusses how the internet has made it easier to find out about job vacancies and to obtain information on the different social work systems and qualifications. The internet has made it easier for

social workers from developing countries in particular to explore work opportunities abroad.

### Key challenges

There are also challenges associated with the recruitment of overseas social workers. These social workers may face difficulties in adapting to a new culture of social work practice.<sup>20,21</sup> A further issue of debate in the UK in relation to international recruitment is the level of support, training and time needed for overseas workers to adjust to a new practice.<sup>18</sup> Welbourne<sup>20</sup> identifies the provision of adequate support to overseas-trained social workers as an ethical issue, because it is linked to the development of safe working practices for both workers and service users.

According to Lyons,<sup>22</sup> the international movement of workers, including social workers and child protection workers, can illuminate key areas of practice. For example, it can provide an opportunity to research 'good practice' in recruitment and induction across international boundaries. It can also highlight the benefits and stresses of relocation, how to maximize the expertise of the new recruits to the workforce, and to explore the impact of international recruitment from a service user's perspective.<sup>22</sup> It also offers an opportunity to consider how organisational practices, which aid retention, can be tailored to the needs of workers recruited from overseas.

International recruitment of overseas social workers can be described as complex in the sense that it involves bringing to the UK, many people who are of different cultures, trained in different social work backgrounds, with different levels of language capabilities and in some cases, holding different social values, among other characteristics. The process of adapting to the UK social and work systems could be a daunting task and challenging for both the recruiters and the overseas social workers.

### Social worker recruitment from Zimbabwe

The migration of overseas Zimbabwean social workers to the UK is not a unique phenomenon. It appears from the literature review that they are attracted or pushed by similar factors as their professional colleagues from other developing countries such as South Africa and Nigeria. Migration of social workers between different countries of the world is a general trend.<sup>23</sup> Social work is an international profession, which is supported and promoted by the internationally agreed definition of social work, together with the international ethical and global standards of social work.<sup>17</sup>

### Effects of recruitment and migration from Zimbabwe

Lyons<sup>22</sup> states that one of the main concerns about overseas recruitment from some countries, e.g. South Africa,<sup>24</sup> is the extent to which this deprives them of much needed human resources, following their investment in training for a field where qualified staff are in short supply.<sup>20</sup> For instance, in 2003, it was reported that Zimbabwe's Department of Social Welfare had a 75% vacancy rate, attributed to aggressive recruitment by British agencies.<sup>8</sup> While the general situation in Zimbabwe now gives reason to suppose that, had they stayed, such workers would themselves be facing a situation of extreme hardship, this nevertheless illustrates a result of the 'brain drain'.

There are implications of employing workers from abroad and these include among others; the acceleration of brain drain from countries that do not have enough professionals to deal with their own problems. Further international recruitment, can be perceived, as a

providing a temporary solution to a wider long-term issue that needs a long-term solution.

### Positive implications for international recruitment

The majority of the research that has been carried out on international recruitment of social workers has concluded that there are a number of benefits accruable from this process and these include according to Pullen et al.<sup>31</sup> added value for service users, more diversity in the social care sector, local staff gaining new knowledge and practice perspectives, adding to the Skills Matrix from language skills, high level of training and qualifications, values and diligence. According to Hussein<sup>3</sup> the common view from team managers, HR managers, and recruitment agencies involved in recruiting abroad is that international social care workers are hardworking, more productive, more reliable and essentially stay longer in service than their local counterparts. They also have a relatively lower sickness record than local workers.

### Integration of Zimbabwean social workers into English society

Migration literature has generally proposed that once migrants entered a foreign country, they would break ties with their home countries and work towards being incorporated into the host society.<sup>25</sup> To explain the different ways through which migrants adapt to life in host countries, terms such as assimilation, integration, settlement, insertion and incorporation have been used,<sup>26</sup> with the authors concentrating on assimilation and multiculturalism as the two broad paradigms of migrant integration.<sup>27,28</sup>

Professional integration also involves gaining an understanding of issues and priorities for the local service, and an understanding of social care values, and cultural and moral beliefs. The sharing of cultural differences in the forms of practice is of particular value in childcare services, and the above can be fostered through appropriate training and induction.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of cultural awareness is of paramount importance to any new migrants in a new environment. Cultural differences in the way people relate to each other, child and family interactions and the myriad ways in which culture shapes our attitudes and behaviour as individuals present some of the greatest challenges to living, working or studying social welfare in a foreign country.<sup>8</sup>

