



“I hate being idle”

Wasted skills and enforced dependence
among Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK

Lisa Doyle

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Executive Summary

“I’m tired of being miserable...I hate being poor. I hate being idle.”

“I did ask them for permission to work and they refused. No reason, you can’t, you’re not allowed to work...no reason and yet I’m not getting anything from them, I’m supporting myself you know so that it’s really a problem. It doesn’t make sense to me that someone who is able-bodied and mentally fit to work cannot do that. I think the whole point is just to frustrate one to the point where you say I’ve had it, I’m leaving...”

This report presents the findings of a research project conducted by the Refugee Council and the Zimbabwe Association. During January and February 2009, 292 Zimbabweans living in the UK responded to a survey about their education, skills and work experience, and the impact of life in the UK on their skills. Six detailed interviews were also carried out to learn more about the key issues.

The two organisations have been working for many years with asylum seekers who have been denied the opportunity to work and have limited access to other means of support. We have long argued that current government policy leaves skilled people in a state of dependence, depression and destitution. It de-skills them and dashes their hopes of rebuilding their lives, supporting their families, contributing to their host communities and, for many, of one day returning to help rebuild their country.

This research provides compelling evidence to substantiate these arguments; it shows that skilled and educated people are left destitute and forced to rely on handouts, despite being from professions where there are shortages in the UK, including health care and teaching.

We know that Zimbabwean asylum seekers have particular characteristics, speaking English and sharing an education system with common features to that of the UK. However, our experience of working with refugees from many different countries suggests that many of the findings of this research, concerning destitution caused by delays in the system combined with the denial of the right to work, apply to other nationalities.

Based on this research, and our experience of working with refugees and asylum seekers, we are calling for asylum seekers to have the right to work if they have waited longer than six months for their case to be resolved, or if they cannot return home.

Key findings

Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK have a high level of education and vocational qualification

- The majority of the 292 people surveyed had gained O' Levels at school (64 per cent), over a third had A' Levels (37 per cent), 13 per cent had studied to degree level and six per cent held a postgraduate degree.
- The qualifications held by the interviewees included O' Levels and A' Levels. One person interviewed held both a degree and postgraduate qualification in the field of medicine.
- Nearly a quarter of people surveyed (24 per cent) held National Certificates, 20 per cent had a National Diploma, 19 per cent attained a Higher National Certificate and 15 per cent had completed a Higher National Diploma.

The majority had held jobs that were specialist or skilled before they left Zimbabwe

- Teaching was the profession that featured most highly, with 45 people (15 per cent) having worked as a teacher or lecturer.
- Administration, finance, health care and retail jobs also featured highly.
- The most popular type of skills, identified by 38 per cent of people, encompassed various types of management skills including managing people, projects and businesses.
- Office skills also featured highly, with knowledge of IT making up a large proportion of those identifying skill sets in this group.

“I hate having to ask for money I hate not having my own money and I also hate not being able to buy what I want when I want. So it’s a bit of a difficult situation.”

“I have been left destitute and I play hide and seek with Immigration [authorities]. I have sometimes resorted to prostitution to get money for food and clothes not out of choice. I was never a prostitute in Zimbabwe. But life is tough here. I wasn’t to be granted asylum here and work legally.”

Many people had experienced destitution, homelessness and hunger in the UK, including those with children

- 208 people (71 per cent) were not receiving any financial or other support from the UK Government.
- 74 (25 per cent) of those who said that they were not receiving any support from the government and did not have permission to work had identified themselves as having dependants.
- People were heavily reliant on friends and family for support, with charities, community and faith groups also providing assistance.
- More than a third of people had been unable to buy necessities such as toiletries and clothing.
- Homelessness and hunger was something that 87 (30 per cent) and 62 (21 per cent) people had lived through.

About one third of people had participated in education and training in the UK, but the same number were unable to do so because of immigration status and lack of money

- 96 people (33 per cent) had undertaken some kind of education or training since coming to the UK. Some of these people may have come to the UK on a student visa prior to applying for asylum. These courses included postgraduate study and undergraduate degrees, as well as a broad range of vocational courses.

- 101 people (35 per cent) said they had applied for education or training in the UK, but had been unable to take it up because of financial and issues relating to immigration status.

Only 8 per cent of people were given permission to work but 88 per cent wanted to work – leaving most people with impossible dilemmas about how to survive

- Only 24 people (8 per cent) had been granted permission to work. In contrast to those who have been allowed to work, 88 per cent of people surveyed said that they would want to work if given the right to do so.
- The consequences of having no right to work included loss of structure and purpose, and negative impacts on feelings of self-worth and the ability to integrate into society.
- People had no choice but to rely on the generosity of others, and some felt they had little choice other than to break the law and work illegally to survive.

“...I have applied for permission to work twice. First on my own initiative and I got an answer within 7 days where they told me that they would not give me permission to work because I was a refused asylum seeker. And then the second time was through my solicitor and then we got all the evidence of the exams I’ve done to qualify for registration of the General Medical Council and a letter of recommendation from the Director of the Centre I go to to say that I would be able to get work if I had permission to work because the [name of] Hospital has got protected posts for refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work. So I’d be able to get a post there to start me off. So in spite of that they took a month and decided no with absolutely no grounds.”

The majority of people wanted to return to Zimbabwe if it was safe but felt their experience in the UK had affected their ability to get work and have the resources to start again

- 184 people (63 per cent of people) stated that they would like to return to Zimbabwe if it was safe to do so.
- When asked if they thought they would have a job to go back to, only 22 (eight per cent) said yes and 204 said no.
- Most people thought that their skills were not sufficient to carry out the work they had done previously (53 per cent) and a further 20 per cent were unsure.
- Only 28 per cent of people surveyed thought they would definitely have a place to live if they went to Zimbabwe.
- Only 12 people (four percent) thought they would have resources to help them start again back in Zimbabwe.

“I want to work. You know, getting up you’re just sitting each and every day. You don’t know where you’re coming from and where you’re going and remember we are not getting any younger. What will I do for my child if he grows up? There’s nothing for him...and contribute in the society, not particularly in my own – in the UK, I’d love to mix with people...I’d love to integrate...I feel those people who try to pump out their own money giving me, it’s not fair on them. They’ve got other things to do better than me.”

“It’s terrible, it’s totally unacceptable the way I see it...here’s a person who wants to work. I mean, I was paying tax when I was working you know. It wasn’t like I was on benefits or anything. The tax I was paying was to support partly other people that were on Job Seekers Allowance... and I’m not claiming anything from the government. They’re not giving me a penny so I’m getting deskilled each and every day. It’s terrible.”

¹ Although the vast majority of respondents did not have permission to work, some people will have entered the UK on working visas and would therefore have been allowed to work in the past.

Recommendations

- 1. Permission to work:** We want the Government to allow asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting longer than six months for a full resolution on their asylum claim. The Government aims to have decisions on asylum applications made within six months, so when they do not reach this target, those still in the asylum determination process should be allowed to work. We want the permission to work to continue for people whose claim for asylum is refused, but are unable to return home immediately through no fault of their own, and are complying with instructions to report to authorities.
- 2. Support to fill the gaps in shortage professions:** We have noted that the Government has identified a list of shortage professions in the UK. This research has shown that many Zimbabwean asylum seekers have the skills and experience to work in these professions, but are being denied the opportunity to do so. We believe that in addition to being given permission to work, those who have worked in shortage professions prior to their arrival in the UK should be supported to enter those sections of the workforce through specialist programmes. This will help to fill gaps in the labour market.
- 3. Support to engage in learning and training:** The research has identified barriers to the participation of asylum seekers in education and training. We would like the Government to support learning and training opportunities for asylum seekers, including those who have been refused but are unable to return. These opportunities assist people to enter the labour market at an appropriate level and allow employers to tap into this pool of talent. Asylum seekers should become eligible for Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding as home students when they have been in the UK for three years or more at the start of an academic year and they satisfy entry requirements. Higher education institutes should also ensure that asylum seekers are eligible for hardship funds, bursaries and other internal financial support available to registered students.
- 4. Protection for those who need it:** Government policies in relation to Zimbabwe contain inherent contradictions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognises the serious human rights abuses that are taking place, but the UK Border Agency wishes for people to return. We want the UK Border Agency to develop policies and practices that reflect the reality of the situation in the countries of origin of asylum seekers.

“The fact that I haven’t been working for 6 years, no employer will take me for that here, and in Zimbabwe I don’t think they would take me.”

“I’m not allowed to work and therefore what skills I had when I left Zimbabwe I’ve lost.”

“Due to prolonged time of not working I’m really suffering from depression and my life is in limbo. Actually, I have lost the value of life.”

Chapter 1 – Introduction

The political and economic situation in Zimbabwe is rarely out of the news. Over the last decade, the political regime has used violence against its opposition and civil society leading to Zimbabweans fleeing out of fear for their safety. The UK has been a destination for a variety of reasons, including historical colonial links, opportunities for work and study and because most Zimbabweans speak English and will not need to learn a new language as they seek to rebuild their lives.

There is a significant population of Zimbabweans, who have been living in the UK for many years without receiving a positive decision on their applications for asylum. At least 8,500 Zimbabweans whose applications are being handled by the Case Resolution Directorate, are not receiving financial support from the Government.² New people are arriving from Zimbabwe and fresh asylum claims are being submitted all the time. As a result of the UK government's restrictive asylum policies, most of this population will not be able to undertake paid work and many are not receiving support from the Government.

This report discusses the findings of a research project conducted by the Refugee Council and the Zimbabwe Association. The two organisations have been working for many years with asylum seekers who have been denied the opportunity to work and have limited access to other means of support. This partnership came together to investigate the experiences of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in more depth in order to gain a better understanding of the issues they face. The research aims were to gather quantitative and qualitative data to explore:

- the education, skills and work experience of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK;
- the ways in which people were supporting themselves;
- the impact of living in the UK on people's skills;
- whether Zimbabweans want to return home when it is safe to do so; and

- the resources people would have available on return, and the skills they would have to aid reconstruction.

For many years, community groups working with Zimbabwean asylum seekers have been highlighting the destitution they have increasingly witnessed. Previous research has illustrated that Zimbabweans in the UK are generally well-educated and skilled and that those undertaking paid work are often not employed in jobs that match their levels of skills.³ We have long argued that current government policy leaves skilled people in a state of dependence, depression and destitution. It de-skills them and dashes their hopes of rebuilding their lives, supporting their families, contributing to their host communities and, for many, of one day returning to help rebuild their country.

This research focuses only on Zimbabweans, but many of the findings and recommendations are applicable to all asylum seekers who seek safety in the UK. The restrictions placed upon asylum seekers' eligibility to work will affect all nationalities, and the destitution experienced by Zimbabwean participants in this research is not unique to people from that country alone. This report illustrates the experiences of one particular group of asylum seekers, but the findings can be used to further our understanding of the impact of Government policies across the board.

2 The Case Resolution Directorate processes claims that were made prior to the introduction of the 'New Asylum Model' in March 2007. Figures obtained from the public minutes of the Case Resolution Stakeholder Sub-Group meeting, 17th March 2009.

3 Bloch (2005)

Chapter 2 – Policy context

This chapter outlines the policy context in which this research was undertaken. The sections were written by two of the Refugee Council's Policy Advisers, and outline the situation of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK, with a particular focus upon asylum determination, as well as access to work, welfare and education for asylum seekers.

2.1 Seeking asylum in the UK: determinations and removals

The destitution crisis faced by so many Zimbabweans in the UK is a result of the combination of the human rights and humanitarian disaster in Zimbabwe and the UK government's asylum policies. The fear of unsafe conditions in Zimbabwe prevents people returning home, whilst staying in the UK can result in destitution. The refusal by the Home Office to give permission to stay and the UK government's decision to prevent most asylum seekers from working legally has been accompanied by its failure to provide any form of basic welfare support to those Zimbabweans unwilling to take up the offer of a one-way plane ticket home. This situation has led to many Zimbabweans becoming destitute.

Zimbabweans started applying for asylum in the UK in increased numbers in 2000, the year from which Amnesty International dates the significant deterioration of the human rights situation in Zimbabwe.⁴ February 2000 saw President Mugabe's Zanu-PF government lose a referendum on a draft constitution, its first electoral defeat since Zimbabwe achieved independence from the British. In June, it narrowly won a disputed parliamentary election against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). In the UK 1,010 applications for asylum were made by Zimbabweans compared with 230 in the previous year, 1999, and just 80 in 1998.⁵ By the end

of 2000 the Home Office had recognised 20 Zimbabwean asylum applicants as refugees, granted another 10 Exceptional Leave to Remain but issued refusals to 525 others (95 per cent of decisions made). This pattern of widespread reports of human rights and humanitarian crises in Zimbabwe yet very high levels of refusals by the Home Office to grant leave to Zimbabwean asylum seekers would continue throughout the subsequent years.

By the end of 2001, the UK government's Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, was reporting to the House of Commons that *"the situation in Zimbabwe is extremely worrying. People are being oppressed, violence is being used, the rule of law is not being honoured, the economy is in a desperate state, poverty is growing and the country has the worst incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world"*.⁶ Another 2,140 Zimbabweans had made applications for asylum in 2001; though again the number recognised as refugees by the Home Office was very low at only 120 and the number granted Exceptional Leave to Remain even smaller at 45. The Home Office refused asylum to 1,970 applicants (91 per cent of decisions made).

