

# **Migration of Health/Social Workers from Zimbabwe to the United Kingdom (UK): Prospects and Challenges**

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## **Abstract**

Recent decades have witnessed the mass movement of social and health workers from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, to the United Kingdom (UK). This study focused on the development of social work in Zimbabwe, which, like in other African countries, has been attributed to colonial roots. The role of social worker through advocacy on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS and vulnerable groups, has been spelt out. By employing a qualitative approach using questionnaires and interview guides, this study explored the factors contributing to the migration of social worker to the United Kingdom (UK). Participants indicated high costs of living, political instability, poor health services and costly health care as the main reasons for migration of Zimbabwean social workers to the UK. Improved standard of living, improved health care, competitive income and favourable political climate, were noted as the factors which have attracted the mass movement of social and health workers from Zimbabwe to the UK. However, the study revealed that some social workers who intend to migrate to UK were not aware of the risks associated with immigrants.

## **Key Words**

Social work, push factors, pull factors, non-governmental organizations, community development

## **1. Introduction**

Social case work is as a professional approach that seeks to develop the social functioning of an individual and to help people in distress (Leiby, 1978). According to Hamilton (1940), social casework consists of processes which develop personality through interaction between man and his social environment. Therefore, social casework is both art and science of resolving individual problems in social settings, as individual and society are interdependent and social forces influence behaviour and attitude of an individual.

The historical development of social case work can be traced back from the concept of charity and philanthropy, which saw the enactment of the Elizabethan Poor Law in 1601, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (Kaseke, 1991). The Poor law catered for the needs of those living in sub-standard conditions categorized as; the able body poor, impotent poor and dependent children.

The enactment of the Law was an effort on part of the government to register categories of people in need of help and render services according to the need. However, the Law which was meant to cater for the needs of the vulnerable group, was faced with challenges related to administration and corruption, which contributed to failure of the law (Eborall and Griffiths, 2008). Though this Law led to the setting up of workhouses where poor people were housed, some people, motivated by religious and philanthropic considerations, began to render personal social services to the poor, marking the beginning of voluntary organizations. The creation of voluntary organizations led to the establishment of the Charity Organization Society, to coordinate the activities of voluntary organizations involved in providing personal social services (Muridzo, et al. 2022).

The establishment of the Charity Organization Society in England in 1869 also contributed to social work by addressing many social problems in England, which included chronic diseases, beggary and crime, among others (Willett and Hakak, 2022). On another development, in the late nineteenth century, migration of people from Europe to America increased rapidly, and by 1885, the number of Charity Organization Societies exceeded one hundred throughout the USA. Various researches have noted that the root causes of social problems can be attributed to poverty, resulting from political, social and economic factors. Therefore, the task requiring a holistic approach in which social workers would play their part is recommended. This study provides a review on development of social work in Zimbabwe, the impact of Zimbabwe and UK relations on social work, with focus on prospects and challenges.

## **2. Literature Background: Development of Social Work in Zimbabwe**

The development of social work in Zimbabwe is closely linked to the country's colonial history from the British experience (Muridzo, et al. 2022). Social work in Zimbabwe was a response to urban social challenges such as crime, prostitution and hardship. Since the attainment of Independence in Zimbabwe, there has been a paradigm shift towards developmental social work in order to promote social change. Government ministries and non-government organizations (NGOs) have been involved in empowering rural communities and building their capacity for self-reliance, with the Department of Social Welfare as the major setting for social work practice in Zimbabwe, (Willett and Hakak, 2022). The Department of Social Welfare was established in 1948 to deal with problems related to juvenile delinquency within white settler community. To date the social workers employed by the Department of Social Welfare have a special concern for the promotion of child welfare, particularly the prevention of neglect and abuse of children.

The absence of trained personnel in the country saw the colonial government securing the services of a probation officer from the UK, before the appointment of the first black probation officer in 1949 and the establishment of appropriate institutions in Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare (Kaseke, 1991). Thus the social work practice in Zimbabwe is a reflection of the transfer of social work practice from developed countries, particularly Britain, and a response to the social problems associated with urban and industrial growth. The focus, therefore, is on problems arising from unemployment, marital conflict, disability and deviant behavior, which often threaten order and stability in society, hence the need for counteractive services. Emphasis has been placed on the need for those experiencing social challenges to adjust to their environment, and the norms and values of their society such that focus is on collective well-being, with the individual as the means to achieve that objective (IHD, 2022).

