

THE BRAIN GAIN:
SKILLED MIGRANTS AND
IMMIGRATION POLICY IN POST-
APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

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ROBERT MATTES, JONATHAN CRUSH AND WAYNE RICHMOND

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South African immigration policy has become extremely restrictive since 1994. Immigration numbers are at an all-time low, even as emigration accelerates. The number of temporary work permits issued has also declined at a time when South Africa has reconnected to the global economy and many companies and investors wish to import high-level skills. Immigration is not viewed as a public policy tool that could benefit South Africa. Immigrants and migrants (even the most highly skilled) are more often stereotyped as a threat to the economic and social interests of South Africans.

Why has South Africa's first democratic government taken such a dim view of immigration to date? Why is immigration invariably seen as a problem to control rather than an opportunity to exploit? Why has South Africa shifted from being a net immigrant-receiving to an immigrant-exporting nation? These are the first questions addressed in this paper. We address the Draft White Paper's rationale for a restrictionist policy and review various other explanations that have been advanced to explain post-apartheid policy.

International experience suggests that skilled immigrants and migrants make important contributions to any country's economic growth and development. Immigrants can fill the gaps created by emigrating skills or the inadequacies of a country's education and training system. Even more important, skilled immigrants bring innovation to the economy through new ideas and skills. In this regard, there needs to be greater awareness of the profile and contribution of South Africa's current stock of skilled immigrants.

Studies of skilled immigrants in other countries have shown that they rarely fit the popular negative stereotypes. There is no reason why this should not be true for South Africa as well. One way to assess the potential value to South Africa of a more open attitude towards skilled migration and immigration, is to examine the existing immigration population. If these immigrants conform to the negative stereotypes, there is reason for caution. If, on the other hand, they are making a valuable contribution then the case is strengthened for further immigration. This paper therefore profiles South Africa's skilled immigrant population: who are these immigrants? When did they come to South Africa? Are there significant differences between pre-1990 and post-1990 immigrants? And how do they perceive and experience living in South Africa?

The paper is based on a detailed survey of 400 skilled foreign nationals in South Africa using face-to-face interviews. The survey provided

the following profile of South Africa's skilled immigrant population:

- Reflecting South Africa's pre-1994 immigration policies, the major source region is clearly Europe (47%) and the most important source country, the United Kingdom (31%). But as many as 41% of the sample were from elsewhere in Africa (with 18% from the SADC region and 23% from other countries). This points to a newer, post-1990 trend in South Africa's immigration experience; the movement of skilled Africans (as immigrants and asylum seekers) to the country following the demise of apartheid.
- Nearly 73% of South Africa's skilled immigrants from Europe entered before 1991. In contrast, some 87% of non-SADC African respondents entered after 1991, highlighting the recency of South Africa's reconnection to the rest of the continent. SADC-country citizens are about evenly split between the two, indicating that the brain drain from neighbouring states began before the formal end of apartheid.
- Three quarters of skilled non-citizens (mainly whites) who have been in the country since before mid-1991 are permanent residents. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of skilled non-citizens (mainly blacks) who entered after 1991 (91%) are temporary residents on work permits. Nearly 80% of white skilled residents have permanent residence status compared to only 44% of African non-citizens. A restrictionist immigration policy has done little to correct historical inequalities. White non-citizens enjoy rights and privileges that black non-citizens have difficulty accessing.
- The vast majority of skilled immigrants in South Africa were in full-time employment at home before they left. While we cannot discount improved job opportunities and prospects as a motive for migration, it is clear that unemployment per se is not the reason why skilled immigrants leave their home country and come to South Africa.

Most of South Africa's skilled immigrant population can therefore be put into one of two groups: (a) white immigrants who entered before 1994 with the security and other rights conferred by permanent residence and (b) black immigrants (more exactly migrants) who have temporary residence status only. The question therefore arises as to what linkages skilled migrants and immigrants maintain with home and their degree of commitment to South Africa:

- Many non-citizens maintain tangible links with home. One half of the respondents still have a bank account in their home country, 35% still own a house and 34% have investments

there. Very few appear to have cut all ties, with only 12% saying they “never” return home. On the other hand, only 16% return home often. Most do so on an irregular basis. Africans are far less likely to do so even though their destinations are closer. These patterns are not unusual. In a transnational world many contemporary immigrants maintain strong and active backward linkages. This does not mean that they are uncommitted to their country of new residence.

- Only 7% of those with temporary residence and work permits have applied for permanent residence. Is this because they are uninterested or because they see no point in applying since the likelihood of being granted permanent residence is slight? Almost half (45%) said that they would want to become permanent residents if they could, indicating that there is a significant interest in a more lasting commitment to South Africa.
- South Africa’s skilled non-citizens, both black and white, are highly qualified with 93% holding a post-secondary qualification (and 15% a post-graduate degree. There is a very strong trend for post-1991 arrivals to be better educated. Almost 70% of skilled non-citizens with university degrees and 60% with post-graduate training arrived after 1991. This finding clearly contradicts the idea that the “quality” of immigrants to South Africa has been in decline. Under apartheid, a white skin was the usual passport to entry. Under the new dispensation, skills and value have become much more important determinants.
- Skilled non-citizens are high wage earners with 25% earning more than R20,000 per month, and 59% earning more than R10,000 per month. White immigrants tend to earn more, on average, than black.