As the human rights, economic and humanitarian crises worsened in Zimbabwe, the start of 2002 saw growing calls in the UK for the government to change its approach to asylum seekers from Zimbabwe; the Liberal Democrat Home Affairs Spokesperson stated that "You can't have an ethical foreign policy without an ethical asylum and deportation policy" and the Shadow Home Secretary, along with UNHCR, called for the UK government to suspend all deportations to Zimbabwe.⁷ Subsequently on 15 January 2002, the UK's government's Home Secretary announced that he had decided to suspend removals of failed asylum seekers to Zimbabwe until after the elections in Zimbabwe in March that year.⁸ This suspension however remained in force until November 2004.

4 Amnesty International (2008)

5 Unless otherwise stated, all UK asylum statistics for 1998 to 2007 are taken from: Home Office (2008), Asylum Statistics United Kingdom 2007, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/hosb1108.pdf>. Please note that the Home Office states that figures referring to 2007 are provisional.

6 Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, House of Commons, Wednesday 19 December 2001, Commons Hansard, Column 273. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo011219/debtext/11219-01.htm>

7 Bright et al. (2002)

8 Home Office press release notice, Home Secretary Suspends Removals to Zimbabwe, 15 January 2002, Home Office: London, STAT001/2008

Although the Home Office did not enforce removals to Zimbabwe, it carried on refusing to grant leave to the majority of applicants for asylum. 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 or Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection to another 175 whilst refusing 9,480 applications (73 per cent of decisions made).⁹

Although it agreed that there had been no improvement in conditions in Zimbabwe since it suspended removals in January 2002, the UK government announced its intention to start enforcing removals in November 2004.¹⁰ The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration sought to justify this change of policy by asserting that the absence of enforced returns acted as a 'pull factor' claiming as evidence that *"the proportion of claimants whose claims are not well-founded had increased markedly over the period of the suspension"*.¹¹

The UK government's policy to enforce removals lasted just eight months as in July 2005, as a result of a series of legal challenges in the courts, the Home Office gave undertakings not to carry out any forced removals.¹² During 2005, Home Office figures show that 245 Zimbabweans were returned to Zimbabwe.¹³ Figures from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) show 114 of these returned on the assisted voluntary return programme it runs on behalf of the UK government.¹⁴

In the following years, UK Government spokespersons continued to express concerns about the conditions in Zimbabwe. Lord Triesman reported *"that the most*

recent events in Zimbabwe are of grave concern. Zimbabweans are deprived of their democratic and human rights, facing the consequences of chronic economic misrule and grappling with severe food shortages".¹⁵ Geoffrey Hoon, the UK Government's Minister for Europe asked *"May I make it clear that the UK condemns the most recent assaults on ordinary Zimbabweans? The organisation Women of Zimbabwe Arise shuns any form of violent demonstration and has a history of peaceful protest; there can be no excuse for the attacks that its members have suffered. The beating of women and children only two months after the abuse of the trade union leadership is further evidence of Zimbabwe's terrible human rights record"*.¹⁶

Three years after the initial challenge to the UK government's policy towards asylum seekers from Zimbabwe in November 2008, the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal published a determination setting out country guidance on Zimbabwe.¹⁷ The Tribunal found that the evidence establishes clearly that, as well as other categories of claimants, *"anyone who is unable to demonstrate support for or loyalty to the regime or to Zanu-PF is at risk on return to Zimbabwe"*. In rejecting the submissions by the Home Office that it was not the right time to give country guidance, and whilst noting the power sharing arrangement between President Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai and Arthur Mutambara on behalf of the two formations of the MDC, the Tribunal held that in the absence of some international intervention or unforeseen upheaval *"we could not see that there can be said to be an end in sight to the real risk of violence being perpetrated on those identified as disloyal to the regime and therefore as potential supporters of the MDC"*.¹⁸

9 The Home Office stopped granting Exceptional Leave from April 2003 and started giving permission to stay in the form of Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection.

10 Des Browne, Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, UK, House of Commons, Tuesday 16 November 2004, Commons Hansard, Column 78WS
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmhansrd/vo041116/wmstext/41116m02.htm>

11 Yet Home Office Statistics show that during the two years when the suspension was in force, 73 per cent of its decisions were refusals while in the two years immediately prior to the suspension of removals, 95 per cent of its decisions were refusals in 2000 and 91 per cent were refusals in 2001. This shows a significant decrease in proportion of refusals during the suspension period.

12 Further details on UK government policy on returning asylum seekers to Zimbabwe whose applications have been refused are set out by Gabrielle Garton Grimwood, (2009) <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/briefings/snha-03391.pdf>
Note these Standard Notes House of Commons Library notes are subject to being updated.

13 Heath et al. (2006). 260 Zimbabweans were removed from the UK in 2005 but this figure includes those removed to countries other than Zimbabwe.

14 International Organisation for Migration (2008)

15 Lord Triesman, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Commons Hansard Column WS68, 18 July 2005
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.com/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo050718/text/50718-06.htm>

16 Mr. Geoffrey Hoon, Minister for Europe, Commons Hansard, 5 December 2006, Column 146
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm061205/debtext/61205-0002.htm>

17 RN (Returnees) Zimbabwe CG [2008] UKAIT 00083
http://www.ait.gov.uk/Documents/CaseLaw/cg_list_last_updated_28_04_09.pdf

18 RN (Returnees) Zimbabwe CG [2008] UKAIT 00083, paragraph 220.

Whilst the UK government has not been carrying out enforced removals, it has consistently advised that refused asylum seekers from Zimbabwe should nevertheless leave the UK and return to Zimbabwe.¹⁹ To assist such returns the UK government provides funds for the IOM's Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration Fund (VARRP). 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.²⁰ Figures provided by IOM show that a total of 628 Zimbabweans have returned under its VARRP programme from 2005 to March 2009 (inclusive), at an average rate of about 10 per month.²¹

In 2006, when launching the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) annual report on human rights, Margaret Beckett, then Foreign Secretary, described Zimbabwe as *"suffering under a regime that is a byword for human rights abuses"*.²² By the time of its report for the following year the FCO was writing that *"conditions had deteriorated since 2006 with a marked escalation in the use of violence and intimidation"*.²³ In its latest report for 2008, the FCO recorded *"a frightening deterioration of the situation"* despite the fact that *"for many years we have made clear our deep concern about human rights abuses in Zimbabwe – including torture; intimidation; arbitrary arrests and detentions; forced displacements; violence; repressive legislation; lack of freedom of expression, association and the press; and politicisation of food"*.²⁴ Despite the political power-sharing agreement reached in September 2008 in Zimbabwe, Human Rights Watch and others continue to report human rights abuses and violence.²⁵

Persecution and human rights abuses in Zimbabwe have been accompanied by humanitarian and health

crises. In February 2009, Medecins Sans Frontieres was warning that the political crisis and economic meltdown had led to an implosion of the health system and basic infrastructure of the country. The World Health Organisation had recorded that life expectancy for women had fallen to 34 years and for men to 37, that one in five adults were living with HIV/AIDS of whom many experience poor access to medical treatment. Food shortages were predicted to worsen in the immediate months, with an estimated three million seeking refuge in South Africa, and yet MSF found restrictions on its activities due to the rigid control of the Zimbabwean government over aid agencies.²⁶ At the start of 2009, the Zimbabwe government had allowed the use of foreign currencies such as the South African rand, US dollar, and Botswana pula as a response to the currency hyperinflation claimed to be running at 231 million percent.²⁷

Yet by April the Integrated Regional Information Networks (which is part of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) reported that the government had announced the suspension for at least a year of the local Zimbabwean currency, a measure ineffective for ordinary people who lack any foreign currency.²⁸

2.2. Entitlement to work

The majority of asylum seekers in the UK are not permitted to work in the UK. In 2002, the Government withdrew the entitlement to apply for permission to work which had applied to asylum seekers who had been waiting for more than six months for an initial decision on their asylum application. This entitlement was for the main asylum applicant only and did not extend to dependants of working age.

19 For example, Tony McNulty, Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Nationality, House of Commons, 14 December 2008, Commons Hansard, Column 154WS <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo051214/wmstext/51214m03.htm> and Lord West of Spithead, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, House of Lords, 20 October 2008, Lords Hansard, Column WA88 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldhansrd/text/81020w0003.htm>

20 International Organisation for Migration (2009)

21 International Organisation for Migration, *ibid.*

22 Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett launch of the 2006 Annual Report on Human Rights, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/newsroom/latest-news/?view=Speech&id=1893354>

23 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2008)

24 Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2009)

25 For example, see Human Rights Watch (2009)

26 Medecins Sans Frontieres (2009)

27 <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83053>

28 IRIN, ZIMBABWE: Shops shelves fill up but customers stay away <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=83923>

The Home Office justified removing the employment concession for two main reasons. Firstly, they stated that a vast majority of asylum seekers were receiving decisions on their asylum claim within six months. In addition, the Government expected that it would make decisions on new asylum claims within two months. Therefore, the Home Office believed that the concession was no longer appropriate. Secondly, the Government wanted to protect the asylum process from abuse by ensuring that it was not open to those who only wanted to come to the UK to work.²⁹ Those asylum seekers who had had been granted permission under the concession could continue to work.³⁰

In February 2005, the UK implemented the European Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 (commonly known as the EU Reception Directive). This allows asylum seekers to apply for permission to work if they have not received an initial decision on their asylum claim from the Home Office after twelve months.³¹ There is no right of appeal if the application for work under the Directive is refused. Asylum seekers are not included within the Points Based System (PBS) which is designed to manage foreign nationals coming to the UK for work, study or training.

2.2.1 Volunteering and Purposeful Activities

UKBA has expressed its support for asylum seekers volunteering and engaging in purposeful activities.³² This policy aims to give people the opportunity to be actively involved in their own and wider communities. In doing so, UKBA has made it clear that this should not count as employment, paid or unpaid.

There are no legal restrictions on refused asylum seekers or those who have submitted further representations continuing to volunteer. Although UKBA recognises this, the guidance they have issued to employers discourages volunteering amongst these groups.³³

2.3 Asylum support and destitution

The vast majority of asylum seekers are debarred by the UK government from claiming social security benefits.³⁴ Instead asylum seekers unable to support themselves are eligible for asylum support provided that they are destitute and applied for asylum as soon as 'reasonably practicable' after arrival in the UK.³⁵ Eligibility for support lasts until the asylum seeker receives a final decision on the application for asylum; if the decision on the asylum application is negative then support will cease after 28 days unless there is a dependent child in the household of the asylum seeker at that time. In certain limited circumstances a person can make a fresh claim for asylum and if the Home Secretary accepts that it is a fresh claim as it is sufficiently different from the previous claim and stands a realistic chance of success, then that person becomes eligible for asylum support again.³⁶ Following the RN judgement, some refused asylum seekers from Zimbabwe were able to lodge fresh applications for asylum.

Many refused adult asylum seekers face destitution, unable to support themselves, lacking any resources and prohibited from working legally.³⁷ In some very restricted circumstances such refused asylum seekers

29 As outlined by Beverley Hughes, the then Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration). For full details, see <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2002-07-23.72779.h&s=work+concession+speaker%3A10296#g72779.r0>

30 The Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration) retained the discretion to grant permission to work for asylum seekers in exceptional circumstances (ibid).

31 Again this only applies to main applicants and continues until a person's claim is determined (i.e. granted leave to remain or refused following an appeal). In general, the Home Office will grant permission to work if the main applicant was not responsible for the delay in making a decision and does not include permission to engage in self employment or a business or professional activity.

32 As outlined by Beverley Hughes, the then Minister of State (Citizenship and Immigration). For full details, see <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2002-07-23.72779.h&s=work+concession+speaker%3A10296#g72779.r0>. See also Comprehensive Guidance for Employers on Preventing Illegal Working (Border and Immigration Agency, 2008: 54, 58)

33 Border and Immigration Agency, *ibid.*, p59

34 Those asylum seekers 'in need of care and attention', being unable to care for themselves, are eligible for community care services provided by local authorities under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948.

35 Asylum seekers are eligible for support under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The requirement that asylum seekers must apply as soon as 'reasonably practicable' was introduced by the UK government in section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. It does not apply to families with children. The Act also allows the Secretary of State to provide support where it is necessary to avoid a breach of the rights under the European Convention on Human Rights 1998.

36 For further details on such claims, see Willman et al. (2004: 3.62-3.68)

37 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. For example, see Smart and Fullagar (2008), Smart (2009) and Asylum Support Appeals Partnership (2008)

may be eligible for 'hard cases' support under section 4 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. Asylum seekers are eligible for this very basic and low level of support if they take all reasonable steps to leave the UK or when the Secretary of State declares that there is no viable route of return available.³⁸ The UK Home Secretary has never made a declaration that there is not a viable route of return to Zimbabwe. Instead UK government ministers and the UKBA have consistently advised refused and destitute asylum seekers from Zimbabwe that they expect them to return voluntarily to Zimbabwe, regardless of the deterioration of conditions in Zimbabwe during this decade.

Despite the Prime Minister's claim back in July 2008 that his government "*are actively looking at what we can do to support in this country Zimbabweans who are failed asylum seekers*", no measures to alleviate the destitution faced by asylum seekers from Zimbabwe have been taken and the government continues to refuse to provide food and support to those unwilling to return.³⁹

2.4 Further education, higher education and training

Further education includes learning and training within the post compulsory education sector. This currently covers learners from 16 years onwards. The main funding body is the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) which has set out those groups who are eligible for its funding as 'home learners'.⁴⁰ Within these groups, certain categories of learners qualify for LSC fee remission (i.e. the fees charged for the course). Those who fall outside this group are considered as overseas learners and are therefore liable to pay the full overseas rate for the course, unless the further education institution decides to reduce the amount charged.