### **2.1 Emergence of Social Worker Group and Non-State Actors**

The establishment of the National Association of Social Workers Zimbabwe (NASWZ) in 1968 and joined the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2023) in 1986 (IFSW, 2023), was a welcome development to social workers in Zimbabwe. The NASWZ sought to provide an opportunity and forum for social workers of Zimbabwe to unit, exchange and share ideas, knowledge and experience. Kaseke (1991) cites that social work intervention must not create dependency, but propel individuals towards self-reliance, where workers must concern themselves with issues of social justice and the redistribution of wealth.

## **2.2 Refugee Matters**

Working with refugees has also become an important function of social workers in both the government and the private sector. In that regard, Zimbabwe continues to receive refugees from Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Somalia, Ethiopia, amongst others (IHD, 2022), in accordance with the Refugees Act. Here, the responsibility is to receive refugees, identify their needs, and provide appropriate assistance, which could be in the form of finance, education, counselling, vocational training, job placement, or assistance to form cooperatives. As refugees are considered temporary residents in Zimbabwe, and expected to return to their own countries, emphasis is not only on meeting their immediate subsistence needs but on preparing them for life after their return home.

## **2.3. The role of NGOs for Community Development**

NGOs have been recognized as alternative healthcare, community development and social justice among other goals. These organizations have been seen as development partners that contribute to the enhancement of social relations and collective action to increase democratic participation levels (Abiddin et al. 2022). According to Salamon and Anheier (1996) NGOs have been considered to be formal/official, private, non-profit, self-governed, voluntary, non-religious and apolitical in carrying out their activities.

Community development is a result of a holistic approach where opportunities are provided for local communities to enhance socio-economic situation by utilizing available resources efficiently (Akinyemi and Abiddin, 2013). United Nations (1956) describes community development as a process by which people and government work together to improve, social, economic, cultural conditions of the society so that they contribute fully to national development.

William (1991) describes six important roles of NGOs as; development and operation of infrastructure; supporting development and innovation; facilitating communication between people and government; technical assistance and training; research, monitoring and evaluation; and advocacy for and with the poor. Various NGOs which include World Vision, Plan International, among others, with support from international partners such as UNICEF, USAID, to mention a few, have been funding various community and humanitarian projects in the past decades, aimed at community development.

The role of social worker in HIV/AIDS has also been noted through advocacy on behalf of people living with HIV/AIDS. In that respect, various NGOs have delivered education to such individuals, families and communities at large, allowing their participation in community health planning, as well as undertaking community health needs assessment (Muridzo, et al. 2022).

### 3 Methodology

In this study, publications from various sources were studied to assess the development of social work in Zimbabwe. The study also employed an anonymous online questionnaire with both open and closed ended questions to explore the perception of participants on the viability of social worker relations between Zimbabwe and the UK. Interviews were also conducted with DHOs to establish the impact of social work migration on Zimbabwe and on the receiving country, the UK.

#### 3.1 Sampling and data collection

##### 3.1.1 Questionnaire

The online questionnaire was completed by 30 health workers drawn from health care centres in Harare Metropolitan province, comprising 9 (30%) student nurses and 21 (70%) senior nurses (table 1). This group was targeted as they are directly involved with health care, which is one of the major components of social work. The group was also of interest to this research as they constitute the majority of local staff who are migrating to the UK to undertake social work. The participants constituted 18 (60%) females and 12 (40%) males (table 2).

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Student Nurses	9	30
Senior Nurses	21	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1: Participants for the survey

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	12	40
Females	18	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2: Participants by Gender

### 3.1.2 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for in-depth analysis on the pull and push factors regarding migration of social workers from Zimbabwe to the UK. Interviews on the matter were conducted with District Health Officers in the Harare. Only 5 participants who expressed willingness to take part in the interview were purposively considered for the study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Reasons for Migration to the UK

Study findings showed reasons for influx of migrants from Zimbabwe to the UK as a result of pull and push factors, as shown in figure 1 and 2 below.

