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## ***Skills and brain drain and the movement of skilled migrants in Southern Africa***

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### ***Patterns of Skilled Immigration***

While southern Africa has received considerable number of skilled immigrants from other parts of Africa and other continents, several of its skilled populations have also migrated to work and live outside the region. Due to the diverse nature of existing human resource skills and the social and legal categories of people who migrate, it is quite difficult to estimate skilled immigrants in Southern Africa (Mattes *et al.*, 2000). Indeed much of what exists about the number of skilled immigrants in Southern African countries is guess work. The most attractive African country for skilled migrants is South Africa. Next to it are Botswana and Namibia. Not surprisingly, empirical studies on immigration have centred on South Africa.

The proportion of skilled immigrants in South Africa seems to be inversely related to social distance from the source countries. Most of the skilled migrants are from Western Europe, followed by the rest of Africa and southern Africa (Mattes *et al.*, 2000). On the contrary, the four major home countries of skilled immigrants in Botswana are, in rank order, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and the UK. A study conducted by McDonald *et al.* (2000) suggests that 33% of African labour migrants employed in South Africa are skilled. Intension to migrate to South Africa exists among 11% of Basotho and Mozambicans and 23% of Zimbabweans who have at least completed high school. Within short distances, visiting the destination is important in the migration decision-making process. 44% of visitors to South Africa from Namibia, 11% from Lesotho and 14% from Mozambique had completed at least high school education (Frayne and Pendleton, 2000). Skilled Namibians are more likely than the unskilled to migrate to South Africa. Greater skills among urban than rural populations largely explains why urban Namibians are more likely to migrate to South Africa than the rural folks. Among Zimbabweans, 20% of male and 14% of female visitors to South Africa had completed at least high school education (Zinyama, 2000).

Just as South Africa and Botswana have experienced brain gain, it seems that there is the risk of brain drain from these countries. Up to 1992, South Africa gained more skilled immigrants than it lost (Mattes and Richmond, 2000; Mattes *et al.*, 2000). But since 1994, the country has been experiencing a deficit in skilled human resource. Effectively, it has consistently lost than gained skilled persons through international migration. The situation is similar in Zimbabwe. Botswana is at risk of losing about 35% of its skilled nationals to, in rank order, the USA, South Africa, the UK and Namibia in the near future (Campbell, 2001).

### ***Why Skilled People Migrate***

Generally, economic factors dominate among the determinants of skilled immigration in Southern African. Strangely, the SAMP study on skilled immigrants in South Africa does not seem to have addressed why they moved to the country (Mattes *et al.*, 2000). Though it seems that less than 50%

of Africans migrate to South Africa for economic reasons (McDonald *et al.*, 2000), excluding the effect of unskilled immigrants would confirm that skilled immigration is income-related. Data on emigration preference reveal the dominance of economic factors. Among skilled South Africans that are likely to migrate to live and work in other countries, concerns about levels of taxation, cost of living, personal and family security and the political situation constitute the major motivating factors (Mattes and Richmond, 2000). Skilled citizens of Botswana that are likely to emigrate are motivated by low prospects for professional advancement, levels of income and cost of living (Campbell, 2001). Rapidly declining quality of life is a major determinant of emigration among Zimbabweans. Other factors that assist the decision to migrate include access to social networks in South Africa, Botswana and Namibia (see among others, Rogerson, 1999).

### ***Consequences of Immigration***

Due to insufficient statistics, it is also difficult to examine the direct effects of skilled immigration in southern Africa. However, it may be conjectured that skilled migration contributes significantly towards economic efficiency at the destination. This process affords receiving countries opportunities to employ the best skills, subject to demand and supply factors. Effectively, skilled immigration is equivalent to brain gain for South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. But given the costs on national investment on persons that have acquired internationally marketable skills and the demand for such skills in the home country, skilled migration could constitute brain drain to the countries of origin.

Studies by SAMP have revealed the existence of xenophobia among several southern Africans, especially South Africans, Botswana, and Namibians. Paradoxically, while Zimbabweans seem to be among victims of xenophobia in South Africa and Botswana, they have been accused of expressing xenophobic attitudes toward non-citizens in the 1980s.

The component of illegal immigration within skilled migration has contributed to increased cost of immigration control in South Africa and Botswana. Skilled immigrants also benefit from opportunities to enhance their skill levels, especially while working in South Africa (Rogerson, 1999).

### ***Policy Implications***

Creating skilled employment market to offset chances of brain drain in southern Africa is a priority.

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