Lyons<sup>22</sup> argues for seeing the world as a global society where both local and global responses can interact to ameliorate the conditions of global citizens and proposes a 'globalization' approach to social work practice, a fusion, where people think globally while acting locally. Social work is described as a heavily context-dependent profession.<sup>29,30</sup> While there is some agreement on basic human needs, how responses and resources attend to those needs varies greatly according to local circumstances and cultures. For this reason, while global standards for education and practice are significant, they cannot be the sole means for ensuring preparation for practice across cultures and countries.<sup>31</sup> There is agreement from most scholars on the fact that social work practice is shaped by local conditions, local procedures and local legislative framework, which therefore requires social work practitioners from a different context to adjust accordingly in order to practice effectively in a new context.

The support required by overseas social workers when they arrive in England includes both basic training and induction, to enable them to familiarise themselves with their role and to start work smoothly.

There is however, a lot of discussion by scholars, academics and policy makers, drawn on in the next section, as to the nature, adequacy and relevance of the training and induction offered by different local authorities across England and the UK at large.

### Inconsistencies in induction and training

The evidence emerging from the available literature suggests that some overseas social workers receive induction, but there is little information given on the shape, form or relevance and depth of the induction. There appears to be variation across different employers and there is with no standardization of induction and training across the local authorities where such induction and training exist reports that early Zimbabwean arrivals received little or no induction, and some of those recruited later also reported to having no induction. Social work researchers in England have advocated induction programmes for people recruited from abroad which should: meet the needs of the overseas workers in terms of necessary professional development; serve the needs of agencies and service users for/with whom these individuals will work; and contribute to the validation and recognition of the prior experiences of overseas workers and maintain or restore their professional competence<sup>3,32,33</sup> According to several different research studies conducted in the UK, induction programmes are on offer for newly recruited social workers. However, there are divergent views regarding the adequacy and relevancy of the induction programmes offered to newly recruited social workers from abroad. Overseas Zimbabwean social workers interviewed in Chogugudza<sup>1</sup> expressed mixed feelings about the nature of induction and training programmes in UK.

According to Experian,<sup>34</sup> the induction programmes provided in the UK are often inadequate to the complex needs of overseas social workers, some of whom would have experienced an immense transformation in their lives. They were often informal and very short suggesting that many employers were not following Induction Standards in the UK as advised by SCIE in 2006. In some cases when overseas Zimbabwean social workers arrived to take post in UK there was no management preparation.

According to Bartley,<sup>35</sup> some of the social workers recruited from abroad needed support with adjusting to the different job culture in the UK and it is observed that most have found it easy to adjust if they receive good training and induction. It has also been observed that transnational social workers come with a range of qualifications and practice competencies and experience that may not only contribute to the local professional context, but also indeed expand it as intervention models and skills sets developed overseas can be put into practice in new settings. Thus, in the process of integration a cross-pollination may occur which can bring benefits to both the profession and client communities.

Layons<sup>22</sup> argue that an in-depth analysis of the training and induction programmes offered by recruiting local authorities remain unaddressed in relation to the needs of these new social work recruits. This is especially so from developing countries such as Zimbabwe, where cultural adaptation plays a crucial role and the lack of analysis of the issues affecting social workers, during their transition process from Zimbabwe to England.

### Differences of social work organisation and culture in England and Zimbabwe

One of the most important experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK is the exposure to differences in the organisation

and culture of social work practice between Zimbabwe and England, and naturally, this is a cause for confusion or misunderstanding. The main areas of organisational and structural difference relate to the distinction between children's social care services and adult social care services. There are specialisations within children's services such as Looked After, First Response, Long Term, Children with Disabilities Teams and this can be difficult to understand for overseas workers to understand during the initial days of employment. According to<sup>1</sup> it is not unreasonable to suggest that it can take several months for overseas workers to gain a clear understanding of how the entire children's social care system works in UK. This includes situating the welfare benefits system in the broader social care system in comparison to the situation in Zimbabwe. It can also be difficult to understand how the Benefits system works in England and more importantly how it is linked to children's services.