The survey showed that skilled non-citizens are very satisfied with their personal economic conditions in South Africa, access to health care and quality schooling, and the cost of living. This extends across respondents from differing areas of origin. They are much less satisfied with the standard of services available in South Africa. Finally, there is an overwhelming concern about the lack of personal and family safety. Black non-citizens are far more positive about the future than white, reflecting the same division between white and black South Africans.

Several policy-related conclusions and recommendations can be drawn from this research.

- “Brain drain” pessimism has focused mainly on the exit of skills from South Africa with little focus on what South Africa can do to attract more skilled workers from abroad or to keep those who are already here. Lurking behind much of this one-sided focus is

the misguided assumption that national development and skills in-migration are incompatible. In fact, the opposite is the case.

- There are clearly very important changes afoot in the composition of the skilled foreign workforce in South Africa. Compared to the situation just a decade ago when a similar survey would have been hard pressed to find significant numbers of black skilled workers from the rest of Africa, 41% of this sample were from Africa. This seems to suggest that South Africa is in a position to capitalize on its comparative developmental advantages over the rest of the continent as an attractive destination for skilled workers.
- At the moment, skilled Africans are widely satisfied with South Africa, and fairly optimistic about its future. What is required to keep them is, first and foremost, a change in their treatment at the hands of ordinary South Africans and their government. In this regard, the problem of keeping skilled Africans appears to be the same problem confronting the formulation of a more rational immigration policy in general: xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination against foreigners, particularly those from the rest of Africa.
- South Africa has an important opportunity to enter the global market for skilled migrants and immigrants. Further prevarication and suspicion is counter-productive. In the last year, the Minister of Home Affairs has responded to criticism of government policy by proposing a relaxation of rules of entry for skilled immigrants. This has not yet translated into practical policy measures. The new Immigration Bill will produce a new regulatory framework but does not, of itself, guarantee any change unless there is the political will and a changed mindset.

We recommend that the ANC government articulate a position on skilled immigration as a matter of priority. Implementation of immigration policy is rightly a line function of the Home Affairs Minister. But it cannot simply be assumed that his views are necessarily those of the ANC. Is the ANC, for example, prepared to endorse and work to implement the Minister's new stance on skilled migration, as articulated in the Immigration Bill and various public speeches? If so, a major change in South Africa's restrictionist immigration policy is inevitable.

The Department cannot, in the light of the grave unemployment situation in the country, grant work permits to aliens who do not possess special skills or qualifications not readily available in the Republic of South Africa, thereby depriving South African citizens and other permanent residents of their just expectations of earning a livelihood (Home Affairs Minister Buthelezi 1996).

On the immigration policy I would say that the Department's functions regarding international migration relate to the control over the admission of aliens to their residence in and departure from the Republic. The existing immigration policy is first and foremost directed towards the protection of the interest of the sovereign worker and creation of employment opportunities (Home Affairs Minister Buthelezi, 1996).

In South Africa, we need to acquire large numbers of skilled people to support our economic growth, for we are aware that only through economic growth will our country be able to provide a long-term solution to its severe social problems. However, the relocation to South Africa of skilled people on a temporary or permanent basis is often perceived as threatening scarcely available job opportunities for our nationals. Obviously, this might be true in the short term in respect of specific or even anecdotal situations. However, in a country such ours which is still on its way towards development, the macroeconomic impact of additional skills leads to greater employment generation and the broadening of the economic basis (Home Affairs Minister Buthelezi 2000).

INTRODUCTION

South African immigration policy has become increasingly restrictive since 1994. South African and multi-national employees seeking to introduce foreign skills on a temporary basis have also become increasingly frustrated and critical of government. Immigration is not viewed as a public policy tool that could benefit South Africa. Rather, immigrants and migrants (even the most highly skilled) are more often stereotyped as a threat to the economic and social interests of South Africans.

Why has South Africa's first democratic government taken such a dim view of immigration to date? Why is immigration invariably seen as a problem to control rather than an opportunity to exploit? Why has South Africa shifted from being a net immigrant-receiving to an immigrant-exporting nation?

The official position seems to be that immigration should be treated with great circumspection since it has the potential to exacerbate South Africa's employment problem by taking jobs away from South Africans. The recent Draft White Paper on International Migration suggests three possible reasons why South Africa should be wary of immigration, none of which are particularly convincing.¹

First, the White Paper argues that South Africa has too many people and too high a population density to sustain its existing population. This outdated neo-Malthusian argument takes no account of the real determinants of a country's ability to support its population: its natural and human resource base, its global competitiveness, its economic policies, and many other factors. There are a great many countries with much higher population densities than South Africa who are considerably better off.

Second, there is a tendency to think that every position occupied by a non-South African is one job less for a South African. Immigration is therefore deemed to undermine the state's affirmative action policies which are supposed to open up new job opportunities for black South Africans.

But consider the following scenario: a foreign company is considering investing in South Africa but to operate effectively in a global market, the company wishes to import 100 skilled non-South Africans. They apply to Home Affairs and are told that those 100 jobs must go to South Africans. The company therefore decides to locate its operation in Argentina instead. The result is that the 5,000 new jobs that the company would have generated for South Africans go to Argentina as well.