Asylum seekers are not eligible for the LSC's Discretionary Learner Support Fund.⁴¹ In addition, 16-18 year old asylum seekers are not able to claim for the Education Maintenance Allowance.⁴²

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) provides funding to institutes of higher education (e.g. universities). Universities receive HEFCE funding for those students who are classified as home students for fee purposes.⁴³ Asylum seekers are entitled to study in higher education provided they meet the entrance requirements of the course and pay the course fees. However, asylum seekers are classified as overseas students for fee purposes and do not qualify for HEFCE funding. The situation is different in Scotland where the Scottish Government funds asylum seekers who meet certain criteria.⁴⁴

A university has the discretion to charge asylum seekers home student fees or waive the fees altogether. A number of universities have chosen to do so, either as an admissions policy decision or on the strength of the individual applicant. In terms of support while studying, asylum seekers are not entitled to student support such as student loans for tuition fees and living costs and childcare. However, asylum seekers are eligible to apply to a University's hardship fund.

Training opportunities are restricted to those that do not involve paid or unpaid employment (the same criteria used for volunteering). UKBA has stated that asylum seekers can do vocational training where it is part of a college course, but it cannot be work-based where the training is part of a job. Any work placement that is part of a college course must be unpaid.⁴⁵ Asylum seekers are unable to access public funds for initiatives such as New Deal or Modern Apprenticeships.

38 The other limited circumstances when refused asylum seekers are eligible for 'hard cases' support are: that the person is unable to leave due physical impediment or some other medical reason, or has been given permission to proceed with judicial review of the decision on the asylum application, or to avoid breach of Convention rights within the meaning of the Human Rights Act.

39 Prime Minister, House of Commons, 10 July 2008, Hansard Commons, Column 1556

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080710/debtext/80710-0005.htm>

40 These groups are outlined in paragraphs 14-19 of the Learning and Skills Council's Learner Eligibility Guidance (2008)

41 The Discretionary Learner Support Fund is aimed at providing support to those learners facing financial hardship.

42 The Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) aims to encourage participation in post-compulsory learning by providing financial support to 16-18 year old learners from low-income families.

43 Statutory Instrument (2008)

44 For information on higher education funding for asylum seekers in Scotland, see Scottish Government and Skill Scotland (2008)

45 If it carries a training allowance, the person may need to have the conditions attached to their temporary admission amended.

Chapter 3 – Method

During January and February 2009, a survey was conducted of Zimbabweans living in the UK which resulted in the 292 responses analysed in this report.⁴⁶ The questionnaires were administered by six volunteer researchers who were recruited by the Zimbabwe Association and are members of the Zimbabwean community. The researchers were given a briefing session on the purpose, methods and scope of the study. The researchers were based in the East Midlands, London, Manchester and Cardiff and they had links with Zimbabweans in their local areas with whom they conducted the survey. The researchers accessed respondents through personal contacts and community and social groups that were frequented by Zimbabweans.

Following a preliminary analysis of the survey in March, six qualitative interviews were conducted in April to explore some of the issues raised in the survey in more depth. The interviewees were recruited by the Zimbabwe Association and the interviews were conducted by the Refugee Council’s Research Unit. The interview questions covered many of the same issues as the survey, but the interview method allowed participants to disclose more details about their experiences, to convey their thoughts and feelings and the interviewer was able to ask follow up questions.⁴⁷ The quotations from interviewees in this report are verbatim.

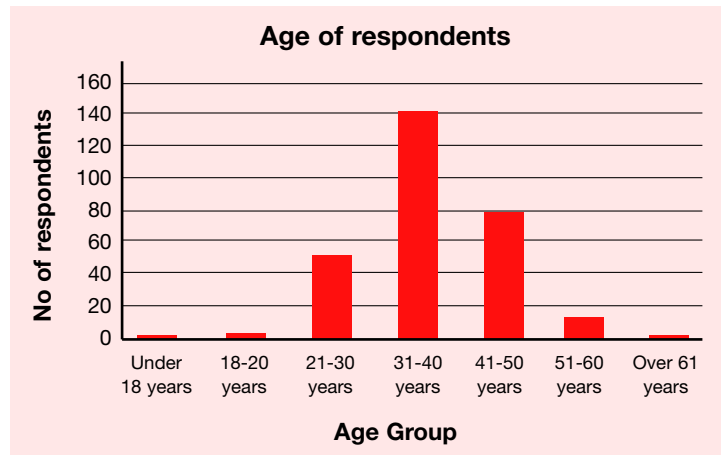
3.1 Profile of survey respondents

The survey gathered 292 responses from people who described themselves as either asylum seekers or refused asylum seekers. There were 370 responses to the survey in total, but some people had gained refugee status, or were in the UK on student visas, so their questionnaires are not discussed in the analysis that follows. A total of 143 described themselves as ‘asylum seeker’ and 149 selected ‘refused asylum seeker’. All the respondents have at some point applied for protection from the UK Government having left Zimbabwe. There are some issues to consider about definitions as some of those who had previous claims rejected but have lodged fresh claims may describe themselves as either ‘refused’ or as an asylum seeker. It should be noted that not every respondent answered every question so in the discussion of the

findings below, the numbers will not always add up to a total of 292.

3.1.1 Gender and age

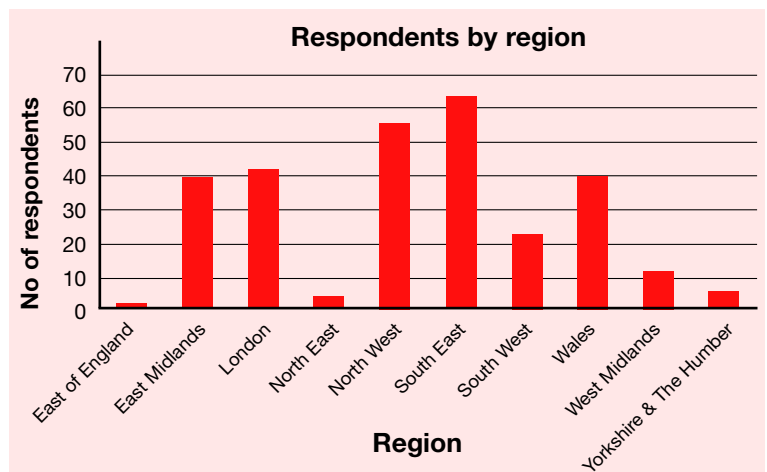
More women than men responded to the survey (165 women compared to 120 men), and those between the ages of 31-40 years were by far the most numerous, as illustrated in the graph below.



The age profile shows that 81 per cent of the sample was over 31 years old. Only five respondents were 20 years or younger.

3.1.2 Region

The respondents to the survey lived in different regions across England and some were resident in Wales. As highlighted previously, the volunteer researchers were based in different parts of England and Wales and they linked with local networks of Zimbabweans in order to carry out the fieldwork.



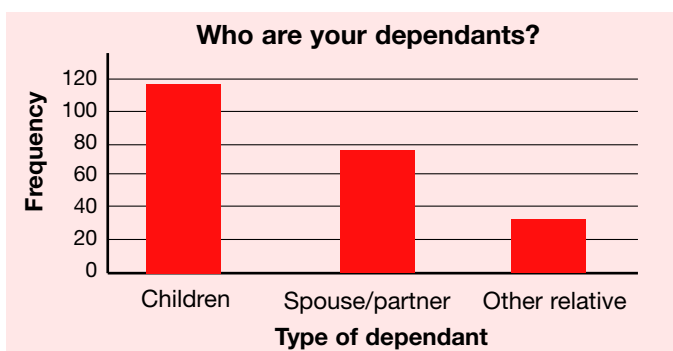
46 See Appendix 1 for a copy of the questionnaire.

47 See Appendix 2 for a copy of the interview questions.

Over a third of respondents lived in London or the South East of England, and the graph shows that there are higher proportions of respondents from the regions where the researchers were based. However, it should be noted that all of the English regions are represented, as well as 40 responses being from people living in Wales.

3.1.3 Dependants and family in the UK

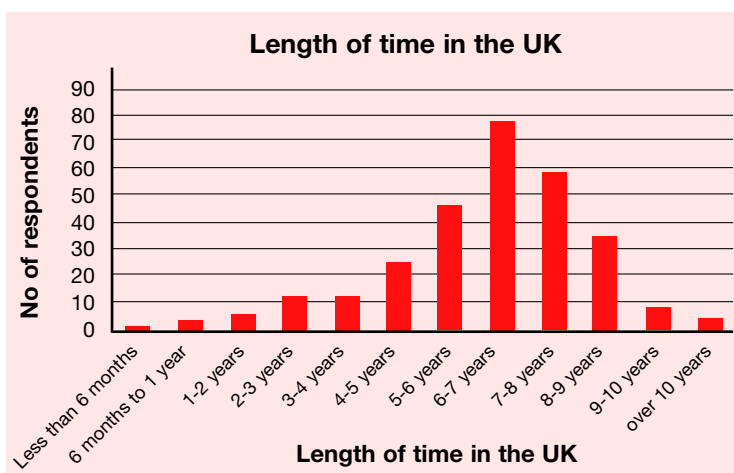
Respondents were asked about any dependants or family they had living in the UK. Dependants in this context were defined as a person who depends on the respondent for financial support. A total of 130 respondents (45 per cent) stated that they had dependants with them in the UK. The majority of these dependants were children, as displayed in the graph below.



The 'other relative' category here included siblings, grandparents, grandchildren and friends. Nearly half (48 per cent) of respondents stated that they had family members in the UK who were not necessarily dependent upon them for financial support.

3.1.4 Length of time in the UK

As previously stated, all of the respondents included in the survey analysis presented here were either asylum seekers or refused asylum seekers. Respondents were asked how long they had been in the UK, and the results are displayed in the graph below.



The responses show that many of those completing the survey had been here for a significant period of time, with 87 per cent living in the UK for more than 4 years. It should be noted that not all of these people will have been in the asylum system for the amount of time stated. For example, some may have initially arrived on student or work visas, and then applied for asylum when these expired. While not all of them will have been waiting for decisions on asylum applications and appeals for the entire period, this will certainly be the case for some.

3.2 Profile of interviewees

Qualitative interviews were conducted with six people. There were four women and two men, and their ages ranged from 37 to 52 years. All of the interviewees had previously had their applications for asylum in the UK refused. One heard in the month before the interview that she had been granted refugee status (five year limited leave) having first applied in 2002.⁴⁸ The interviewees described years of multiple applications and appeals.

The interviewees lived in the North West, London and the South East of England. None of the interviewees had dependants with them in UK, although three did talk of their children back in Zimbabwe. Five of the six had relatives in the UK, including siblings and uncles/aunts. In terms of the length of time the interviewees had spent in the UK, one had been here for six years, three for seven years, one for nine years and one for eleven years.

3.3 Summary

This chapter has outlined the profile of those who responded to the questionnaires and participated in the interviews. The characteristics and experiences described in this chapter will help to put some of the ensuing discussion in context, and links between respondents' profiles and experiences are highlighted in subsequent sections of the report.

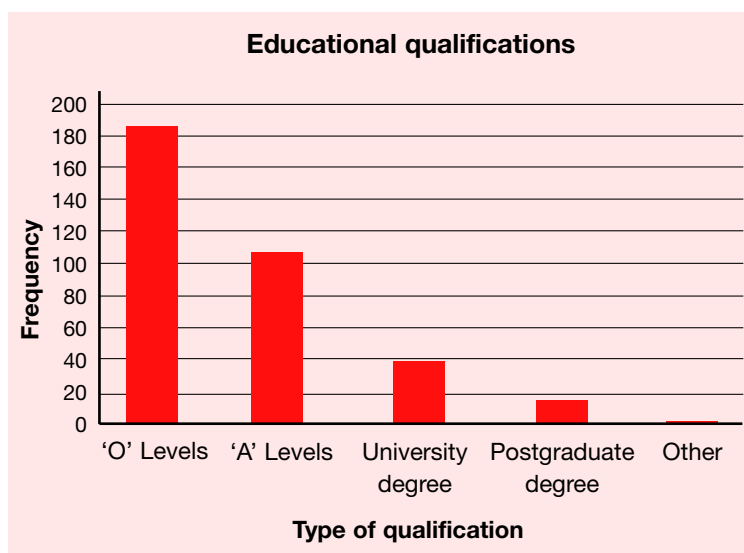
One of the main aims of this research was to investigate the types of education, training and work experiences Zimbabwean asylum seekers had prior to their arrival in the UK. This chapter will discuss the findings from the survey and interviews, and provide an overview of the achievements and work profiles of the research participants.

⁴⁸ This interviewee therefore reflected on her experiences prior to getting status during the interview.

Chapter 4 – Education, training and work experience in Zimbabwe

4.1 Education and vocational qualifications

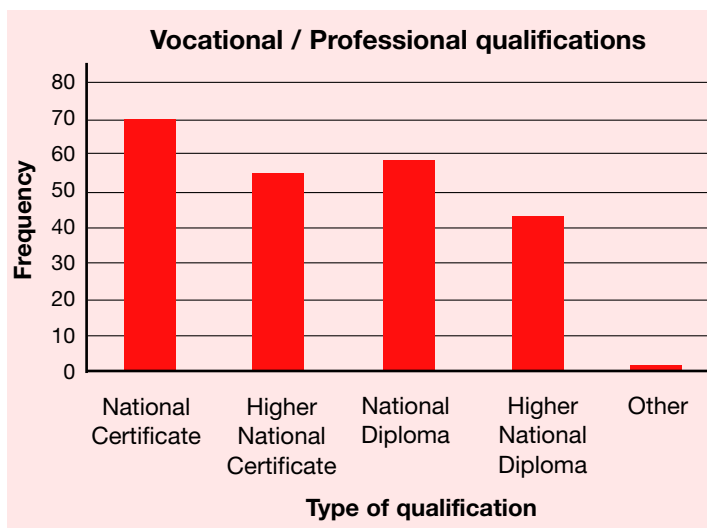
Respondents were asked what educational qualifications they had attained in Zimbabwe. Even after independence, the Zimbabwean education and qualifications system still resembles the British system in many respects at both secondary and higher education levels, which explains the familiarity of the qualifications named in the graph below.⁴⁹ State education is not free at secondary level in Zimbabwe so families are expected to pay school fees.