One of the experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers is that they are not used to being challenged by clients/service users in Zimbabwe, as is the case in UK and many of them would have struggled to understand this during situation during their practice. The concept of complaining against social workers would certainly be a new experience to most overseas Zimbabwean social workers. Service user/social worker relationship perceived differently in Zimbabwe compared to England. For overseas Zimbabwean social workers, the court system set up is completely different from the UK. In Zimbabwe, parents and children's guardians do not always have solicitors in court, most parents have limited or no detailed knowledge of human rights principles. Some of the experiences for overseas Zimbabwean social workers relate to significant problems in understanding the many protocols and procedures especially in child protection, as well as the low thresholds of child abuse criteria justifying intervention in English local authorities. Most overseas Zimbabwean social workers reported noticeable differences in the practice and legislation of child care/protection.<sup>1</sup> For the greater majority of social workers recruited from abroad especially from Zimbabwe, the poor image and low status of social work was unexpected and certainly disappointing.<sup>1</sup>

### Experience of transnationalism

In their experience, overseas social workers have become transnational in most respects. Transnationalism is perceived as an important element of their migration process. Transnationalism is a complex phenomenon which transcends the area of overseas social worker recruitment. The majority of overseas Zimbabwean social workers interviewed in Chogugudza's research stated that they have maintained some contact, albeit at varied levels, with their professional colleagues and families in Zimbabwe as a way of keeping themselves updated on social, political and practice issues. There are however, a number of factors that determine the success of transnational activities and these were not fully explored in this paper but further reading on transnationalism would address these.

Negi<sup>36</sup> in their contribution to the transnational social work debate argue that we live in a global society that affects both our daily lives and our professional careers in many intense ways in which we cannot afford to ignore things that happen around us and in places further away from us. They contend that every form of social work practice is transnational practice. Social workers, they argue, must stay in touch with the many issues that affect us and even intervene when appropriate and that social workers now have access to much of the world through information technology, which was never the case previously.

This form of transnationalism had reportedly helped overseas Zimbabwean social workers to integrate and function reasonably well in their host communities, socially and professionally. They believe that transnationalism helped them in transferring knowledge and skills gained from Zimbabwe to England. They reportedly had achieved this through back and forth travel to Zimbabwe and maintaining constant face-to-face and electronic links with professional colleagues there. Transnationalism evoked feelings of identity and belonging, for most of the Overseas Zimbabwean social workers in England, the host-country is considered 'home', even if this is contrasted with the recreation of a Zimbabwean setting in the diaspora. They also consider Zimbabwe as 'home', which leads to a dual notion of home.

Different authors, scholars and researchers identified transnationalism as an important element of social care migration and the importance it plays in the entire migration journey. There is however, no integrated empirical study on transnationalism in social work in particular, and the lack of theoretical and empirical engagement in this area makes it difficult for professionals in social care to understand how to incorporate issues of transnationalism in their practice.

### Feelings of identity and social networks

For overseas Zimbabwean social workers, the sense of belonging to their home country of Zimbabwe even though they are physically domiciled in England, appears to be pivotal to their lives away from home. They perceive of the 'prejudices and discrimination' they often encounter from service users, colleagues and other professionals as strengthening their sense of identity and belonging. For some, the longer they stay away from home the more their perceived attachment with Zimbabwe gets stronger. It appears that the issue of identity is significant to most overseas Zimbabwean social workers because of their perception of difference and that their negative experiences should be seen through that prism.<sup>1</sup> According to Crisp,<sup>37</sup> social networks enable other migrants to follow peers, utilising the provision of information about job opportunities, money for transportation, and accommodation. Arguably, social networks help in creating a supportive environment in which they could transfer knowledge and skills acquired from Zimbabwe to England. These also help in adjusting to life in the UK.

The use of social networks is very important in the lives of the overseas social workers especially during the initial settlement days. These social networks help in finding accommodation, deciding which school they took their children to, deciding which church to attend and in seeking help and support with social and professional issues. In the main, social networks play a significant role with information and support in the overseas social workers decision to move abroad. As potential migrants, they would have been connected to networks through both direct links (family, relatives and friends) and indirect ones (community networks). Overseas Zimbabwean social workers managed to access support from their own community in the UK during the initial settlement and in subsequent years. According to Kindler,<sup>38</sup> the quality and scope of networks, which determines its success differ not only between migrants and local colleagues and citizens, but also among the migrants. However, sometimes there is a tendency to exaggerate the effectiveness of social networks in the process of integration or acculturation but that does not diminish its importance, especially for professionals crossing continents to live and work as social workers in a different setting.