Third, immigrants are viewed as likely to be a drain and burden on

the state. On the contrary, most international evidence suggests that skilled migrants, in particular, are a major economic boon to a country. They are far more likely to add energy, innovation and jobs to an economy than steal them from locals. There is therefore no evidence and little logic to the argument that South Africans are economically better off because of the country's restrictive immigration policy.

However, even if we reject these arguments, the fact remains that existing policy is restrictive, begging the question of why this should be, given that South Africa was a major immigrant-recruiting nation before the 1990s. Several inter-related reasons have been advanced for post-apartheid South Africa's adoption of a restrictionist policy on legal immigration and migration:²

- The legacy of South Africa's racially-sullied immigration history.³ Under white rule, legal immigration was confined to whites only, primarily from Western Europe. This policy was not officially removed from the statute books until 1991. Black people from the rest of Africa were allowed legal entry to South Africa only under strictly controlled conditions - usually as migrant contract workers who were required to return home as soon as their employment ended. Immigration is therefore associated in many minds with South Africa's racist past and is seen as of little relevance to the new state.
- South Africa's newly-inclusive nation-building project and the impact of new nationalism.⁴ This process has placed great emphasis on defining the boundaries of citizenship and membership. The corollary of this process is identification and exclusion of those "who do not belong." Africans who had lived side-by-side with black South Africans before 1994 found themselves increasingly alienated thereafter. South Africa has no policy of immigrant integration and no vision of a national identity that would welcome and embrace new members.
- Popular and policy confusion between migration and immigration, and between legal and unauthorized migrants and immigrants.⁵ Since 1990, South Africa has had to confront an increasing flow of undocumented migrants to the country. Although the extent of this movement is often highly exaggerated, it has led to a moral panic and policy obsession with controlling and deporting "illegal aliens." Legal immigration tends to be lumped together with undocumented migration and is tainted by association. At best, the idea that legal immigration might benefit the country is relegated to the policy backburner.
- The impact of public, media and official xenophobia.⁶ Research has clearly demonstrated that an anti-immigration policy enjoys

broad public support. Almost 1 in 4 South Africans would be happy if no non-citizens came to the country at all. Over 65% favour a highly restrictionist entry policy and draconian response. South African hostility to immigration is not, the surveys also show, based on rejection of the potential benefits of legal immigration; indeed, there is widespread ignorance about what these might be. What this means is that a shift in policy direction, even the tentative one proposed in the White Paper, requires political leadership, changed media attitudes and serious public education.

This paper examines South Africa's anti-immigrationist policy in the context of the associated debate on the "brain drain." This debate has focused to date almost obsessively on the emigration of skilled South Africans from the country.⁷ But skilled emigration is only one side of the story. Before we reach firm conclusions about whether South Africa is experiencing a net loss of skilled labour, the volume of that loss, and its impact on the South African economy, needs to be weighed against the numbers and types of skilled non-South Africans living in and immigrating to South Africa.

Skilled immigrants and migrants make important contributions to any country's economic growth and development.⁸ Immigrants can fill the gaps created by emigrating skills or the inadequacies of a country's education and training system. Even more important, skilled immigrants bring innovation to the economy through new ideas and skills.⁹ This is seldom recognized in the anti-immigration discourse of post-apartheid South Africa.

In order to shift the debate so that skills immigration is not perceived as a universal evil by South Africans and its real potential is realistically debated and assessed, several things need to happen.

First, there needs to be far more precise documentation of the extent of the skills lost through brain drain. A recent study by the South African Network of Skills Abroad (SANSA) project at UCT claims that official statistics on emigration are far too low, by as much as two-thirds.¹⁰ Official statistics on emigration count self-declared *émigrés*, and do not capture those who might leave permanently under the pretext of, or subsequent to, a temporary visit.¹¹

Second, the brain drain and brain gain issues need to be disconnected. Immigration needs to be viewed not simply as a means to fill some actual or hypothetical gap caused by emigration but as a policy tool in its own right. Immigration, properly planned and managed, can do much more for South Africa than simply plug the gap.

Third, there needs to be greater awareness of the profile and contribution of South Africa's current stock of skilled immigrants. Studies of

skilled immigrants in other countries have shown that they rarely fit the popular stereotypes. There is no reason why this should not be true for South Africa as well.