The graph shows that the majority of the 292 respondents had gained O' Levels at school (64 per cent), over a third had A' Levels (37 per cent), 13 per cent had studied to degree level and six per cent held a postgraduate degree. The one 'other' answer was described as "primary level" which is likely to mean that the respondent left education after primary schooling. Some respondents gave examples of what their qualifications were in and examples included degrees in Education and Business Studies.

The education qualifications attained by the interviewees included O' Levels and A' Levels. One respondent held both a degree and postgraduate qualification in the field of medicine.

Respondents were also asked if they had any vocational or professional qualifications. Their responses are illustrated in the following graph.



Nearly a quarter of respondents (24 per cent) held National Certificates, 20 per cent had a National Diploma, 19 per cent attained a Higher National Certificate and 15 per cent had completed a Higher National Diploma. The two 'other' responses were from people who had gained City and Guilds qualifications. Some respondents gave examples of what their qualifications were, which included National Diplomas in Education and Marketing, and a Higher National Certificate in Building Construction.

The interviewees outlined a range of specialist vocational/professional qualifications. These included a Certificate and Diploma in Education, a Diploma in Accounting, National Certificates in two different types of engineering, and a Certificate administered by an International Non-Governmental Organisation which enabled the person to be a nursing assistant. One interviewee explained that she was in the process of studying for a further specialist accounting Diploma which her employers were paying for, but she left Zimbabwe before this was completed.

This data shows that most of the participants in this research had been educated to at least O' Level standard, and many had attained higher level educational qualifications. These findings also show

⁴⁹ See the UK NARIC (2007) <http://www.refugeesintoteaching.org.uk/Resources/Refugees%20into%20Teaching/Documents/PDF/TeacherTrainingZimbabwe.pdf>

that many in this sample had undertaken specialist vocational training to assist them in their jobs. These findings concur with previous research undertaken into the education levels of Zimbabwean diaspora in the UK, which also found that levels of educational achievement were high.⁵⁰

4.2 Work experience in Zimbabwe

Respondents to the survey were asked what their last three jobs were before they left Zimbabwe. The rationale for asking about the last three jobs was to capture the types of work respondents usually did as it is possible that their careers may have been disrupted immediately prior to their leaving Zimbabwe. It is also possible that, given the economic situation in Zimbabwe, those who had left the country more recently will not have been working in their usual professions due to high levels of unemployment forcing people to take whatever work is available.

This section of the survey was open-ended to allow respondents to be able to include details about their jobs. This, coupled with multiple responses and both unclear and very specific descriptions of people's jobs, led to a complex set of answers. The table below displays the responses grouped into categories. These are indicative of the types of jobs that individuals had done and it should be borne in mind that some people only mentioned one job (this was typical of teachers) whereas others stated three (and these could have been in the same profession). It should be noted that some respondents were unspecific in their descriptions of their jobs, for example describing themselves as a 'manager'. Some people also stated 'self-employed', but did not outline in which profession so these responses have been excluded from the analysis here. The jobs have been grouped together and are listed in the table below.

A full list of the jobs can be found in Appendix 3. The table illustrates that the majority of respondents held jobs that were specialist or skilled. Teaching was the profession that featured most highly, with 45 respondents (15 per cent) having worked as a teacher or lecturer. It has

been acknowledged that teachers have been particular targets of persecution in Zimbabwe, which may be one of the reasons why they feature so highly in this

Respondents' jobs in Zimbabwe

Qualified Specialist	54
Teacher / Headteacher / Lecturer	45
Surveyor	2
Qualified / senior healthcare	2
Qualified / senior financial	5
Specialist	32
Police	3
Transport / Town planning	6
Specialist technical / scientific	11
Civil service specialist / officer	4
Journalist / Media	4
Farmer	4
Skilled	119
Skilled manual / technical	24
Junior / mid-level financial	10
Mid-level / junior healthcare	8
Administration / Office work	40
Retail / Service – mid-level and junior	37
Management	20
Retail / Service – Management	8
Manager – general	12
Non-skilled	17
Non-skilled manual	8
Non-skilled other	9
Other	22
Not employed	3

sample.⁵¹ Administration, finance, health care and retail jobs also featured highly where respondents held positions at a variety of levels.

The interviewees were asked about the types of work they did in Zimbabwe before coming to the UK. These jobs included accounting assistant, doctor, farmer, nursing assistant, teacher and tool maker and were described very much in terms of them being professions. Two interviewees mentioned having previously worked as an income tax assessor and a metal machinist, but these were not the areas of work they were engaged in before leaving Zimbabwe. Some of the interviewees talked specifically about their 'professions'. For them the work they had carried out was a source of pride and achievement. The teacher referred to her "noble profession" and the accountant described the hard work it took to qualify and settle in at work, but she felt it was worth it especially as she had been in line for promotion at the point she fled. A

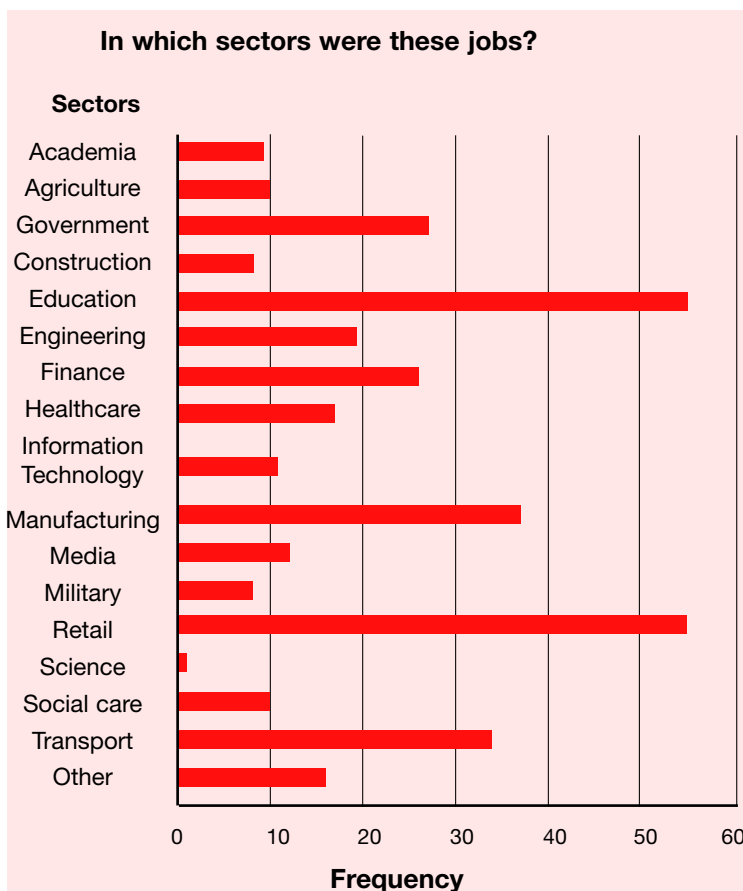
50 Bloch (2005) found that 82 per cent had a qualification and 38 percent held a first degree or higher. It should be noted that nearly half of the sample in the research had emigrated to seek employment rather than to seek asylum, which may go some way towards explaining the higher proportions than witnessed in this research. Bloch's research also included Zimbabweans in South Africa as well as the UK.

51 The RN judgement included the identification of teachers in Zimbabwe as being at risk of persecution. For a summary of RN, see Refugee Council (2008)

person's job or profession can often be a significant factor in their sense of identity, and this appeared to be the case for those interviewed for this research.

The job types discussed above give some indication of the sectors in which the survey respondents worked, but this information alone does not necessarily clarify the types of organisation or company they worked in. For this reason, respondents were asked in which sector their jobs were.

The results show that the education and retail sectors were dominant. Manufacturing, transport, government and finance followed with a frequency of at least 25. The 'other' category included hospitality/tourism (6), student (2), administration (2), motor industry (1), mining (1), private sector (1), aviation (1), Non-Governmental Organisation (1) and local government



(1). This further illustrates the range of work experience respondents' had.

4.3 Skills

The questionnaire asked respondents to identify the skill sets they had in order to capture abilities that they had gained as part of their previous work experience, but were not necessarily specific to particular professions or jobs. This helps to illustrate transferable skills that would be of use in a variety of jobs and roles. Some respondents identified more than one skills set, and the responses are outlined in the table below.

Respondents' skills

Management skills	102
People Management	52
Project Management	28
Unspecified business/Management	19
Human Resources Management	2
Financial Management	1
Office skills	90
Computer/IT/IT Repairs	78
Secretarial/administration/typing	8
Research	2
Information Dissemination	1
Time Management and planning	1
Specialist skills	21
Teaching/Headteacher	8
Accountancy/Banking	4
Counselling	1
Detective	1
Doctor	1
Environmental Health	1
Healthcare	1
Land Management	1
Land Surveyor	1
Lecturer	1
Nurse	1
Transport Organisation	1
Technical Skills	16
Technical	3
Driving	2
Engineering/Mechanics	2
Sewing	2
Chemical Processing	1
Electrical	1
Food Industry	1
Maintenance	1
Metal Work	1
Printer	1
Spray painting	1
Interpersonal skills	16
Sales/Marketing	7
Customer Services	2
Communication	1
Motivational Speaker	1

Respondents' skill sets continued

PR	1
Self-Help	1
Social skills	1
Tourism and hospitality	1
Training	1
Artistic skills	2
Artist	1
Music	1
None	7
Other	1
Sporting	1

It is likely that this list is not comprehensive as it is often the case that people find it difficult to identify the types of skills they possess. This is illustrated by the fact that, for example, only eight people identified themselves as having teaching skills when the previous question relating to jobs identified 45 respondents who had been teachers. It is also apparent that descriptions of skills overlapped in some people's responses.

The most popular category was the one which encompasses various types of management skills illustrating that respondents had the ability to manage people, projects and businesses.⁵² Office skills also featured highly, with knowledge of IT making up a large proportion of those identifying skill sets in this group.

There are skills that can be inferred from the answers to this question and some of the previous ones discussed in this section. For example, the data shows a lot of people having worked in education or retail settings. To be successful in these fields, people need to possess 'soft' skills such as communicating, influencing and motivating as well as the 'hard' more technical skills such as financial management. Some respondents acknowledged that they had soft skills (see, for example, the responses under 'Interpersonal skills'), but the prevalence of them among this sample is likely to be a considerable underestimate, especially as such attributes are often taken for granted.

While there are some limitations to the data gathered in response to this question, the findings do give an overall impression of the types of skills this group possessed. These skills will have been acquired through education and work, and many of them are transferable to different contexts. It is likely that these

findings do not reflect the true extent of the skills the respondents had, which provides an indication of what they can add to the workforce.

4.4 Summary

This section has displayed the wide range of education and vocational qualifications Zimbabwean asylum seekers hold, their previous work experience in Zimbabwe and the skills they possess. While this is not a representative sample of Zimbabwean asylum seekers in the UK, it does provide an indication of the achievements and talents of a population who are living in the UK and have the potential to contribute to the economy.

The information on qualifications and work experience in this chapter will help to frame the discussion in some of the sections in the next chapter, which focuses on experiences in the UK.

“I can't describe how difficult it is when you know you want to be straightforward but the system does not allow you to be straightforward. It's difficult when you finally make up your mind that I'm going to be lying my way to working...the moment you think I'm going to lie my way out, it's just difficult you are brought up not to be doing what you have decided that, this is the way of survival I have to do. It was difficult.”

⁵² It should be noted that both people and project management were given as prompts on the questionnaire to illustrate the types of information the survey wished to gather. This could have resulted in more people being reminded that they possessed these abilities rather than thinking of other skill sets on the spot.

Chapter 5 – Experiences in the UK

This chapter discusses the experiences that participants in this research have had since they arrived in the UK. It initially outlines some of the reasons why people chose to come to the UK, and then focuses on issues relating to the asylum process such as detention and support. The last sections of the chapter focus upon experiences of education, work and volunteering.

5.1 Decision to come to the UK

The questionnaire did not include a question about why people decided to come to the UK, but the interviewees were asked about their choices. Some of them reported having not initially intending to claim asylum, but rather they came to get away from the situation in Zimbabwe where they were being targeted. Four interviewees stated that they chose this destination because they had relatives or friends in the UK. The rationale behind one interviewee's decision is shown in the excerpt below:

"I had a distant relative here so it was a contact as it were...I could have gone to another country really, it didn't have to be in the UK but I had never travelled until I left that time so, not even to our neighbour countries. I had no idea. Not South Africa or Mozambique, you name. The only contact I had was a relative who was here."

Interviewee 2

Knowledge of the English language featured in two responses. One woman said that she chose the UK because she knew English and as Zimbabwe was a former colony, she felt comfortable and thought it would be easier for her here than elsewhere. For one man, the choice was not so considered due to the urgency in which he left Zimbabwe.

Did you choose to come to the UK and if so, why did you choose to come here?

Coming to the UK, it wasn't the first choice to be honest. Coming to the UK was no choice, on a no choice basis because the moment I arrived in Johannesburg, the very day I looked for any flight, either it was Canada, Australia, New Zealand or London. So most of the flights that I could get were just London flights so I just got a London flight and came here.

So it was just because, it was the most quick and convenient?

Yeah, yeah. Because my aim was to go to an English-speaking country."