### Communication and cultural challenges

Communication, language and cultural differences are some of the issues that affect overseas social workers especially from Africa, including those from Zimbabwe. These are largely related to the proper use of language, colloquia and political correctness, the role of the state and civil society in determining what is good or bad parenting, the existence of powerful children's rights, the definition of parenting responsibilities, skeptical attitudes towards gay rights, the importance of multi-agency working, differences in the conception of civic responsibilities, attitudes towards domestic violence, attitudes towards marriage and civil partnerships, among others. Knowing the correct language, English social and cultural values and etiquette did help a great deal in the case of the overseas social workers interviewed in Chogugudza's<sup>1</sup> study.

Sharp differences in social work culture, terminology and practice can be a major challenge in the way overseas social workers approach their practice and in attempts to transfer knowledge and skills acquired from abroad to England. A gradual understanding of the diverse or multicultural nature of the English society helps in overcoming some of the communication and cultural challenges.

### Experience of racism and discrimination

The experience of racism and discrimination (perceived or not) is one of the most poignant issues affecting overseas Zimbabwean social worker in UK according to Tinarwo,<sup>39</sup> Episodes of racism and discrimination can have a damaging impact on overseas social workers ability to successfully integrate in English society, both on a personal and professional level. In Tinarwo,<sup>39</sup> a few isolated accounts of incidents of racism and racial discrimination suffered by Zimbabwean social workers in England were cited. Some of these experiences were covert and therefore difficult to evidence. In some cases, the racism, it appears would have been both overt and covert. However, most social workers interviewed were reluctant to report incidents as they felt reporting would threaten their jobs and make them more vulnerable. It fair to state that the experience of racism and discrimination was not surprising. It is important that social workers, social work educators, researchers and policy makers should continue to explore issues of racism and discrimination as the social work force in most developed countries is increasingly becoming diverse. Failure to address the issues of racism and discrimination will result in disharmony and poor racial relationships in the workplace, which may impact on service delivery.

According to Chogugudza,<sup>1</sup> overseas Zimbabwean social workers interviewed reported being subjects of perceived racism and discrimination from both white and black Caribbean social workers and, from service users and other professionals. They stressed that discrimination from black Caribbean social workers was unanticipated and even more painful. The perceived lack of support received from managers had apparently resulted in some social workers allegedly being subject to disciplinary action. Some overseas Zimbabwean social workers also reported being unfairly excluded from training opportunities and promotion to senior roles such as senior practitioner and team manager but gave no further evidence to substantiate this. The experience of racism and discrimination affected the social workers' confidence levels in many areas of their professional practice. There were also reported cases where overseas social workers suffered racial prejudice from some service users, which was surprising for most of them. It would appear some workers were able to raise concerns of

racism and discrimination with their managers about racist behaviour but others were not, understandably for fear of being unnecessarily targeted by management. Given these experiences of discrimination, along with the desire to be seen to be sociable and adaptable one might anticipate that sources of support were important to newly recruited overseas Zimbabwean social workers arriving in England.

There is however, a counter view that some of the overseas social workers who reported incidents of racism and discrimination could have been using this to cover for their lack of confidence and incompetence. These perceived incompetent overseas social workers; it could be argued were most likely citing racism and discrimination as an excuse for challenges to their poor performance and lack of professionalism. The above view is however, controversial. Chogugudza<sup>1</sup> also argues that in his research, that some overseas social workers held inaccurate views about the existence of a fair and equal society in England prior to their arrival from Zimbabwe. They expected, as promised by recruitment agencies, a significantly better life including a plethora of opportunities for themselves and their families which was true in part. The racism and discrimination allegedly suffered by some newly recruited overseas social workers on arrival and supposedly perpetrated by white colleagues, professionals and service users caused some respondents to turn to each other and create spaces for themselves where they could feel accepted. They turned to the now defunct Zimbabwe Social Workers Network (ZSWN) for support. The ZSWN was perceived as very crucial in addressing some of the effects of racism and grievances encountered by some respondents. It was also noteworthy that those who were members of UNISON or BASW felt better protected against incidents of racism and other forms of discrimination or unfair treatment by their employers.