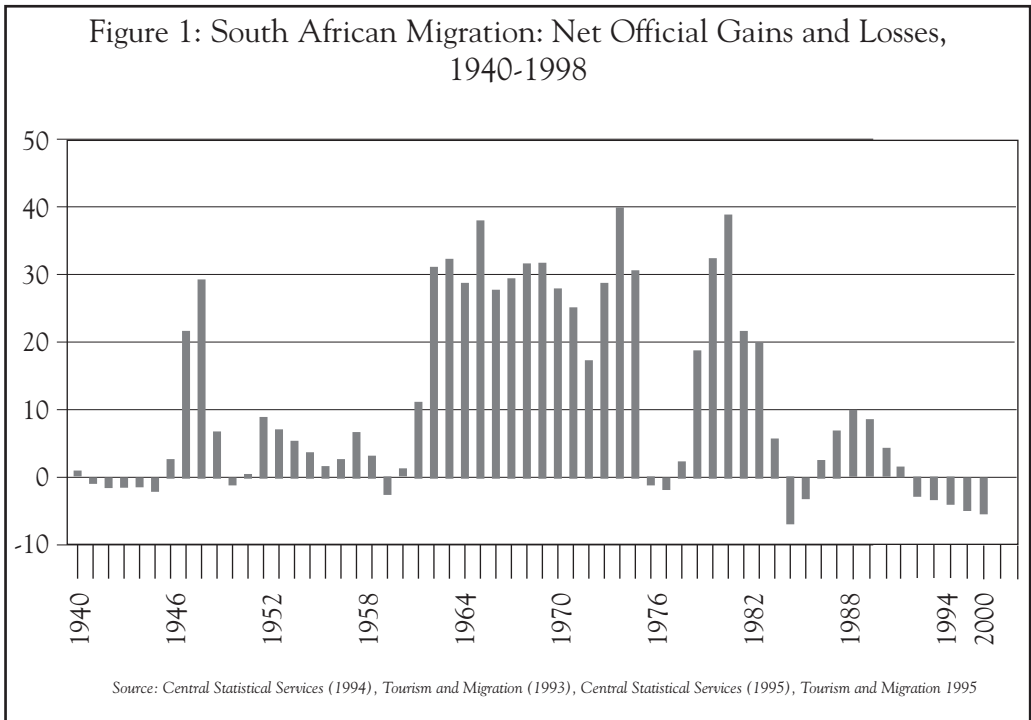
Finally, there is a clear need for bold political leadership on the immigration question. In a climate of antagonism and public hostility towards non-citizens, the benefits of controlled immigration and migration to South Africa must be clearly articulated and marketed. In this respect, the Minister of Home Affairs has recently begun to recognize this reality in public.

However, his cannot be an isolated voice. The ANC needs to clarify whether its own policy position on immigration advocates continued restrictionism or greater flexibility.¹²

This paper aims to profile South Africa's current skilled immigrant population. The analysis addresses the following questions: (a) who are these immigrants? (b) when did they come to South Africa? (c) are there significant differences between pre-1990 and post-1990 immigrants? and (d) how do they perceive and experience the xenophobic smog which is said to blanket much of the country? The primary intention is to demystify the contribution that non-citizens are making to the country and to suggest that an anti-immigrationist policy on skilled migration is not in the country's best interests.¹³

A NATION OF EMIGRANTS?

Before the 1990s, South Africa was usually classified as an “immigrant-receiving nation”!¹⁴ According to official statistics, the country consistently experienced net immigration gains up until 1994; interrupted only during periods of political upheaval and large-scale emigration in 1960-1961 (Sharpeville), 1977-1979 (Soweto), and 1986-1988 (the States of Emergency) (Figure 1).



Official immigration figures show that until the 1980s, Western Europe (and Great Britain in particular) was the major sources of immigrants to South Africa. The peak decade for European immigration was 1965 to 1975, when 300,000 immigrants entered the country (Table 1). European immigration fell sharply after 1985. African immigration prior to the 1970s was primarily of whites from other countries to the north. The peak period coincides with white flight from independence in Africa.

In the 1980s, South Africa's immigration stream became somewhat more diverse. With the nominal “independence” of the homelands of Transkei, Ciskei and Bophuthatswana, skills were imported from a more

| | Europe | Africa | Asia | Americas | Oceania |
|---------|---------|--------|--------|----------|---------|
| 1926-30 | 30,871 | 791 | 742 | 746 | 511 |
| 1931-35 | 18,537 | 1,130 | 464 | 766 | 508 |
| 1936-40 | 30,896 | 1,596 | 845 | 1,369 | 841 |
| 1941-45 | 5,422 | 928 | 417 | 328 | 198 |
| 1946-50 | 91,573 | 4,027 | 3,438 | 1,865 | 1,189 |
| 1951-55 | 70,242 | 7,841 | 1,375 | 1,576 | 637 |
| 1956-60 | 48,857 | 14,187 | 1,423 | 1,386 | 654 |
| 1961-65 | 89,658 | 58,231 | 2,563 | 2,734 | 1,189 |
| 1966-70 | 157,087 | 44,418 | 2,918 | 3,218 | 2,511 |
| 1971-75 | 142,584 | 27,838 | 2,754 | 3,666 | 3,843 |
| 1976-80 | 76,381 | 50,343 | 2,189 | 2,441 | 2,428 |
| 1981-85 | 98,191 | 58,603 | 3,136 | 2,837 | 1,278 |
| 1986-90 | 28,189 | 13,946 | 4,730 | 2,422 | 554 |
| 1991-95 | 18,999 | 8,474 | 12,462 | 1,890 | 498 |

Source: S. Peberdy, "Selecting Immigrants"

diverse range of sources, including Asia, SADC and the rest of Africa. In the 1980s significant numbers of Taiwanese immigrants were also welcomed by the apartheid government as part of the Bantustan industrialization strategy.

Officially, South Africa remained a net immigration country during the tumultuous transition years from 1990 to 1994. However, this picture is misleading since official figures seriously under-estimate the extent of emigration. The official net immigration losses of the period since 1994 similarly fail to reveal the full extent of the deficit (Figure 1).

Official South African data on emigration can be compared with that for the five major recipient countries of South Africans - the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁵ Since South Africa's data capture methods rely on self-disclosure of emigration, they are less likely to be accurate than data from recipient countries. There is consistent underreporting in the South African data (Table 2).

