

ICAR Population Guide

Zimbabweans in the UK

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Introduction

Zimbabwe has been in the UK's top ten asylum receiving nations since 2000. This is attributed to the unprecedented economic decline and political instability that has prevailed in Zimbabwe. Not only does the UK receive most of its asylum seekers from Zimbabwe, the UK is also the top destination for Zimbabweans after South Africa (UNHCR: 2009).

This guide serves to provide the most important historical, political and social context with regard to Zimbabwean refugees in the UK. It also highlights the key issues faced by this population. However, it should be used as a general overview or starting point and key texts are referenced to provide more in-depth understanding on particular areas.

History



Source: CIA World Factbook

Overviews

Home Office Country of Origin Information

Annex A: Chronology of Major Events

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs09/zimbabwe-231209.doc>

Home Office Operational Guidance Notes

Country Assessment

<http://www.bia.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/countryspecificasylumpolicyogns/zimbabweogqn?view=Binary>

BBC Timeline: Zimbabwe

A chronology of key events

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1831470.stm

The Republic of Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in April 1980. Robert Mugabe has dominated the political landscape and remained in power since that time. The political situation continues to be volatile and elections are marred by violence, widespread intimidation, vote-rigging and the use of food to buy votes (Home Office: 2009b).

The 2000s saw drought, land seizures and food shortages which have continued for the rest of the decade (Reuters Alertnet: 2009).

In 2005, Operation Restore Order was implemented, ostensibly an urban rationalization program, which resulted in the destruction of the homes or businesses of 700,000 mostly poor supporters of the opposition (CIA World Factbook). Due to economic and political instability until early 2009 the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe routinely printed money to fund the budget deficit, causing hyper inflation (Home Office: 2009b).

Zimbabwe's human rights record under Robert Mugabe has been criticized by the international community including the European Union, the Commonwealth, the United Nations, and the Africa Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights, as well as by the United States and other countries. Among the chief allegation are: The security forces have been used to suppress political opposition, torture has been regularly used², peaceful protests are suppressed³, independent media has been stifled, and legislation limiting freedom of political association, education and discussion has been introduced. This has led to sanctions by the EU and the USA and the withdrawal of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth.

Ethnic diversity

There are a number of different ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. According to government statistics, the Shona ethnic group makes up 82 percent of the population, Ndebele 14 percent, whites less than 1 percent, and other ethnic groups 3 percent. There is some tension between the white minority and other groups, between the Shona majority and the Ndebele minority, and among the various Shona subgroups (USSD 2008). The definition of a Zimbabwean also has political connotations (ibid.).

Zimbabweans in the UK

Political and economic deterioration in Zimbabwe has coincided with continuous reform of the UK's immigration and asylum system. The legacy of this coincidence is a confusing patchwork of migrants from Zimbabwe in the UK: naturalised citizens, refugees, asylum seekers, reunited families, undocumented workers and over-stayers, students, work permit holders and those whose nationality is disputed (Wintour: 2009).

There are no concrete figures for how many Zimbabweans are residing in the UK. According to the 2001 census there are 49, 303; a 130% increase from the 1991 census which recorded 21, 427. The rise in Zimbabweans in the UK is attributed to an expansion in the NHS which has attracted more Zimbabwean doctors and nurses and secondly, the political turmoil in the country which has led to a sharp rise in asylum seekers.

There is no specific ethnically disaggregated data for different groups of Zimbabweans in the UK. However, a recent study of 500 Zimbabweans in the UK found most respondents were black and Shona. Nearly three-quarters (71 per cent) spoke Shona fluently, a third (32 per cent) spoke Ndebele fluently while 12 per cent were fluent in both Shona and Ndebele. Only 12 respondents were monoglot English speakers, suggesting that they were white Zimbabweans (Bloch: 2008).

Zimbabweans are overwhelmingly concentrated in London and its northern commuter towns such as Luton, Milton Keynes and Slough. Major centres of Zimbabwean settlement outside London are Leeds, Leicester, Manchester, Birmingham and Coventry. However, Zimbabweans in the UK are scattered, partly because of the policy of dispersal of asylum seekers and partly because of the importance of care work, for example in coastal and other retirement centres (Wintour: 2009).