Interviewee 1

These responses highlight the importance of language and contacts when deciding on where to flee, and the traditional links with Britain help to explain why the proportion of asylum seekers who are Zimbabwean is relatively high.

5.2 Time in detention

Immigration officers have the power to detain some asylum seekers at any stage in their asylum application. There is no limit on the amount of time people can be detained and people are sometimes moved repeatedly between detention centres.

A total of 40 respondents (14 per cent) had been detained. Some reported having been detained in several centres, with one respondent listing four different centres over a five month period. The lengths of time people were detained are specified below.

Time in Detention

Length of time	Frequency
Less than a week	3
1-2 weeks	4
2-4 weeks	4
6 weeks	1
2 months	4
3 months	6
4 months	2
5 months	1
6 months to 1 year	7
2 years	1

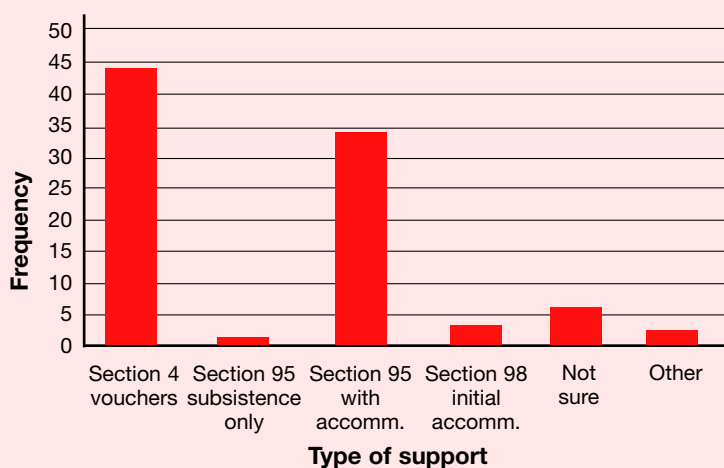
One of the survey respondents stated that “*Being detained was the most painful experience in the UK. Ill-treatment by security/detention staff.*” Only one of the interviewees had been in detention, and he had been detained twice. He was detained for three months the first time around as he had been reported by an employment agency for trying to find work. During this period of detention, he was moved between three different centres. The second period of detention lasted for three weeks, and he was placed in the centre prior to scheduled removal, but the decision to remove was overturned and he was released.

Detainees live in fear of being removed and can experience significant periods of uncertainty as it is sometimes unclear what will happen next. The fear of being detained can also drive people underground who therefore could be unaware of successful outcomes in their claims for asylum. Being detained can also have enduring psychological impacts, especially if detention is protracted.⁵³

5.3 Types of support

The questionnaire asked if respondents received any financial or other support from the UK Government, 208 people (71 per cent) stated that they did not. Those who did receive support from the Government identified that they were in receipt of the types in the table below.

Which types of Government support do you receive?



The types of support identified in the 'other' category was 'social services'. The most common type of support being received was section 4 vouchers. This type of support is given to some who are at the end of the asylum process, but are unable to return to their

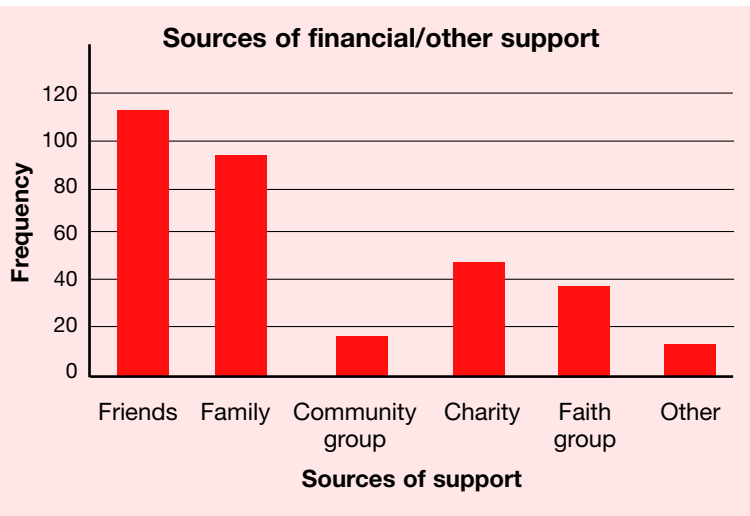
country of origin. Living on vouchers can be particularly difficult as people have no access to cash, making travel and keeping in contact with friends and relatives very difficult.⁵⁴

Further analysis of the data reveals that 74 of the respondents who said that they were not receiving any support from the government and did not have permission to work had identified themselves as having dependants. The difficult task of trying to survive with no reliable source of income will be exacerbated for these people as they need to feed and clothe others as well as themselves.

The survey did not provide details on how long people had been living without any government support.

The interviews, however, did shed some light on the situation. Only one of the interviewees was receiving support from the government (section 95 – accommodation and subsistence). One interviewee had never received any government support and she had been in the UK for seven years. One had received support for the first six months after putting in her asylum claim, but had not been in receipt of anything else for the subsequent six years, and another had his section 4 support stopped 18 months prior to the interview. It was not clear precisely how long the two remaining interviewees had been without government support, but one of them had been in this situation for at least three years.

Respondents to the survey were asked what sources of financial and other support they received from sources other than the government. The graph below illustrates their responses.



53 See for example, Medical Justice’s statistics on those in detention who are classified as on ‘Formal Self-Harm Risk’ for an indication of the number of people considered vulnerable to self-harm www.medicaljustice.org.uk/content/view/273/61/

54 For more information on the impact of living on section 4 vouchers, see Doyle (2008)

The responses show a heavy reliance on friends and family for support. Several respondents specified that the charity providing them with support was the British Red Cross. Of the 'other' responses, 12 stated that they had done paid work despite not having permission to do so, and one said her husband supported her. The interviewees below describe the ways they have been living with no means of support.

"I'm surviving with handouts from those who know me. They feed me, clothe me, buy me some sanitariums. Sometimes I go to the Red Cross and get some clothes and now that we have [a community organisation], we have some clothes from the donations so I go through them and pick whatever."

Interviewee 5

"I live with church people, they give me accommodation in their home to stay and that is it. For the past 3 years I'm staying with them. That's really from the goodness of other people really."

Interviewee 2

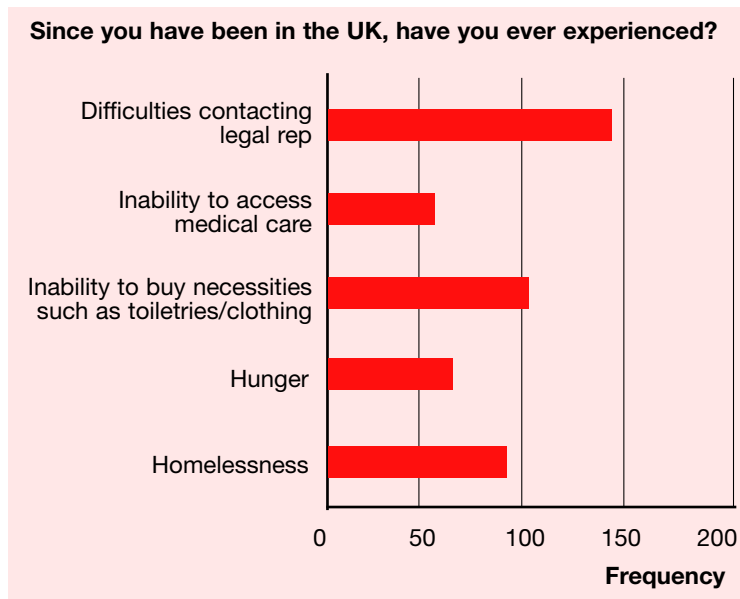
These excerpts illustrate the variety of sources people rely upon, and the commitment and good will of individuals offering support to people in dire need. Having to live on the kindness of others and being denied opportunities to support themselves (through paid work, for instance), was a situation several interviewees described with a great deal of discomfort. For example, one woman who had been relying on money from her aunt for seven years, described how this made her feel.

"It's really difficult for [my Aunt]. She's wanted to pull out a few times but she is the only person who can support me. My friends can only do so much and sometimes it becomes a bit of a, you feel like you're harassing people and that's how it is. I hate having to ask for money I hate not having my own money and I also hate not being able to buy what I want when I want. So it's a bit of a difficult situation."

Interviewee 3

Having very little access to money or resources has obvious practical, as well as psychological, effects. Respondents to the survey were asked whether they had experienced the following issues since arriving in the UK: homelessness; hunger; the inability to buy

necessities such as toiletries and clothing, the inability to access medical care; and difficulties in contacting their legal representatives. The results are displayed in the graph below.



The most common experience in the list was difficulty contacting their legal representative, with half of respondents having reported this. This may be an experience that extends beyond problems associated with limited access to money. The inability to buy necessities such as toiletries and clothing was a situation over a third of respondents had encountered, and homelessness and hunger was something that 87 (30 per cent) and 62 (21 per cent) people had lived through.

5.4 Education and training in the UK

Of the 292 people included in the survey, 96 (33 per cent) had undertaken some kind of education or training since coming to the UK. Some had taken part in more than one course, and the types of things this group studied included both academic and vocational courses. When asked for details of the learning they had done, respondents answered with varying levels of detail, sometimes describing the subject matter, sometimes the level of qualification and sometimes a combination of the two. It should be noted that participants may have come to the UK on a student visa prior to applying for asylum, so places on some of the courses outlined below may have been secured before arrival in the UK.

Seven respondents had undertaken postgraduate studies (which included social work and management), eight had gained a degree, and ten had participated in access to higher education courses (which included

"I hate being idle"

nursing, IT, social sciences and media studies). There were 12 mentions of NVQs (five at both levels two and three, and two unspecified), and these covered subjects including nursing and health and social care. Courses concerned with medicine, nursing, counselling and health and social care were undertaken by 28 respondents. The study of Information Technology was popular with 23 respondents identifying that they had participated in courses which varied from basic IT skills through to much more advanced qualifications in networking and maintenance.

Four respondents had undertaken English language classes and a further three had participated in literacy and numeracy courses. Others had participated in training in food hygiene, health and safety and first aid, which are skills that are often required by employers.

All of the interviewees who participated in this research had undertaken some education or training since arriving in the UK. One interviewee had completed a degree, one was studying at a postgraduate level at the time of the interview and another had started a degree but was forced to give up as she could not pay the fees. One respondent had passed an Access to Nursing course, and another had undertaken a number of short medical courses as part of a specialist programme to help refugee doctors into work in the UK. The final interviewee had passed a VCE course in Business, and was studying towards a specialist accountancy qualification from the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA) at the time of the interview.

The types of education and training discussed above are not an exhaustive list of the learning participants had undertaken while in the UK. Rather this discussion provides an illustration of the areas of knowledge that this group of respondents have, and therefore hints at the kinds of jobs this potential workforce would be equipped to undertake were they able to work. It also illustrates a desire among participants to further skills and enhance prospects for the future.

5.4.1 Barriers to education and training

The questionnaire asked if people had applied for education or training in the UK, but had been unable to take it up. A total of 101 respondents said that this was the case, which constitutes 35 per cent of the sample. When asked why they had been unable to take up the education or training, some respondents

cited more than one reason and their answers have been categorised below.

Reasons for not taking up education/training	
Reason	Frequency
Financial issues	52
Because of status/papers	43
Depression/health condition	3
Fear	2
Application mishandled	1
Relocation	1
Wanted to sort out status first	1

Financial issues were the most frequently mentioned factor that prevented respondents participating in education and training. This included seven respondents specifically stating that they were not eligible to apply for bursaries as a result of their immigration status, several highlighting that they could not afford to pay international student fees and one respondent reported having started a course but then being forced to drop out because of an inability to pay fees. When responding to this question, people did not make the distinction between further and higher education where different rules around fees and financial support operate.⁵⁵ In the case of Universities, 'home students' are expected to pay fees, but these are at a lower rate than those levied at international students. Home students are also eligible to get a student loan to cover their fees, which asylum seekers cannot access making the raising of funds even more difficult.

The second highest response given was that people had not taken up places because of their immigration status or papers. Most respondents did not elaborate on why this made them unable to study, or the types of courses that they were trying to get on. As highlighted in section 2.2, asylum seekers are unable to participate in most courses that have an element of work-based training. It is therefore not surprising that in the current climate of cuts in eligibility to training for asylum seekers, colleges and Universities may have a tendency to be over-cautious and not allow this group to take up learning opportunities, even if it would be permitted in some circumstances.

Five of the six interviewees had applied for education or training places and not been able to take them up, or complete them. All of them had been offered places at universities (four at undergraduate level and one at postgraduate level) and cited issues relating to fees

55 In the current academic year (2008/09), all 16-18 year old asylum seekers are considered as home learners and qualify for LSC fee remission. Adult asylum seekers aged over 19 are considered as home students if their claim for asylum is ongoing after six months. Only people on Section 95 (asylum) support automatically qualify for LSC fee remission. However, if an asylum seeker is considered as a home student but does not receive asylum support, they may still qualify for LSC fee remission.

and status as reasons barring them from attending. One interviewee started a degree course but it became apparent that she could not afford the international student fees so she had to withdraw. She described this situation as “one of the painful things” that she has experienced in the UK. Another described how he had to take a break midway through his degree as he could not pay the fees.

“...I was paying £7,000 a year as an overseas student...so the first year I scraped through it but I was still owing, I couldn't pay it. I had to pay my rent you know, and pay for the fees and then they told me not to come back for my second year and they put my name out for debt collection. It was hard. So I took a year out and tried to earn some money and pay back the fees...I made an agreement to pay £100 a month towards the fees [when debt collectors got involved], but was still owing £6,000. By the time I was in my second year it was too much. I did the first semester of the second year before they chucked me away from campus...”