#### 4.1.1 Push Factors

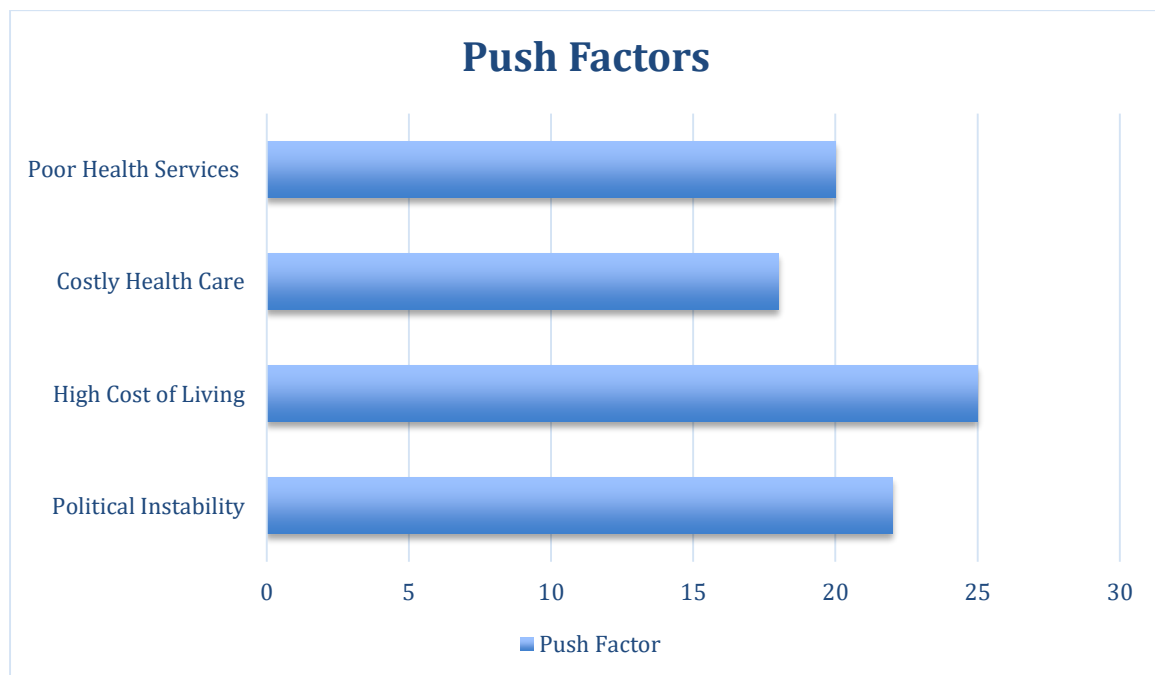


Figure 1: Push factors for migration

From the study, push factors noted were economic and political challenges. Majority of participants (83%) indicated that high costs of living was the main reason for the influx of Zimbabweans into the UK, followed by political instability (73%), poor health services (67%) and costly health care (60%).

### 4.1.2 Pull Factors

Information obtained from the study also revealed economic and political factors which have necessitated the migration of social workers from Zimbabwe to the UK. From the study, improved standard of living (90%), improved health care (80%), competitive income and favourable political climate (67%), were noted as the factors which have attracted the movement of social and health workers from Zimbabwe to the UK, as indicated in figure 2 below.