The magnitude of the discrepancy increases over time, perhaps indicating not only that more people are leaving but that they are less willing to report it. In sum, an estimated 233,609 people left South Africa to settle abroad in these five countries between 1989 and 1997. The official figure for these countries, as reported by SSA, is only 82,811. There is thus significant under-reporting of emigration in official South African statistics: only 35% of the emigration stream was captured by official data-collection methods.

| | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 | 1991 | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | Total |
|----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| NZ Data | 632 | 246 | 209 | 202 | 223 | 422 | 2 054 | 2 638 | 2 046 | 2 648 | 2 689 | 14 009 |
| SA Data | 411 | 176 | 83 | 64 | 50 | 126 | 242 | 1 465 | 939 | 1 266 | 1 157 | 5 979 |
| Aus Data | 3 792 | 3 024 | 2 424 | 2 084 | 1 274 | 1 021 | 1 654 | 2 792 | 3 190 | 3 211 | 4 281 | 28 747 |
| SA Data | 3 484 | 2 588 | 1 275 | 1 292 | 928 | 694 | 1 309 | 1 298 | 1 507 | 1 767 | 1 508 | 17 650 |
| UK Data | 6 700 | 7 000 | 11 700 | 6 400 | 8 000 | 6 900 | 9 400 | 8 100 | 4 200 | 11 400 | 10 988 | 90 788 |
| SA Data | 3 817 | 2 295 | 1 420 | 1 804 | 1 800 | 1 987 | 3 716 | 2 880 | 2 045 | 2 243 | 2 162 | 26 169 |
| Can Data | 1 748 | 1 672 | 1 558 | 1 083 | 1 014 | 1 141 | 1 822 | 2 910 | 1 753 | 1 526 | 1 898 | 18 125 |
| SA Data | 755 | 722 | 454 | 349 | 266 | 285 | 566 | 947 | 679 | 774 | 557 | 6 354 |
| US Data | 1 741 | 1 832 | 1 899 | 1 990 | 1 854 | 2 516 | 2 197 | 2 144 | 2 560 | 2 966 | 2 563 | 46 724 |
| SA Data | 543 | 325 | 174 | 278 | 307 | 314 | 566 | 752 | 882 | 963 | 832 | 5 936 |

Source: Brown, Kaplan and Meyer, "Brain Drain."

One of the reasons that immigration has been increasingly outstripped by emigration is because immigration policy has become increasingly restrictive since 1994.

POST-APARTHEID IMMIGRATION POLICY

Official statistics for immigration are a great deal more reliable than those for emigration.

The new, post-apartheid restrictionist attitude towards immigration has affected flows in two main ways: first, the numbers of people being allowed to legally immigrate to South Africa has fallen consistently since 1994 (Table 3). The argument that this is because few people wish to emigrate to South Africa is almost certainly incorrect. With limited opportunity for legal immigration, South Africa's skills base has ironically been augmented by undocumented immigration and official corruption.¹⁷ This is the regrettable downside of the absence of a proactive immigration policy. South Africa's economy is also relatively developed in comparison to the rest of the continent and to much of the "third world." Thus, South Africa has comparative advantages that make it a preferred destination for many skilled workers.

Second, the new restrictionism has affected temporary skills import. The official figures indicate that the number of work permits issued to foreign temporary residents increased during the 1990s but has fallen consistently since 1996 (Table 4). The 1998 figure was the lowest for many years. Employers have been frustrated and blocked at almost every turn as they seek to import high-level skills from outside the country. This discontent has swelled into a torrent of criticism over the last year

| | Total | Europe | Africa | Asia | Other |
|------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|
| 1990 | 14,449 | 7,560 | 1,628 | 2,837 | 2,474 |
| 1991 | 12,379 | 5,767 | 2,065 | 3,650 | 897 |
| 1992 | 8,686 | 3,869 | 1,266 | 3,005 | 546 |
| 1993 | 9,824 | 4,541 | 1,701 | 3,165 | 417 |
| 1994 | 6,398 | 2,784 | 1,628 | 1,645 | 342 |
| 1995 | 5,064 | 2,272 | 1,343 | 1,063 | 386 |
| 1996 | 5,407 | 2,315 | 1,601 | 1,137 | 454 |
| 1997 | 4,352 | 1,630 | 1,281 | 1,148 | 473 |
| 1998 | 4,371 | 1,614 | 1,169 | 1,207 | 381 |

Source: DHA Annual Reports

as the policy has seriously interfered with the economic plans and operations of key enterprises. There are signs that the message is getting through and a loosening of restrictions has been promised. However, the new Draft Immigration Bill proposes a new system that is bureaucratically cumbersome and may simply exacerbate the situation further.¹⁸

DEFINING SKILLED IMMIGRATION

The systematic study of skilled immigration faces various difficulties. Definitions of the term "skilled", for example, vary considerably. Most researchers tend to focus on people who have received some sort of specialized training that results in superior technical competence, talent, or abilities that are applied in professional occupations. Without these people, the operation and development of the economy would be severely hindered. But is this definition really adequate? A survey of skilled non-

| | New | Renewals | Total |
|------|--------|----------|--------|
| 1990 | 7,657 | 30,915 | 38,571 |
| 1991 | 4,117 | 32,763 | 36,880 |
| 1992 | 5,581 | 33,318 | 38,899 |
| 1993 | 5,741 | 30,810 | 36,551 |
| 1994 | 8,714 | 29,352 | 38,066 |
| 1995 | 11,053 | 32,838 | 43,891 |
| 1996 | 19,498 | 33,206 | 52,704 |
| 1997 | 11,361 | 17,129 | 28,490 |
| 1998 | 10,828 | 11,207 | 22,035 |

Source: DHA Annual Reports

citizens in South Africa needs to approach a broader range of people than this typical popular image might imply.