Interviewee 2

Given the funding situation and restrictions that have been implemented around accessing education and training for asylum seekers, the high incidence of not being able to take up education and training places is to be expected. Despite these problems, many research participants had studied and gained qualifications in the UK, although it should be considered that many may have entered the UK on student visas with the intention to study.

5.5 Experiences of work in the UK

This section will discuss participants' experiences of work in the UK and explore the skills levels they were operating at, as well as the ways in which people have attempted to maintain their work skills.

5.5.1 Permission to work

Section 2.2 of this report outlines the restrictions placed upon most asylum seekers in the UK in relation to gaining permission to work. It is therefore not surprising that only 24 respondents had been granted permission to work which constitutes eight per cent of the sample. In contrast to those who have been allowed to work, 88 per cent of the respondents said that they would want to work if given the right to do so.

None of the interviewees had been granted permission to work after the point they applied for asylum and all of them stated that they would like to be able to work. Two interviewees described how they had applied for permission and had been refused without a clear explanation as to why this was the case.

“I did ask them for permission to work and they refused. No reason, you can't, you're not allowed to work...no reason and yet I'm not getting anything from them, I'm supporting myself you know so that it's really a problem. It doesn't make sense to me that someone who is able-bodied and mentally fit to work cannot do that. I think the whole point is just to frustrate one to the point where you say I've had it, I'm leaving...”

Interviewee 2

“...I have applied for permission to work twice. First on my own initiative and I got an answer within 7 days where they told me that they would not give me permission to work because I was a refused asylum seeker. And then the second time was through my solicitor and then we got all the evidence of the exams I've done to qualify for registration of the General Medical Council and a letter of recommendation from the Director of the Centre I go to to say that I would be able to get work if I had permission to work because the [name of] Hospital has got protected posts for refugees and asylum seekers with permission to work. So I'd be able to get a post there to start me off. So in spite of that they took a month and decided no with absolutely no grounds.”

Interviewee 4

As people had been waiting for protracted periods of time for a decision on their asylum claim and appeals, the speed in which they were refused permission to work, with scant justification, was noteworthy.

Many of the respondents to the survey stated their desire to work at the end of the questionnaire. One respondent stated “I'm tired of being miserable...I hate being poor. I hate being idle”. The interviews provided the opportunity for research participants to talk about how being denied the opportunity to work legally made them feel. The interviewee below expresses his frustration at not being able to earn money and contribute, especially as he was not receiving any support from the government.

“I hate being idle”

“It’s terrible, it’s totally unacceptable the way I see it...here’s a person who wants to work. I mean, I was paying tax when I was working you know. It wasn’t like I was on benefits or anything. The tax I was paying was to support partly other people that were on Job Seekers Allowance... and I’m not claiming anything from the government. They’re not giving me a penny so I’m getting deskilled each and every day. It’s terrible.”

Interviewee 2

The interviewees below describe the way that not having work can leave people without a structure and purpose, negatively impact on feelings of self-worth and affect the ability to integrate into society.

“I want to work. You know, getting up you’re just sitting each and every day. You don’t know where you’re coming from and where you’re going and remember we are not getting any younger. What will I do for my child if he grows up? There’s nothing for him...and contribute in the society, not particularly in my own - in the UK, I’d love to mix with people...I’d love to integrate...I feel those people who try to pump out their own money giving me, it’s not fair on them. They’ve got other things to do better than me.”

Interviewee 5

“Sometimes I think I’ve become a bum, the effect of long term unemployment when sometimes I wake up and I want to do 10 things and they’re on a list and I wake up and I think I can’t be arsed. Although having recognised those traits in myself I am trying to at least make sure I am doing stuff.”

Interviewee 4

“I feel, I’d say neglected, should I say. Yes or rejected or not dignified.”

Interviewee 1

Similar feelings were expressed by one survey respondent who stated that *“due to prolonged time of not working I’m really suffering from depression and my life is in limbo. Actually, I have lost the value of life.”*

Previous sections of this report have highlighted the precarious financial position that many of the

interviewees had lived in for many years. The excerpt below illustrates how being denied permission to work when people are solely reliant on others’ generosity to survive can put people in a position where they feel they have little choice other than to break the law.

“It makes me feel, it depresses me because I haven’t really, I’m not, it’s like you’ve committed a crime therefore you cannot work. I haven’t committed any crime other than come here to seek refuge if that’s a crime. But I would like to be given the chance because being given permission to work is really not saying to me go and take, we’ll give you so and so’s job. It’s saying to me, go and try your luck and see if you can get a job, and there’s nothing better than that little competitive twist in the job market when people are competing for jobs. I want the chance to bring in some money for myself and for my child and whatever, and I want to be able to do it without feeling like I should resort to something illegal or something. I’ve never done anything illegal as far as I know, but I don’t want to be that person, that criminal, that person that goes to the other side and does really horrible things to get money. I don’t want to do that. But the situation as it stands, you know it pushes you little by little. You fight it as much as you can but it pushes you bit by bit.”

Interviewee 3

“I can’t describe how difficult it is when you know you want to be straightforward but the system does not allow you to be straightforward. It’s difficult when you finally make up your mind that I’m going to be lying my way to working...the moment you think I’m going to lie my way out, it’s just difficult you are brought up not to be doing what you have decided that, this is the way of survival I have to do. It was difficult.”

Interviewee 6

The first interviewee quoted above had not undertaken any paid work in the UK, and the second one had in order to earn money to survive. The excerpts clearly illustrate that participating in illegal activities was something that was not taken lightly, and was not something that these people intended to do, but having no access to support in the UK and fear of return to Zimbabwe was pushing them towards this course of action.

The quotations above clearly illustrate feelings of frustration, unfairness, boredom and the negative impact on individual's sense of self-worth. The excerpt below highlights how the denial of opportunities to work can affect a person's outlook on life and perceptions of life in the UK.

“It’s really difficult and it makes you strong in ways that you probably would have never thought because it in itself is a very draining experience. It kills a lot in you. It kills your hope. It kills your sense of being human because you are sat there, or lying there, you know you spend a lot of your time just laying when you’re not out and about...the times that I’m not out and about you just lay there. You don’t actually sit up as you are a defeated person and you’re lying there and you’re thinking if I was wherever I could be getting up and going to work or I could be getting ready to do this and that and the years as they go by, that’s a lot of things that you’re not going to get the chance to do and that weighs heavily on you as well. You sort of look at like it is a lot of wasted opportunities but you can’t take any of those opportunities because you are obviously prohibited from working. And that law in itself, because you are here and you need to follow the law and what it says, but you know your inner being wants, it’s a struggle really...but I really want to do something. I don’t want to be in my room 24/7... The home, it’s not a home any more, it’s like a prison. I think it’s like house arrest so although you are still in your house so to speak, you’re still under arrest because you can’t go and get a job, you can’t do certain things.”

Interviewee 3

For these interviewees, being given the opportunity to work was not just important in terms of being able to support themselves. It also represented the chance to have a structure and purpose to life, and restore feelings of pride and of being valued.

5.5.2 Experiences of work in the UK

When asked in the survey if they had done any paid work since coming to the UK, 165 (57 per cent) of respondents said yes. It should be noted that although the vast majority of respondents did not have

permission to work, some people will have entered the UK on working visas and would therefore have been allowed to work in the past. It is also the case that those who had possessed student visas in the past will have been entitled to undertake paid work for up to 20 hours a week. It is, however, the case that some of these respondents will have been working without permission. The quotations featured in the last section illustrate how some people feel that they have little choice than to do paid work given their experiences of protracted periods with no means of support other than friends/family, which puts these experiences in context.

Type of work	Frequency
Care work	77
Cleaning	28
Warehouse and factory work	17
Catering/food industry	10
Hospitality (including hotel housekeeping, waiting tables and bar work)	9
Security (including street warden)	9
Teaching (including supply and music classes)	8
Finance (including bank staff, credit control and cashiers)	4
Driver	4
Retail	4
Administration	3
Building/labouring	3
Customer services	2
‘Management’ (including people management)	2
‘Odd jobs’	2
Social work	2
Call centre work	1
Dental nurse	1
Electrical engineer	1
Laboratory work	1
Mail delivery	1
Media work	1

Some respondents identified that they had carried out more than one type of job. The types of work identified here provide a stark comparison with those the respondents had undertaken in Zimbabwe, as discussed in section 4.2. The top six categories encompass work that is very often unskilled, badly paid and takes place during unsocial hours. Other research on the Zimbabwean diaspora has identified work in the care sector as being the most common and has highlighted how working in this sector informally can make people vulnerable to bad conditions.⁵⁶

Many of the skills, qualifications and work experiences of the sample discussed in chapter four of this report do not seem to be reflected in this list, with a handful of exceptions. One respondent stated on her

questionnaire that *“I have been left destitute and I play hide and seek with Immigration [authorities]. I have sometimes resorted to prostitution to get money for food and clothes not out of choice. I was never a prostitute in Zimbabwe. But life is tough here. I wasn’t to be granted asylum here and work legally.”*

Three of the interviewees had worked since arriving in the UK, and three had not. One of the people who had worked made it clear that she had not done so from the point she had applied for asylum (*“after I claimed I thought I should not go against the law”*). One of the interviewees explained that when his NASS support was terminated a few years ago, he attempted to get work through an employment agency in order to support himself. The employment agency called the police and he was subsequently detained.

Two of the three interviewees who had been employed had undertaken care work. One of these was a nursing assistant in Zimbabwe so this line of work was very similar. The other was a qualified teacher who went into the care profession out of necessity rather than choice as this was the type of work she would be able to get.

“I think maybe it’s because it was an industry where many people are needed most and it’s an industry [that is not popular]. It was a job that was easily available at the time...I went into the care industry. I stopped teaching, as much as I wanted to pursue my teaching...”

Interviewee 6

The other interviewee who had worked previously had undertaken a variety of jobs in different sectors. He describes his motivations for working and the types of jobs he had carried out in this excerpt.

“I’m not working at the moment. I used to, I mean without permission. I used to work, I mean, if I get a job I take it because I have got family to feed in Zimbabwe. They needed money to survive. I’ve got 3 children and they’ve got school...food mainly and clothing, so you can’t sit here and say I’m not allowed to work and starve...I worked in various industries. I worked in construction, did labouring, I worked as a gangster with a group of labourers – I was in charge of them,

stuff like that. I did demolition, underpinning in many buildings in London and the South East. And then I went back to Uni again and in the summer holidays I went to work on a dairy farm, and I was working security. I mean I’ve done nearly all the jobs a man would do really...

Interviewee 2

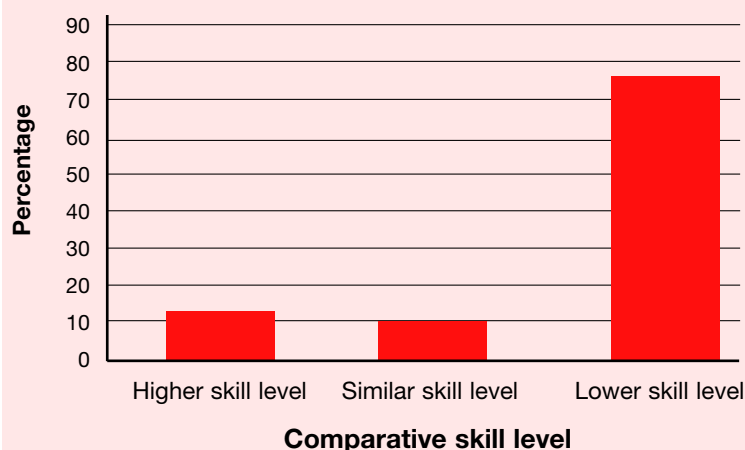
These findings show that research participants who had worked in the UK generally appear to have worked in different types of jobs than they did in Zimbabwe. While it may not be expected that migrants would be able to acquire identical jobs to those they had before due to competition with UK applicants with different types of work experience, the dominance of unskilled and badly paid work highlighted above reflects a waste of skills and talent. This situation appears particularly perverse in the instances where these respondents had previously worked in roles that have been identified as ‘shortage professions’ by the Government. This list includes teachers and many healthcare occupations, including GPs and nurses. Allowing asylum seekers to work and developing support programmes to assist them in the transition between the different systems that may operate in Zimbabwe and the UK, would help to meet an identified need in the labour force.⁵⁷

5.5.3 Skills

Given the list of jobs that are described above, it is not surprising that when asked on the questionnaire how the work they had been undertaking in the UK compared with the jobs people had done in Zimbabwe, the responses were as follows.

Over three-quarters (77 per cent) of respondents to this question stated that the work they had been doing in the UK was at a lower skill level than that which they

Skill levels of jobs in UK compare to Zimbabwe



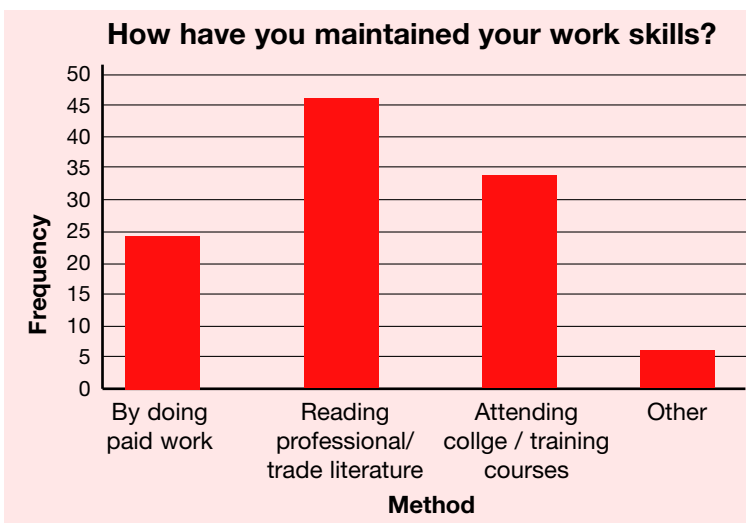
56 See Bloch (2005: 7) and McGregor (2007)

57 The full list of national shortage occupations can be found at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/applicationforms/workpermits/businessandcommercial/occupationshortagelist.pdf>

were doing in Zimbabwe. As many people do not appear to be working in the same professions or roles as before, this is likely to impact on their ability to maintain skills they had gained through work, education and training in Zimbabwe.