See Table 1 below for a breakdown of the distribution of people born in Zimbabwe in regions of the UK.

Table 1

Distribution of people born in Zimbabwe in the UK						
	TOTAL NUMBERS			AS % OF ALL PEOPLE		
Sort by:	1991	2001	+/- %	1991	2001	+/- %
Nation/region						
Whole of Britain	21,427	49,303	130.1	0.04	0.09	0.05
East Midlands	1,270	2,815	121.65	0.03	0.07	0.04
East of England	2,036	5,595	174.8	0.04	0.1	0.06
London	6,131	17,021	177.62	0.09	0.24	0.15
North East	360	607	68.61	0.01	0.02	0.01
North West	1,248	2,152	72.44	0.02	0.03	0.01
Scotland	1,274	2,078	63.11	0.03	0.04	0.01
South East	4,726	10,059	112.84	0.06	0.13	0.07
South West	2,054	3,557	73.17	0.04	0.07	0.03
Wales	535	777	45.23	0.02	0.03	0.01
West Midlands	989	2,645	167.44	0.02	0.05	0.03
York & Humber	804	1,997	148.38	0.02	0.04	0.02

Source: IPPR 2005

Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK

Asylum applicants 1999 - 2008: 28,000
 Given refugee status: 4,480 (19%)
 Granted other rights to stay: 390 (2%)
 Refused: 17,705 (74%)
 Voluntary returns 2007-2008: 345
 Voluntary returns 2009: 89

Source: Home Office RDS

Zimbabweans began to claim asylum in Britain in significant numbers in 2000 when 1,010 applications for asylum were made compared with 230 applications in 1999 and just 80 in 1998. Trends in applications have generally followed the scale of state violence and political instability in the country.

In 2000 the Home Office had recognised 20 Zimbabwean asylum applicants as refugees and granted another 10 Exceptional Leave to Remain but issued refusals to 525 others (95 per cent of decisions made). The years 2002 to 2004 inclusive saw 13,015 applications for asylum; and the Home Office recognised 3,335 Zimbabweans as refugees, gave Exceptional Leave, Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection to another 175 whilst refusing 9,480 applications (73% of decisions made).

In 2002, Zimbabwean asylum applications peaked and the country became Britain's top asylum-seeking nation. The numbers were brought down by the imposition of a visa regulation in November 2002, however this may only have served to push Zimbabweans to enter the UK using Malawian or South African passports (McGregor: 2009).

Overall applications for asylum from Zimbabwe went into decline from 2002. However, with increasing violence 2008 and 2009 saw Zimbabweans return to the top of the asylum seeking nations, with more than twice the number of asylum claims than the second ranked country of origin (Home Office: 2009a).

Initial decisions

In 2009, 6095 initial decisions were made by the Home Office regarding applications for asylum from Zimbabwe. Of these, 1635 were granted refugee status, 310 were given discretionary leave to remain and 4150 were refused. Of those refused, 4140 were refused on safe third country grounds (largely because they were not Zimbabwean nationals). 10 applicants were granted humanitarian protection and 125 withdrew their applications (Home Office: RDS).

Unaccompanied Zimbabwean Children

There were 40 applications from unaccompanied asylum seeking children from Zimbabwe in 2009 (Home Office: RDS). This is a relatively small number when compared to large numbers of asylum claims overall from Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean Nationals in Detention

In 2009, there were 470 Zimbabwean nationals in detention held solely under Immigration Act powers, of whom 435 were asylum seekers (Home Office: RDS Fourth Quarter 2009). This is a large increase from 2008 where 25 Zimbabwean nationals were held, of whom 15 were asylum seekers (Home Office: RDS Fourth Quarter 2008).

Legal and policy developments

The legal situation of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK has been dominated by debate regarding the returns policy of the UK Borders Agency (Grimwood: 2009).