First, the term “brain drain” certainly implies a depletion of the functional core of the economy. In business, the functional core is simply a subgroup of key personnel in an organization who are critical to the normal conduct of economic activity. The functional core of an economy therefore does not only consist of people with post-graduate degrees, in well-paying, high level corporate positions. It is also sustained by people who, despite having no advanced formal education, have worked their way up the corporate ladder or have started their own successful businesses

Second, the skills pool should include people at various stages of the corporate ladder. National economic performance will begin to breakdown not only when businesses lose a certain number of senior managers, but when they cross a specific threshold of loss of middle-level personnel who fill vital administrative and support functions. Middle-level personnel also comprise the potential pool from which to fill senior positions in the future.

Third, the skills pool includes entrepreneurs, not simply those in corporate structures. The self-employed create jobs, add innovation, and contribute to the overall growth of the economy. The pool also includes people from science, technology, education and arts and culture who contribute to the functional core of the economy by training skilled workers, contributing technological and scientific innovation, and sustaining the entertainment and tourist industries.

Because of these definitional issues and problems with official data, nobody is sure exactly how many skilled non-citizens actually live in South Africa. There is also no precise knowledge of where they reside or work. This makes it impossible to draw scientific, representative samples.

To obtain information which is as valid and reliable as possible in the circumstances, an area-controlled quota sample of 400 skilled foreign nationals in the country was interviewed.¹⁹ Face-to-face interviews were conducted in the Gauteng, Cape Town and Durban metropolitan areas. Many no doubt also reside in other metropolitan and rural areas, but due to the immense difficulty and cost in locating them, the survey was limited to the three metropolitan areas.²⁰

Almost two out of every three (61%) sample respondents fitting the criteria were found in the greater Johannesburg region (Table 5). Some 22% were in the Cape Town area and 18% in Durban. African skilled migrants (at 83%) were even more concentrated in Gauteng than those from other regions.

The profile of the sample selected for this study of skilled immigrants should, if any way representative, reflect South Africa’s diverse

| Province | Total | Western* | African | Other |
|---------------|-------|----------|---------|-------|
| Gauteng | 61 | 44 | 83 | 52 |
| Western Cape | 22 | 32 | 9 | 24 |
| Kwazulu-Natal | 18 | 24 | 9 | 24 |

(N=400) Citizen of European and North American countries*

immigration history. This proved to be the case. In the survey sample, the major source region was clearly Europe (47%) and the most important source country, the United Kingdom (31%); a clear legacy of South Africa's racist past (Tables 6 and 7).

South Africa's more recent history of immigrant diversification is also clearly reflected in the sample. As many as 41% of the sample were from elsewhere in Africa (with 18% from the SADC region and 23% from other countries). The snowball sample method picked up respondents from 10 African countries with Nigeria and the DRC prominent outside SADC, and Zimbabwe within.

The fact that almost a quarter of the sample were from non-SADC African countries points to a newer, post-1990 trend in South Africa's immigration experience; the movement of skilled Africans (as immigrants and asylum seekers) to the country following the demise of apartheid. The relatively high proportion of African respondents, in comparison with overall immigration figures (Table 7), is a function of the fact that the survey identified many skilled African respondents who enjoy only temporary residence status in South Africa.

For purposes of internal comparison, the sample can be divided in various ways. First, comparisons are possible between the older, primarily European, stream of immigrants and the newer breed of African (im)migrant. The former are associated with the population engineering of apartheid immigration policy. Nearly 73% of South Africa's skilled

| Region of Origin | % |
|------------------|----|
| Western Europe | 47 |
| Rest of Africa | 23 |
| Southern Africa | 18 |
| North America | 4 |
| Asia/ Far East | 3 |
| Eastern Europe | 3 |
| Australasia | 1 |
| Other | 2 |

For this and all subsequent tables, percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. (N=400)

| Table 7: Citizenship of Skilled Immigrants | | |
|---|-----|----|
| Country of Citizenship | N | % |
| Britain | 123 | 31 |
| Nigeria | 32 | 8 |
| Germany | 22 | 6 |
| Zimbabwe | 15 | 4 |
| DRC | 21 | 5 |
| Netherlands | 16 | 4 |
| Ireland | 11 | 3 |
| United States | 9 | 2 |
| Malawi | 9 | 2 |
| Zambia | 9 | 2 |
| Ghana | 9 | 2 |
| Portugal | 8 | 2 |
| Lesotho | 8 | 2 |
| Uganda | 8 | 2 |
| Botswana | 8 | 2 |
| Swaziland | 6 | 2 |
| Belgium | 6 | 2 |
| Canada | 5 | 1 |
| Austria | 4 | 1 |
| Cuba | 4 | 1 |
| Kenya | 4 | 1 |
| <i>Only countries with at least 1% listed (N=400)</i> | | |

residents from Europe entered South Africa before 1991 (Table 8). The latter, increasingly global, movement is associated with the new opportunities and attractions of post-apartheid South Africa.