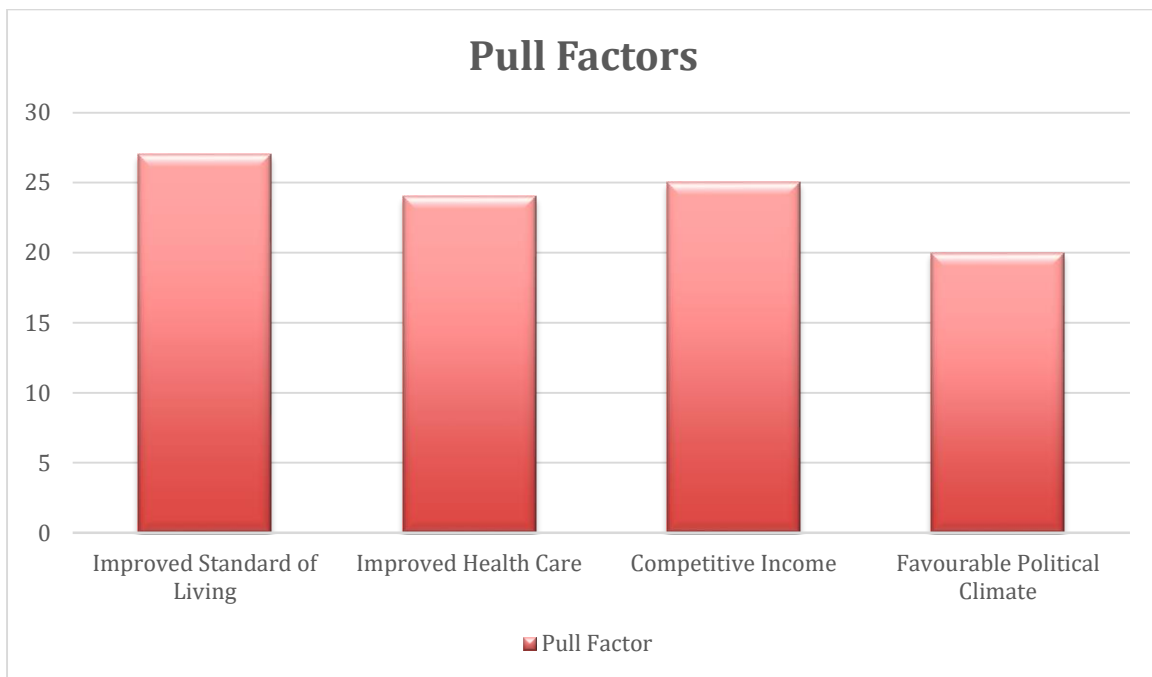


Figure 2: Pull factors for migration.

## 4.2 Impact of Social Worker Migration on Zimbabwe

Information obtained from the study revealed that migration of social workers from Zimbabwe to the UK, has presented challenges on both countries, with the former experiencing more problems than the latter.

### 4.2.1 Training Costs

From the interviews conducted with health officials, they were of the view that Zimbabwe had become a training ground for social workers, whilst the UK had become the major consumer. In that regard, it was recommended that the two countries would reach a mutual agreement which would see the UK Government providing necessary resources to the Government of Zimbabwe for training of health and social workers. Furthermore, it was also recommended

that social workers migrating to the UK be provided with training and support, as well as ensuring that they are well informed on associated risks (Willett & Hakak, 2022).

#### **4.2.2 Shortage of Skilled Labour**

Study results also revealed that migration of social workers to the UK has resulted in shortage of skilled labour supply in Zimbabwe, particularly in major public hospitals due to poor salaries. Information obtained from student nurses indicated that they were already deciding to leave the country for the UK after completing their training. However, they feared that some government restrictions might not allow, as they were likely to serve their probation period in Zimbabwe.

#### **4.2.3 International Status**

Information obtained from the interviews with health officials revealed that migration of social workers to the UK was an indication that the country was struggling to provide better services for its people, prompting to search for greener pastures. Furthermore, it was revealed that migration of social workers to the UK as a result of economic and political instability, was an indication that there was need to promote sustainable economic practices and democratic space in order to fully realize the benefits of social work development in Zimbabwe.

### **5. Conclusion**

The study has presented the historical development of social work in Zimbabwe and health workers' views on the influx of immigrants from Zimbabwe to the UK. These findings of the study help to broaden the understanding of the causal factors behind migration of Zimbabwean social and health workers to the UK. Further studies may focus on surveying the risks being experienced by immigrants as they arrive in the UK, including the gaps in the provision of the needed services. Therefore, understanding the political and economic environment in Zimbabwe is vital in order to appreciate social work practice within it, and possible drivers behind brain drain. Regarding the activities of NGOs in the country, it is noted that the community sees the efforts their efforts as humanitarian in time of disaster. Therefore, increasing the number of local NGOs, to be trained to complement efforts by the government and international partners is commendable. The limitation of this study is that participants were drawn from a small sample size. To overcome this limitation, further studies may focus on larger sample size for comprehensive analysis.

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**Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author declared no conflict of interest with respect to the research and its publication.

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