Overview of Removals to Zimbabwe

2000 - Jan 2002: Removals to Zimbabwe allowed
 Jan 2002: Removals suspended
 Nov 2004: Removals resumed
 July 2005: Removals suspended
 February 2009: Removals allowed but not resumed

Source: Grimwood 2009

There are a several examples of case law relevant to Zimbabwean asylum applicants;

SM and others (MDC- internal flight- risk categories) Zimbabwe CG [2005] UKIAT 00100 Notified 11/05/05: Defined some categories of people as at risk on return and outlined the difficulties of internal relocation due to centralised record keeping and monitoring. Those at risk included perceived political opponents including low level MDC activists and teachers. Established no general risk for failed asylum seekers; being white alone was not a risk factor.

HS (returning asylum seekers) Zimbabwe CG [2007] UKAIT 00094: Confirmed AA2 that some asylum seekers can be safely returned, but risk categories expanded further to include human rights activists and those involved with civil society organizations.

AA (Risk for involuntary returnees) Zimbabwe CG [2006] UKAIT 00061: Judged deportees to be at risk on return solely on the basis that they had claimed asylum in Britain, regardless of the strength or otherwise of their cases. Returned Zimbabweans may be questioned at the airport and, thereafter, may be monitored in their home area or elsewhere.

Promulgated 2/8/06 (AA2): Reversed previous AA judgement – found there to be no risk simply for having claimed asylum in the UK, some asylum seekers can be safely returned. However, the group of those deemed to be at risk was broadened.

RN (Returnees) Zimbabwe CG [2008] UKAIT 00083: All those unable to prove a history of loyalty to the regime are deemed to be at risk, not just those with a history of MDC support or in one of the risk categories.

In February 2009 the Government stated that there is 'no barrier to restarting returns for failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe' (Grimwood: 2009). The UK Border Agency had said it could start returns from the beginning of 2010; however it seems no deportations have taken place to date.

There was escalation in the number of asylum claims following the RN decision at the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal in November 2008 (mostly made by people who were already in Britain rather than from individuals upon arrival from Zimbabwe). As of January 2009 new claims were running at c.500 per month (Wintour: 2009). In response the Home Office issued a new Operational Guidance Note to supersede RN in March 2009 (Home Office: 2009b), although refusals guided by these notes are open to legal challenge as there has been no formal appeal against the RN ruling.

Home Office Operational Guidance notes state that Zimbabweans can be internally relocated according to the judgement in *Januzi v SSHD* (2006⁴). The same situation as in many other asylum seeking countries is in place to protect unaccompanied minors. If they do not have family or adequate reception and care in Zimbabwe, discretionary leave maybe granted (Home Office: 2009b).

Key issues⁵

Removals and voluntary return

The UK Home Office has not been deporting people to Zimbabwe since 2005 but has encouraged Zimbabweans to return voluntarily. To assist such returns the UK government provides funds for the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Fund (VARRP) (Refugee Council: 2010). In February 2009 IOM, on behalf of the Home Office, launched a six month project providing additional humanitarian assistance to returnees to Zimbabwe, including a cholera assistance package (IOM: 2009). Figures provided by IOM show that a total of 628 Zimbabweans returned under its VARRP programme from 2005 to March 2009 (inclusive), at an average rate of about 10 per month (Doyle: 2008).

Employment

Zimbabweans suffer from deskilling when in the UK (Bloch: 2006). In 2004, the Home Office published a *Skills Audit of Refugees* based on a survey of nearly 2,000 refugees who had been given a positive decision on their status between November 2002 and February 2003. The report found that of all groups surveyed, Zimbabweans had the highest level of education, previous work experience and levels of literacy and English language. 57% had worked as professionals, managers or in professional and technical occupations (Kirk: 2004). Furthermore a study of 500 Zimbabweans found that 97% of Zimbabweans in the UK had a formal qualification and an above average level of education compared to the British population and other exile groups (Bloch: 2005). This is attributed to the selection bias within particular migration streams.

A 2009 Refugee Council/Zimbabwe Association report echoes this and highlights further issues including: 35% had been unable to take up offers of education or training because of financial barriers; 88% wanted to work; and 8% were given permission to work (Doyle: 2009).

A similar concern stems from young people who have been educated in the UK but cannot progress to university or gain employment due to their immigration status. There is also concern regarding a number of young undocumented Zimbabweans in the UK, who are facing destitution (Bloch et al.: 2010).