The questionnaire asked respondents if they had been able to maintain or improve their work-related skills since being in the UK. Only 20 per cent (59 people) said yes in response. Those who said yes to the survey question stated that they had maintained or improved their skills through the following methods:

The 'other' category included six instances of voluntary work such as through teaching at homework clubs and ESOL classes, undertaking clinical attachments at



hospitals and by using a library.

The findings here show that 184 respondents (63 per cent) felt that they had not been able to maintain or improve their skills.⁵⁸ At the end of the questionnaire respondents were given the opportunity to add additional comments and in this section many people mentioned that they felt they were being de-skilled and that the ones they still had were going to waste. Some of the interviewees explained how they thought they were being de-skilled, and the impact that this would have on them in their chosen professions and their chances of getting a job.

“Of course I have lost my skills as a toolmaker unless if I go for another maybe 3 months or 6 months training before I start full-time employment. There have been a lot of changes over these 6 years in terms of advancement and anything to do with tool making...The fact that I haven’t been working for 6 years, no employer will take me for that here, and in Zimbabwe I don’t think they would take me.”

Interviewee 1

“I’m not allowed to work and therefore what skills I had when I left Zimbabwe I’ve lost. Recently I got a grant from [a community organisation] so I’m doing my CIMA. I had to start from scratch, from the bottom because my skills are basically redundant. My certificates don’t mean anything now but going to school like that without the work experience is almost as bad as not going to school. My classroom experiences are not that good because I don’t have that work experience. I can’t even, you know certain places have a certain way of speaking or certain work things have certain words that they use, I’m not familiar with the words that we use in accounting or in the financial sector anymore. I find it embarrassing that at my age I’ve had to go back and start from scratch. I find it very de-motivating that I’ve lost my skills and if ever, or when it’s safe for me to go home, I’m not as competitive as I could have been if I had stayed in that situation...I would like to look for a job and I would like to use the skills that I am gaining, re-gaining, to get a job. I want to get back my pride and my sense of being, my sense of being me because a lot of it is wrapped around my work and I took pride in that. But now it’s basically like I’m year one or something in school because obviously I have nothing. It’s all gone now, mean it’s been seven years and it’s like I’ve flipped the switch and I’m back to childhood years.”

Interviewee 3

The second interviewee stressed the importance of having experience of work to maintain skills, as this helps to put principles into practice. This was an opinion that was echoed by the doctor who was studying and undertaking observerships to keep up

58 There was a 'not applicable' option on the form which explains most of the missing data in this response.

knowledge, but felt that it would take a little while to be as good with practical skills as before.

“Do you think there are any skills that you’ve lost?”

Practical skills because now I would not feel confident to do a caesarean section for instance whereas I could do that, suturing. There are certain things obviously I won’t have lost it completely, but it’s the speed and the confidence.”

Interviewee 4

One interviewee noted that even in a profession such as teaching where core techniques do not tend to change rapidly, it will take a while to get back into using particular strategies.

“I am sad to say that when I go back into teaching I will have to really work harder to be where I was because I know, the talk of subjects now, the words which I knew, the ones which I would really deliver the goods. But now will I be able to stand and remember and do the methods and the strategies which I would plan, what I would do, will I be able? Of course when you stand in front of the class or when you start again when you have to put all your mind back to it and think what did I used to do...I would have wanted to be on another level, not where I am. So it affects me when I know I have lost my skills but I’ve not lost them for good...I don’t want to use the word, my mind is wasted, I haven’t been experiencing, I haven’t been using it. I haven’t been using my mind. You want to keep on reading books and doing things to exercise your mind but more of my day, three-quarters of my day I am doing things that doesn’t use my mind.

Interviewee 6

The interviewee above went on to explain that her situation is compounded by the fact that over the last few years, there have been many technological advances which would also need to be learnt in order to teach the children skills they will need in later life. It can be argued that many of those who have not worked or studied for long periods of time will be affected by the rapid changes in technology and will be at a disadvantage compared to those who have been working.

The denial of work and education opportunities for this group of people has led to many of them feeling they

have been de-skilled and unable to keep up with the developments in their professions. This will impact on their ability to find employment in their chosen jobs whether that be in the UK if granted status or permission to work, or in Zimbabwe if they return.

5.5.4 Voluntary work

People participate in voluntary work for a variety of reasons. In the context of asylum seekers, it has been noted that many do this in order to address some of the issues identified by participants above (for example de-skilling, boredom, lack of meaningful activity).

When asked if they had undertaken voluntary work in the UK, 74 respondents (25 per cent) said yes. The types of voluntary activities respondents undertook included working in charity shops, doing administrative duties for charities, performing various roles in churches, teaching ESOL and at homework clubs, caring for others and a lot of involvement with refugee or Zimbabwe-specific organisations in activities such as campaigning and fundraising. For some this helped to keep up skills which would be useful in the labour market. Three interviewees talked about voluntary work they had undertaken.⁵⁹ One interviewee talked of how this activity had helped to give her a focus and a purpose, and warded off feelings of isolation and depression. Being able to volunteer made her feel socially useful again.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has outlined the experiences of the research participants since arriving in the UK. It has highlighted the fact that many live without permission to work and government support, forcing them to be reliant on friends, family and charities to survive as they also do not have permission to work. Many Zimbabweans in this sample had undertaken education and training in the UK, but these opportunities had also been denied to them due to issues around financing courses, fee remission and immigration status. In general, those who had undertaken work in the UK had been employed in jobs that did not reflect their skills and qualifications, and were often in badly paid and under-valued roles. Research participants highlighted the loss of skills they had experienced since leaving Zimbabwe, and the impact this was likely to have when trying to re-enter the job market, whether in the UK or back in Zimbabwe.

⁵⁹ The interview schedule did not contain a specific question about volunteering, so it may be the case that the other interviewees had volunteered but it did not come out in the course of the conversation.

Chapter 6 – Return to Zimbabwe

The final part of both the questionnaire and the interviews focused upon return to Zimbabwe. Participants were asked if they would like to return to Zimbabwe if it was safe to do so. The majority of those responding to the survey answered yes (184 people, 63 per cent of respondents). This was not a clear cut decision for some, as 33 respondents stated they were unsure about return.

It is important to note here that the emphasis was placed upon Zimbabwe being a safe place to return to, which, as section 2.1 highlights, it is not at this moment in time, despite recent political developments. Some of the interviewees repeated the issue of safety in their response, to make it clear that they would wish to return in other circumstances.

“If it’s safe, definitely I’d go back because all my family is there.”

Interviewee 1

All of the interviewees expressed a desire to go back to Zimbabwe at some point, but this would not necessarily be something that they would rush into, as illustrated in the latter quotation above. Many people still had family in Zimbabwe and considered it their home, which led to a wish to return. However, as well as noting the uncertainty surrounding the current power-sharing and ongoing abuses, several interviewees referred to the way the Zimbabwean economy and public services were not functioning properly, and this would be something they would have to consider before going back.

Given the context of hyper-inflation and extremely high levels of unemployment, it may be expected that Zimbabweans returning from the UK would face difficulties entering the job market. When asked if respondents thought they would have a job to go back to, only 22 (eight per cent) said yes and 204 said no.

“With the high unemployment in Zimbabwe, I think it would take long for this issue to be resolved so it would be very high risk just to go back. I think I would go back when I am rest assured that I have got something to do and I know I’ve got a job for me waiting or when I know definitely I would have some income when I go there.”

Interviewee 1

“I don’t think I’ll get a job from this side [in the UK]. I mean there are people running around in the street looking for work there so perhaps I’ll get out there and just see what is there and what I can do...but with [very high levels of] unemployment the chances are pretty slim to get a job there...”

Interviewee 2

Returning to Zimbabwe with little prospect of employment would leave many of these research participants in just as vulnerable a financial position in Zimbabwe as they were experiencing in the UK. The interviewees quoted above differ in the way they would approach finding employment, with one not wishing to return until a job is guaranteed, and the other feeling that this would be very difficult to achieve from afar. Long periods of absence from the country and the workforce could further disadvantage these people in the job market.

Earlier sections of this report have highlighted the fact that many participants felt that they had been de-skilled by their experiences of unemployment and underemployment in the UK. The questionnaire asked respondents if they felt that their skills levels would be sufficient to carry out their previous job. The majority of respondents thought that their skills were not sufficient (53 per cent) and a further 20 per cent were unsure. One interviewee described how her years in the UK without work would mean that she would have to re-enter her profession at the bottom of the ladder, rather than in the more senior roles she had performed before leaving Zimbabwe. She did not like the thought of having to be managed by somebody she felt she should be senior to.

“The way I’m thinking is that if I had to go back and have to work for someone I would be so demoralised and de-motivated I would quit.”

Interviewee 3

In addition to asking interviewees to assess their relative skill level, they were also questioned about how they felt they could contribute to the reconstruction of Zimbabwe if they returned when it is safe to do so. All of the interviewees showed a wish to help to contribute to the rebuilding of their country.

Some interviewees had studied particular subjects in the UK to support the types of activities they would like to do on return (for example, Development Studies and particular aspects of engineering) and one interviewee was trying to get onto a Masters course in Tropical Medicine as the course covered how to manage health systems which could be of vital importance in Zimbabwe. Two interviewees wished to use their skills to set up their own projects (a school and a youth drop-in centre), but felt that despite having done their own research on how to do this while in the UK, they would still want to be better equipped before they embarked on such projects. The theme of de-skilling was raised repeatedly, and the impact on people's ability to contribute in Zimbabwe was explicitly drawn out in the excerpt below.

"I expected the British Government to be able to do more on my case or similar cases like mine. Like helping us with our situation, our present situation and also try to help us for when we go back to Zimbabwe so we have somewhere to start. As it is now, it will be very difficult for a person who is in my situation just to accept going back to Zimbabwe with nowhere to start, having been de-skilled for all these years. it would be very difficult to go back to Zimbabwe so for them to encourage some people like me to go back to Zimbabwe, they should at least help us while we still are here, and then we'd have somewhere to start."

Interviewee 1

In addition to not feeling that they would necessarily have a job to return to, only 28 per cent of respondents thought they would definitely have a place to live if they went to Zimbabwe. One interviewee described how her home had been destroyed by the government so she could not return to it, and another interviewee's accommodation was linked to his job, so when he left he lost it. Other interviewees would mainly have to be supported by family and friends. One person did have accommodation he could live in as part of his farm, but explained that as the farm was no longer viable, returning there would not necessarily be a good idea.

"We've got our own family farm and I'd love to do farming but without fuel, without the chemicals, without the equipment, there's nothing, just ground. There's no point in me just sitting there and saying I want to go back into farming when I've got nothing...there's nothing left on it because all the things have been looted, fences stolen, cows stolen, the equipment is not in running order at all. I had a tractor and a Landrover and stuff like that and it's just not working so how would you really start farming when you've got to have the capital? I've got the knowledge and know how but without the equipment you can do nothing really, without the capital to run that farm."

Interviewee 2

Although it would appear at face value that this person had resources at his disposal to start again on return, having no access to basics such as food and chemicals means that the land would not be sufficient to support any commercial farming venture.

When asked if respondents would have resources to help them start again back in Zimbabwe, only 12 people (four per cent) said that this was the case. The impact of not having access to earning for many clearly impacted here.

"The resources to start again, I think I'll need to get up on that because at the moment for the past 6 years I haven't been productive whether here or back in Zimbabwe so actually at the moment I have nothing so I may need a lot of help for me to start something if I were to go back to Zimbabwe now."

Interviewee 1

6.1 Summary

This chapter has shown that most of the Zimbabweans who participated in this research would like to return if it was safe to do so, but they felt that it was likely that they would face significant difficulties supporting themselves. Most people believed they would not have a job to return to, a place to live or the resources to start again, a situation that had been exacerbated by not being able to work in the UK for long periods of time.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion and policy recommendations

This report has illustrated the education, skills and work experience possessed by the Zimbabwean asylum seekers who took part in this research. It has revealed the vulnerable position that people in this community can find themselves in due to the adverse political situation in preventing them from returning, and an asylum system in the UK that can result in people being unable to access support. Without access to government support or the opportunity to work, many are left destitute and reliant on the good will of others for their survival.

The findings have revealed that the vast majority of the research participants wanted to work in the UK, and the experience of long periods not working had led to an erosion of skills and had detrimental effects on people's sense of self-worth and mental health. Many of the Zimbabweans in this research had undertaken education while in the UK, but there were also examples of a willingness to study being prevented by their immigration status which affected the fees that were levied and the financial support they could access.

Most respondents wanted to return to Zimbabwe when it was safe, and were keen to use their skills to help to rebuild their country. However, many outlined difficulties they would face trying to start again due to a lack of resources and the de-skilling they had experienced having spent years in the UK without work. Being given the opportunity to work in the UK would have left respondents better equipped to contribute to the reconstruction of Zimbabwe on their return.