As Table 8 also shows, 87% of non-SADC African respondents entered the country after 1991, highlighting the recency of South Africa's reconnection to the rest of the continent. SADC-country citizens are about evenly split between the two, indicating that the brain drain from neighbouring states began before the formal end of apartheid, and has continued since.

A second point of comparison therefore is between "old" and "new" immigrants. We use the year 1991 as the nominal divide between old (apartheid) and new (post-apartheid) immigrant movements. The former group is predominantly European but includes some African and Asian immigrants who entered under the banner of the country's late apartheid policies. The latter group is predominantly African, but

| | Europe | Rest of Africa | Southern Africa | Other | Total |
|-------------------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Up to 8 years (since mid 1991) | 27.1 | 86.9 | 53.4 | 73.6 | 49.1 |
| More than 8 years (before mid 1991) | 72.9 | 13.1 | 46.5 | 36.8 | 51.2 |
| N= | 199 | 92 | 71 | 38 | 400 |

includes Europeans and other skilled personnel associated with the post-apartheid influx of foreign capital to the country.

The final point of comparison is between permanent residents (“immigrants”) and temporary residents (“migrants”). As Table 9 clearly shows, three quarters of skilled non-citizens who have been in the country since before mid-1991 are permanent residents. On the other hand, the overwhelming majority of skilled non-citizens who entered after 1991 (91%) are temporary residents on work permits. Nearly 80% of western skilled residents have permanent residence status compared to only 44% of African non-citizens. The impact of a restrictionist immigration policy on the degree of commitment and permanence of non-citizens seems obvious, although it could be that the modern, skilled worker is less interested in permanent residence.

Comparisons are useful for a number of reasons. First, they provide valuable insights into the character, skills, attitudes and behaviours of old versus new immigrants. Second, we can test the pervasive assumption in South Africa that the rest of the continent has little to offer; certainly its citizens are often stereotyped in the media and on the streets in predominantly negative terms. Third, the reality is that South Africa is currently a more attractive permanent immigration destination for Africans than it is for people from Europe. If South Africa were to adopt a more open policy towards skilled immigration, Africa would be a major source of potential immigrants (as happened fleetingly in the early 1990s). It is therefore useful to know something about the new African immigrants already in South Africa.²¹

COMPARING OLD AND NEW IMMIGRATION

A systematic comparison of the old and new foreign skilled populations of South Africa reveals some distinctive differences. First, their residential

| | Permanent Residence | Work Permit | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|-------|
| Up to 8 years (since mid 1991) | 24.6 | 91.1 | 49.1 |
| More than 8 years (before mid 1991) | 75.5 | 9.2 | 51.2 |
| N= | 253 | 147 | 400 |

geography is distinctively different (Table 10), with old immigrants clustering in Cape Town and Durban, while new immigrants are found in absolute and proportionally greater numbers in the economic heartland of the Greater Johannesburg area.

Second, the sample reveals the distinctive gender characteristics of western and African skilled migrants. Both populations are predominantly male (Table 11). However, the western sample had proportionally more females. Much old immigration was of the family variety. The training and mobility of skilled Africans in their home countries remains male-dominated.

Third, in terms of formal educational qualifications, there is little obvious difference between African and western non-citizens. Table 12 shows that both populations are highly qualified in formal terms.

However, there is a much greater difference in the qualifications of old and new immigrants. As Table 13 shows, there is a strong trend for more recent, post-1991, arrivals to be better educated. Almost 70% of skilled non-citizens with university degrees and 60% with post-graduate training arrived after 1991. This finding clearly contradicts the idea that the “quality” of immigrants to South Africa has been in decline. Under

| | Greater JHB | Cape Town | Durban | Total |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|--------|-------|
| Up to 8 years (since mid-1991) | 64.0 | 29.8 | 21.1 | 49.1 |
| More than 8 years (before mid-1991) | 35.9 | 69.9 | 78.9 | 51.2 |
| N= | 242 | 87 | 71 | 400 |

| Gender | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Male | 68 | 61 | 79 | 64 |
| Female | 32 | 39 | 21 | 36 |
| (N=400) | | | | |

| Educational Qualification | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Less than High School Certificate (HSC) | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| HSC only, or equivalent | 7 | 11 | 1 | 4 |
| HSC plus a diploma or Bachelors degree | 68 | 61 | 74 | 84 |
| Honours degree | 10 | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| Masters degree | 12 | 12 | 14 | 4 |
| Doctorate | 3 | 4 | 1 | 8 |
| (N=400) | | | | |

apartheid, a white skin was the usual passport to entry. Under the new dispensation, skills and value have become much more important determinants.

Fourth, despite the similar educational profile of western and African skilled residents and the superior profile of post-1991 entrants, the earning potential of the two groups varies considerably (Table 14). Western skilled residents tend to have higher incomes than their African counterparts. For example, some 63% of skilled Africans earn less than R10,000 a month (compared with only 24% of westerners). Again, a third of Africans, but only 10% of westerners, earn less than R6,000 a month. In part, this is a function of natural career progression (with long-time immigrants tending to earn more than newcomers in any context). But there are obvious racial legacies here. Any white immigrant in the old South Africa immediately enjoyed job and promotion preference over a black counterpart.