Destitution

Due to the political situation in Zimbabwe and the UK asylum system there is a significant population of Zimbabweans who have been living in the UK for many years without receiving a positive decision on their application for asylum, or have been refused asylum but are unable to return to Zimbabwe. Most of this population will not be able to undertake paid work and many are not receiving support from the Government. Therefore many adult asylum seekers face destitution, unable to support themselves, lacking any resources and are unable to work⁶. Many rely on help from family, friends, community or faith groups and charities. Some of those who are destitute can apply for the very limited 'hard cases' support under Section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, however this is becoming increasingly difficult (ASAP: 2008).

Detention

A recent survey of 292 Zimbabwean asylum-seekers conducted by the Refugee Council and Zimbabwe Association, found that 40 (14%) of the sample had been detained, half for more than three months, one fifth for between six months and two years (Doyle: 2009). Zimbabweans have been severely affected by the delays in resolving 'legacy cases', dating from before 2006 due to the uncertainty of return to Zimbabwe. In January 2009, the Home Office estimated there were 'more than 10,000' backlogged Zimbabwean cases⁷.

Since 2005, Zimbabweans held in detention under immigration powers in Britain have been largely individuals who had entered Britain on false foreign passports threatened with removal to destinations other than Zimbabwe (particularly Malawi and South Africa), those detained while making initial claims, and Zimbabweans with criminal records being held after completing their sentences. Removals to these two countries (particularly Malawi) have at times been resisted by Zimbabwean detainees and criticized by UNHCR, as some individuals have been imprisoned on arrival, and the Malawian government has passed Zimbabweans with fraudulent Malawian passports on to the Zimbabwean authorities (Reynolds and Muggeridge: 2008).

Hiv/aids

Since 2005, it has become commonplace to remove asylum seekers or irregular migrants living with HIV and AIDS whose applications for leave to remain have been denied.

A report by the African HIV Policy Network states that there have been many cases where someone who has been denied refugee status has also been denied continued access to treatment in the UK (Soomre:

'Zimbabwe has been hailed as a "success story" in the fight against AIDS. But abusive government policies are blocking treatment for those who desperately need it and making even more people vulnerable to infection.'

Joe Amon, director of the HIV AND AIDS program at Human Rights Watch

2008).

Resources

Amnesty International

Regularly updated news and annual reports on the human rights situation in Zimbabwe

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/zimbabwe>

BBC Country Profile: Zimbabwe

Country profile including detailed media information and historical timeline of political developments in Zimbabwe.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/country_profiles/1064589.stm

CIA World Factbook: Zimbabwe

Provides information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military and transnational issues in Zimbabwe.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/zi.html>

European Country of Origin Information Network. Country Profile on Zimbabwe

Country background, maps, index of national laws and links to global organizations concerned primarily with Zimbabwe.

<http://www.ecoi.net/zimbabwe>

National Documentation Packages on Zimbabwe

Contains documents on human rights, security conditions and other issues relevant to the determination of Zimbabwean refugee protection claims.

http://www.irb-cisr.gc.ca:8080/Publications/PubNDP_CDN.aspx?id=3465

Refugee Council. Sources of information about conditions in Zimbabwe – by theme.

Themes are based on the indicators used by VRSG (Home Office Voluntary return Steering Group): absence of re-migration; physical safety and security; freedom of movement; legal safety and security; housing; work/employment; education and training; and access to basic health services.

http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/howwehelp/directly/voluntary_returns/zimbabweadvicebytheme

Thomson Reuters Foundation. Country Profile on Zimbabwe

A humanitarian news network aiming to keep professionals and journalists up to date on humanitarian crises around the globe. Contains a directory of reports, briefings and statistics on Zimbabwe regarding people, standard of living, economy and aid, health, disasters, conflict and migration.

<http://www.alertnet.org/db/cp/zimbabwe.htm>

UNHCR. Refworld: Zimbabwe

Contains an exhaustive collection of reports relating to situations in countries of origin, policy documents and positions, and documents relating to international and national legal frameworks in Zimbabwe.

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country/456d621e2/ZWE.html>

United States Law Library of Congress

Provides links to information on Zimbabwe's constitutional, executive, judicial and legislative frameworks.