7.1 Recommendations

1. Permission to work:

This research has highlighted some of the consequences of denying asylum seekers permission to work. We want the Government to allow asylum seekers to work if they have been waiting longer than six months for a full resolution on their asylum claim. The Government aims to have decisions on asylum applications made within six months, so when they do not reach this target, those still in the asylum determination process should be allowed to work. We want the permission to work to continue for people whose claim for asylum is refused, but are unable to

return home immediately through no fault of their own, and are complying with instructions to report to authorities.

2. Support to fill the gaps in shortage professions:

We have noted that the Government has identified a list of shortage professions in the UK. This research has shown that many Zimbabwean asylum seekers have the skills and experience to work in these professions, but are being denied the opportunity to do so. We believe that in addition to being given permission to work, those who have worked in shortage professions prior to their arrival in the UK should be supported to enter those sections of the workforce through specialist programmes. This will help to fill gaps in the labour market.

3. Support to engage in learning and training:

The research has identified barriers to the participation of asylum seekers in education and training. We would like the Government to support learning and training opportunities for asylum seekers, including those who have been refused but are unable to return. These opportunities assist people to enter the labour market at an appropriate level and allow employers to tap into this pool of talent. Asylum seekers should become eligible for Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding as home students when they have been in the UK for three years or more at the start of an academic year and they satisfy entry requirements. Higher education institutes should also ensure that asylum seekers are eligible for hardship funds, bursaries and other internal financial support available to registered students.

4. Protection for those who need it:

Government policies in relation to Zimbabwe contain inherent contradictions. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recognises the serious human rights abuses that are taking place, but the UK Border Agency wishes for people to return. We want the UK Border Agency to develop policies and practices that reflect the reality of the situation in the countries of origin of asylum seekers.

Providing asylum seekers with permission to work and enhancing opportunities to engage in education and training will help to counter the experience of deskilling described by many of the participants in this research. Giving these opportunities can also have a positive

impact on individuals' mental well-being and sense of purpose, and allow them to demonstrate the ways they can contribute while in the UK. These measures will also result in people being better equipped to play a part in the reconstruction of Zimbabwe on return.

This report has been written during a time of global recession when levels of unemployment are rising. We believe that this should not deter the Government from granting work permission to asylum seekers. In times of economic hardship, there are far greater concerns around public opinion labelling asylum seekers as 'scroungers'. Such opinion can have a detrimental effect on community cohesion. Allowing asylum seekers permission to work would provide people who are able to work the chance to support themselves and contribute to the UK economy. During a recession we need to be encouraging as much economic activity as possible, not deliberately isolating certain groups.

“I expected the British Government to be able to do more on my case or similar cases like mine. Like helping us with our situation, our present situation and also try to help us for when we go back to Zimbabwe so we have somewhere to start. As it is now, it will be very difficult for a person who is in my situation just to accept going back to Zimbabwe with nowhere to start, having been de-skilled for all these years. It would be very difficult to go back to Zimbabwe so for them to encourage some people like me to go back to Zimbabwe, they should at least help us while we still are here, and then we'd have somewhere to start.”

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

The Zimbabwe Association and the Refugee Council are conducting research with the Zimbabwean community in the UK. The research explores the experiences of Zimbabweans who have sought asylum, particularly in relation to education, skills and work. The results of the research, along with supplementary interviews, will form the basis of a report which will highlight the experiences of Zimbabweans living in the UK. The Zimbabwe Association and Refugee Council are committed to assessing the impact of policies on those who have sought refuge and will use the research findings to lobby for change if necessary.

The answers you give to the following questions will be strictly confidential. We will not ask you for your full name. You will remain anonymous, which means your name and personal details will not appear on any records, information, reports or publications that result from this research.

Thank you for participating in this important project.

About you

1. Which age group are you in?

- Under 18 years
- 18 – 20 years
- 21 – 30 years
- 31 – 40 years
- 41 – 50 years
- 51 – 60 years
- Over 61 years

2. Are you:

- Male?
- Female?

3. Which region do you live in?

- East of England
- East Midlands
- London
- North East
- North West
- Scotland
- South East
- South West
- Wales

- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and the Humber

4. Do you have dependants with you in the UK?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 6]

5. Who are your dependants (please select all that apply)?

- Children
- Spouse/partner
- Other relative
- Other, please state _____

6. Do you have other family members in the UK?

- Yes
- No

7. How long have you been in the UK?

- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 – 3 years
- 3 – 4 years
- 4 – 5 years
- 5 – 6 years
- 6 – 7 years
- 7 – 8 years
- 8 – 9 years
- 9 – 10 years
- Over 10 years

8. What is your immigration status?

- Asylum seeker
- Refused asylum seeker
- Other, please state

Experiences in Zimbabwe

9. Which area of Zimbabwe did you live in before you came to the UK?

- Bulawayo
- Harare
- Matabeleland North
- Matabeleland South
- Masvingo
- Mashonaland East
- Mashonaland West
- Mashonaland Central
- Manicaland
- Midlands

10. Do you come from a rural or an urban area?

- Rural
- Urban

11. Do you have any of the following educational qualifications (select all that apply)?

- O' Levels
- A' Levels
- University degree
- Postgraduate degree
- Other, please state _____

12. Do you have any of the following vocational or professional qualifications (select all that apply)?

- National Certificate
- Higher National Certificate
- National Diploma
- Higher National Diploma
- Other, please state _____

13. What were your last three jobs before you left Zimbabwe?

14. In which sectors were these jobs (please select all that apply)?

- Academia
- Agriculture
- Government
- Construction
- Education
- Engineering
- Finance
- Healthcare
- Information Technology
- Manufacturing
- Media
- Military
- Retail
- Science
- Social care
- Transport
- Other, please state _____

15. Please outline the types of work skills you have (for example, project or people management, computer skills)?

16. Were you a member of a Trade Union in Zimbabwe?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state which one(s)

Experiences in the UK

17. Have you ever been in detention in the UK?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 19]

18. How long were you detained for and where?

19. Do you receive any financial or other support from the UK Government?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 21]

20. What types of Government support do you receive?

- Section 4 vouchers
- Section 95 - subsistence only
- Section 95 - with accommodation
- Section 98 - initial accommodation
- Not sure
- Other, please state _____

21. Please select other sources of financial or other support you receive (select all that apply)

- Friends
- Family
- Community group
- Charity
- Faith group
- Other, please state _____

22. Since you have been in the UK, have you ever experienced:

- Homelessness?
- Hunger?
- The inability to buy necessities such as toiletries and clothing?
- The inability to access medical care?
- Difficulties in contacting your legal representative?

23. Have you undertaken any education or training in the UK?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 25]

24. Please outline the education or training you have received.

25. Have you applied to undertake education or training in the UK and not been able to take it up?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 27]

26. Please explain why you were unable to undertake the education or training.

27. Do you have permission to work in the UK?

- Yes [please go to question 29]
- No
- Unsure

28. If you were granted permission, would you like to work?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

29. Have you done any work you have been paid for since coming to the UK?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 32]

30. Please describe the type of work you have done.

31. In general, how does the work you have done in the UK compare to the work you did in Zimbabwe?

- It is at a higher skill level than in Zimbabwe
- It is at a similar skill level than in Zimbabwe
- It is at a lower skill level than in Zimbabwe

32. Have you been able to maintain or improve your work-related skills since being in the UK (e.g. through paid work, by reading professional literature etc.)?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 34]
- Not applicable [please go to question 34]

33. How have you maintained your work skills?

- By doing paid work
- By reading professional/trade literature
- By attending college/training courses
- Other, please state

34. Have you done any voluntary work in the UK?

- Yes
- No [please go to question 36]

35. Please describe the types of voluntary work you have done, and the types of organisation it was for.

Return to Zimbabwe:

36. If it was safe to do so, would you like to return to Zimbabwe?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

37. If you returned, would you have a job to go back to?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

38. Would your skills level be sufficient for you to carry out your previous job?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

39. If you returned, would you have a place to live?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

40. If you returned, would you have any resources to help you to start again?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Anything else?

41. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 2

Interview questions

Experiences in Zimbabwe

1. Can you please outline your education and any qualifications you have?

[Prompt: academic and professional/vocational qualifications]

2. Can you describe the type of work you did in Zimbabwe?

[Prompts: which sector did you work in?

What kind of responsibilities did you have?

Did you have to have particular qualifications to do this work?]

3. Can you please briefly outline the reasons why you left Zimbabwe?

Life in the UK

4. Can you please explain why you came to the UK (as opposed to other countries)?

5. How long have you been living in the UK?

6. Do you have any dependents with you in the UK?

- If yes:
 - Who are these dependents?

7. Can you please describe your immigration status?

8. Do you receive any support from the UK Government?

- If yes:
 - Can you please describe the support you receive?
 - Do you receive any additional support? Can you please describe what this support is?
- If no:
 - How do you support yourself? What support do you receive and who do you receive it from?

9. Do you have permission to work?

- If yes:
 - When were you granted permission to work?
 - How long did you have to wait before being granted permission to work?
- If no:
 - If you were granted permission, would you like to work?
 - How do you feel about not being able to work legally?

10. Have you done any work you have been paid for since arriving in the UK?

- If yes:
 - What type of work was it?
 - Was it similar work to that which you did in Zimbabwe?
[Prompts: was it in the same trade? Was it at a similar skill level?]
- If no:
 - Would you have liked to have been able to work?
 - Has not having worked affected you in any way?

11. Have you been able to maintain or improve your work-related skills since being in the UK?

- If yes:
 - How have you achieved this?
[Prompts: Through studying, working, volunteering?]
- If no:
 - What types of skills do you think you have lost?
 - Do you think this will affect the types of work you can get in the future?

12. Have you undertaken any education or training since being in the UK?

- If yes:
 - Can you please describe the types of education and training you have done?
[Prompts: vocational or academic? College or University? What type of qualification did it lead to?]

13. Have you applied to undertake education or training in the UK and been unable to take it up?

- If yes:
 - Can you please explain why you were unable to take up your place?

14. Do you have anything else to add about your experiences of work, education or training in the UK?

Return to Zimbabwe

15. If it were safe to do so, would you like to return to Zimbabwe?

16. Do you think you would have a job to go back to?

17. Do you think your skill levels would be sufficient to carry out your previous job?

18. Do you think you have skills that would contribute to the reconstruction of Zimbabwe?

[Prompt: If they have said they have lost skills previously, ask them if they think this would affect their contribution]

19. Do you think you would have any resources to be able to start again?

Anything else?

Is there anything else you would like to add about any of the subjects we have talked about in this interview, or on any other issue?

Appendix 3

List of vocations

Qualified Specialist	54	Mid-Level/Junior Financial	10
Head teacher / teacher / lecturer	45	Accounts Clerk/assistant	3
Teacher	37	Credit Controller/Analyst	2
Lecturer	3	Banker	4
Headteacher	2	Pensions Dept Supervisor	1
Examiner	1	Mid-level/Junior Healthcare	8
Teacher of farming methods	2	Hospital	1
Surveyor	2	Dental Technician	1
Qualified/senior healthcare	2	Care Assistant/Worker	2
Doctor	1	Health Assistant	1
Counsellor	1	Crèche Supervisor	1
Qualified/senior financial	5	Healthcare	1
Accountant	5	Hospital Laboratory Assistant	1
Specialist	32	Administration/Office Work	40
Police	3	School Clerk	1
Transport/Town planning	6	Clerk	6
Senior railway controller	3	Storeman/Clerk	2
Transport Manager	2	Administration/Secretarial	23
Town Planner	1	Telephonist	1
Specialist technical/scientific	11	Receptionist	6
Engineer	3	Company Organiser	1
Electrician	3	Retail and Service – mid-level and junior	37
Mechanic	1	Waitress	2
Field Technician	1	Shop assistant	4
IT Technician	2	Salesman/rep	18
Timber Technology	1	Catering	1
Civil service specialist/officer	4	Trader	3
Education Officer	1	Junior Buyer	2
Environmental Health Officer	1	Shipping Clearing	1
Policy Officer	2	Warehouse Assistant	1
Journalist/Media	4	Depot Officer	1
Journalist	1	Croupier	1
Media	3	Cross Border Shopper	2
Farmer	4	Supervisor	1
Skilled	115	Management	20
Skilled manual/technical	24	Retail/Service Management	8
Tool maker	2	Shop Manager	4
Chemical Process Operator	2	Gym Supervisor	1
Paint Product Supervisor	1	Senior Manager/Retail	1
Printer Supervisor	1	Assistant Manager Food	1
Moulder	1	Chief Buyer	1
Workshop Technician	1	Manager – general	12
Shift Technician	1	Assistant General Manager	2
Tailor/sewing	3	Manager	4
Printer	4	Company Secretary	1
Hairdresser/Barber	2	Project Supervisor	1
Carpenter	2	Senior Marketing Manager	3
Chef	2	Operational Manager	1
Quality Controller	1		
Potter	1		

Non-skilled other	17
Non-Skilled Manual	8
Builder	1
Building Foreman	1
Plant Machine Operator	1
Panel Beater	1
Labourer	1
Fitter	3
Non-skilled Other	9
Dispatch Officer	1
Cleaning	2
Security Guard	2
Porter	2
Factory Worker	2
Other	22
Music/Artist	1
Student	5
Businessman	3
Housewife	2
Driver/Taxi Driver	7
Tour Guide	1
Prostitute	1
Postman	2
Not employed	3



As a human rights charity, independent of government, the Refugee Council works to ensure that refugees are given the protection they need, that they are treated with respect and understanding, and that they have the same rights, opportunities and responsibilities as other members of our society.



The Zimbabwe Association (ZA) is a charity and membership organisation which supports Zimbabwean asylum seekers and refugees in the United Kingdom. We work to ensure they have access to fair legal representation and accurate information throughout the asylum process. Our aims include utilising and developing members' skills, accessing education and enabling Zimbabweans to be heard.

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