### Other experiences

The initial experiences of social worker migrants and their families involved a range of social, cultural and economic factors. Most of them felt that the ease with which they as migrants have settled into the UK was a significant indicator of their long-term adjustment. The wider settlement experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK present both positive and negative experiences. The practice of multiagency working was also reported in Chogugudza<sup>1</sup> as a good experience by overseas Zimbabwean social workers. It was an experience most of them had not seen succeed in Zimbabwe in a coordinated way as is the case in UK. The benefits and challenges of multiagency working were cited as strengthening in their practice. Multi agency working was perceived; as a new way of working for them, which they felt, was a good platform to communicate with professionals from diverse backgrounds, learn new ideas as well transfer some of their skills from abroad.

According to Chogugudza, the social worker /service user relationship was one of the difficult experiences encountered by overseas Zimbabwean social workers. Most of them appeared not to adequately understand the power relationship between the social workers and service users in England. Forming and maintaining positive relationships with service users and other professionals and was critical in attempts by overseas Zimbabwean social workers to strengthen their practice and become more effective in transferring knowledge and skills from abroad to England. A lack of understanding of the power relationship between the

social worker and the service user was a major challenge for the majority of overseas social workers from Zimbabwe. There was an expectation however, that this relationship significantly improved with time. Some struggled to understand the Anti-oppressive and Anti discriminatory practices and their link to practice in terms of social worker-service user relationship. The above demonstrates the need for overseas Zimbabwean social workers to adopt a less directive and less oppressive approach characteristic of their practice in Zimbabwe, which is not acceptable practice in England. Practice wise, there was an interesting experience by overseas Zimbabwean social workers in UK in relation to their understanding of the system of supervision in England compared to their experience in Zimbabwe where in some cases they did not receive regular supervision and for some when they did, the quality was less than impressive. According to Tinarwo,<sup>39</sup> they found supervision in England important, and as a tool for managing accountability and efficiency. They also saw supervision as a form of management support related to reflective practice and learning. For them, it was through supervision where they tested the effectiveness of their overseas-acquired skills, as this would reflect in the progress of their cases and the appraisals they received from their managers and supervisors.

For the majority of overseas Zimbabwean social workers, it would appear the process of moving from Zimbabwe to England was, on balance, smooth but more challenging during the initial days. Some of these challenges were reported to include *interalia*; having to prove to everyone that they were efficient and competent professionals compared to their local colleagues, having to fight some incidents of racism and prejudice from some edgy managers, colleagues and services users. Understanding the different types of service users, abuse allegations against social workers and the impact of the welfare state on social service delivery were also some crucial challenges for the respondents in England according to data analysis. On a positive note, the prospects of better educational opportunities and training, good health care system, higher standards of living, personal safety, higher levels of pay, flexibility of employment and practice, good personal development opportunities and the chance to invest at home abroad.<sup>40</sup> There have been concerns raised about the morality and sustainability of continued recruitment from developing /underdeveloped countries such as Zimbabwe where social workers are needed more than in UK.

### Summary

This paper has presented the general context of social work in terms of staff shortage, migration issues, recruitment of overseas social workers in UK in general and those from Zimbabwe. Equally important, the paper highlighted the specific and general experiences encountered by overseas Zimbabwean social workers in the UK. The experiences of overseas Zimbabwean social workers in England were both negative and positive and were reflected in their social and professional lives. Many of the overseas Zimbabwean social workers in both Tinarwo<sup>39</sup> & Chogugudza<sup>1</sup> developed some coping mechanisms to offset their negative experiences. More importantly, their resilience and determination to succeed in a foreign land, it would appear, helped them to adjust to the new environment as well as to deal effectively with the challenges they encountered. These social workers also found that crossing international borders to practice social work was not as easy as initially anticipated. The context -specific nature of social work practice was one of the significant challenges for

overseas Zimbabwean social workers in England. Their experiences, which were largely of a professional and social nature, were found to be varied and diverse, consistent with the forces of globalisation and social workers' migration trajectories.<sup>41</sup> Finally, the area of overseas social work migration is one that has not been subject to rigorous research and analysis due to its short history and absence of empirical findings hence the need for further research as the shortage of social workers continue to the UK, especially in the post Brexit Era.

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## Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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