<http://www.loc.gov/law/help/guide/nations/zimbabwe.php>

World Health Organization. Country Profile on Zimbabwe

Information on diseases, health expenditures, health care provision and coverage, health system organisation and regulation, human resources in the health sector and statistics in Zimbabwe. <http://www.who.int/countries/zwe/en/>

Services and Advice Centres for Zimbabweans in the UK

Zimbabwe Association

A non-partisan support group for Zimbabwean asylum seekers and refugees across the UK

<http://www.zimbabweassociation.org.uk/>

The Britain Zimbabwe Society

A network of friends of the people of Zimbabwe
<http://www.britain-zimbabwe.org.uk/OFR9.htm>

Zimbabwe Action Group

A human rights organization which seeks to promote social cohesion and awareness of human rights in the Zimbabwean community in the UK. Provides a signposting service and forum for consultation and mutual support.
<http://zimbabweactiongroup.org/index.php?id=HomePage>

Zimbabwe Women's Network UK

A non-political organisation that assists Zimbabwean women with integration into the UK through advice on social, legal, political and economic issues.
<http://www.zimwomenuk.org.uk/index.html>

Citizens for Sanctuary: Strategic internships for Zimbabweans

The Zimbabwean Strategic Internship Scheme aims to assist in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe by increasing the skill levels and work experience of its citizens residing in the UK. <http://www.citizensforsanctuary.org.uk/pages/Strategic.html>

Phoenix Fund for Zimbabwe

Provides a source of financial assistance for Zimbabwean exiles in the UK who wish to pursue courses of professional development or vocational training.
<http://phoenixzimbabwe.org/>

The Bristol Zimbabwe Association

Provides advice, information and welfare support to the Zimbabwean community in Bristol.
<http://www.bristolzimbabweassociation.org.uk/index.html>

Zimbabwean Community Association

Advice and support for Zimbabwean refugees and asylum seekers in London.
<http://www.homelessuk.org/details.asp?id=UK23217>

News and media resources for Zimbabwe

Human Rights Watch

Provides news releases, reports, commentaries and letters on human rights abuses within Zimbabwe
<http://www.hrw.org/en/africa/zimbabwe>

Overseas Security Advisory Council

OSAC monitors and reports on regional security for American businesses operating overseas.
<https://www.osac.gov/Regions/country.cfm?country=195>

ZimOnline

Zimbabwe's Independent News Agency. Includes features, analysis, sports, opinions, letters and comments.
<http://www.zimonline.co.za/>

Zimbabwe Situation

Contains up-to-date news and articles on the situation in Zimbabwe, a news archive for every month since March 2000, news links and links to other related Zimbabwe sites. <http://www1.zimbabwesituation.com/>

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Footnotes

1 <http://www.allbusiness.com/agriculture-forestry/agriculture-agriculture-ownership/13654093-1.html>

2 Zimbabwe Peace Project, Early Warning Report on Human Rights and Food Violations, December 2008 http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/hr/081231zpp.asp?orgcode=zim028&year=0&range_start=1

3 Human Rights Watch, Free Activists Unlawfully Held, 15/1/09 <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/01/14/zimbabwe-free-activists-unlawfully-held>

4 House of Lords Decisions 15 February 2006 <http://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/markup.cgi?doc=/uk/cases/UKHL/2006/5.html&query=januzi&method=all>

5 It is recognised here that many of the issues faced by Zimbabwean refugees and asylum seekers are conflated in the literature and in reality with those who migrate for other reasons. See 'The migration – asylum nexus definition and significance' Stephen Castles and Nick Van Hear COMPAS 27th January 2005 <http://tolerance.cz/courses/multiculturalism/Unit4ims.ppt>

6 Studies also show that other categories of asylum seeker experience destitution and are not provided with support due to factors such as delays in processing applications and poor decision making by the UKBA. See Smart and Fullegar (2008), Smart (2009) and Asylum Support Appeals Partnership (2008)

7 Letter from Deputy Director Operation Policy, HO to ILPA, 29 January 2009.

8 See the judgment in the case of *N v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2005] UKHL 31 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200405/ldjudgmt/jd050505/home-1.htm>

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