Fifth, the survey provided useful insights into the occupational distribution of skilled migrants. Nine-in-ten (90%) skilled non-citizens interviewed work full-time. One quarter (26%) work for themselves full-time, but only a very small proportion in the informal sector (5%) (Table 15). Very few came to South Africa because of unemployment

Table 13: Qualifications of Skilled Immigrants (%)

| | High School or less | HS + | Bachelor's | Post-Graduate Degree | Total |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|------|------------|----------------------|-------|
| Up to 8 years (since mid-1991) | 16.1 | 31.7 | 69.1 | 58.2 | 49.1 |
| More than 8 years (before mid-1991) | 83.9 | 68.4 | 31.1 | 41.8 | 51.2 |
| N= | 25 | 287 | 30 | 58 | 400 |

Table 14: Income of Skilled Immigrants (%)

| Income | Total | Western | African | Other |
|--------------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| R2001 to R6000 | 19 | 10 | 32 | 12 |
| R6001 to R8 000 | 14 | 9 | 21 | 4 |
| R8001 to R10 000 | 7 | 5 | 10 | 8 |
| R10 001 to R14 000 | 16 | 17 | 15 | 20 |
| R14 001 to R20 000 | 18 | 23 | 11 | 28 |
| R20 001 to R26 000 | 11 | 13 | 6 | 12 |
| R26 001 to R32 000 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 0 |
| R32 001 to R38 000 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| More than R38 000 | 5 | 9 | 1 | 4 |
| Refused to answer | 2 | 2 | 0 | 8 |
| (N=400) | | | | |

back home. Only 2% were unemployed before they left, and another 7% worked part time. As many as 63% were in full-time employment when they left. Another one quarter (24%) were still students when they left.

Skilled non-citizens are spread fairly broadly across various sectors of the South African economy. The largest proportion (31%) work in the service industry, followed by professional practitioners – law, medicine and engineering – (25%). With regard to employment status and occupation, there is actually no major difference according to region of origin. New migrants are disproportionately represented in the medical, educational, financial and research and technical fields. They are under-represented in the commercial and manufacturing sectors. This may simply be a reflection of a lack of demand in industry, although this argument is difficult to sustain in the face of persistent complaints from business about the bureaucratic difficulties of accessing non-South African labour (Table 16).

DISCOURAGING PERMANENCE

One of the most striking features of post-1994 immigration policy has been the hostility to the permanent, and even temporary, import of skills from outside. There is a pervasive but highly misleading assumption that every job occupied by a non-citizen is one job less for a South African. This fallacy has produced a policy environment that favours limiting skills in-migration, and temporary over permanent settlement. This contrasts markedly with apartheid policy where (white) permanent immigration and assimilation were encouraged and promoted.

How transient are South Africa’s skilled non-citizens? The first way to answer the question is to examine their continuing economic commitments to their country of origin. Non-citizens who maintain tangible links to their home countries have a much greater potential ability and likelihood of returning. One half (50%) of the respondents still have a

Table 15: Employment Status of Skilled Immigrants (%)

| Employment Status | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Employed – Full time | 64 | 60 | 71 | 55 |
| Employed – Part time | 8 | 5 | 10 | 16 |
| Entrepreneur in Formal Sector – Full time | 21 | 27 | 13 | 24 |
| Entrepreneur in Formal Sector – Part time | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Entrepreneur in Informal Sector – Full time | 5 | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Entrepreneur in Informal Sector – Part time | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| (N=400) | | | | |

| Table 16: Employment Sector of Skilled Immigrants (%) | | | | |
|--|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Employment field/ Sector | Total | Western | African | Other |
| Education / Research | 14 | 10 | 18 | 12 |
| Secondary education | 3 | 1 | 7 | 0 |
| Primary education | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Tertiary education | 6 | 4 | 7 | 8 |
| Research | 4 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| Heavy industry | 17 | 19 | 15 | 12 |
| Manufacturing | 8 | 10 | 4 | 12 |
| Textile | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Construction | 3 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Mining | <1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Automotive | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Steel & iron | 1 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Service industry | 31 | 37 | 20 | 32 |
| Retail | 8 | 10 | 4 | 12 |
| Real estate | 2 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Energy | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Food | 6 | 7 | 3 | 12 |
| Transport | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 |
| Marine / Shipping | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Private security | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Service | 5 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| Computer / Information technology | 2 | 1 | 4 | 4 |
| Tourism / Hotel industry | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Arts / Entertainment / Sport | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Telecommunications | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Media | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Professional practice | 25 | 20 | 30 | 24 |
| Medical | 10 | 6 | 15 | 12 |
| Engineering | 13 | 13 | 12 | 12 |
| Law firm | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| Finance / Banking | 11 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| Accounting | 3 | 1 | 6 | 4 |
| Finance | 3 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Banking | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Insurance | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Marketing / Commerce | 2 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Government / Military | 4 | 2 | 8 | 8 |
| Government | 4 | 2 | 7 | 8 |
| Military | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Agriculture | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| (N=400) | | | | |

bank account in their home country.

But the numbers are significantly lower on the other indicators. One-third (35%) still own a house (35%) and investments (34%) in their home country, and a fifth (19%) still have a job to return to. Western respondents are much less likely to have retained a house back home, a reflection of their more permanent residence status. African respondents are slightly less likely to have a foreign bank account. Other than that, regional differences are minimal (Table 17).

Another measure is how often they return to their home country. Very few appear to have cut all ties, with only 12% saying “never.” On the other hand, only 16% return home often. Most do so on an irregular basis. Africans are far less likely to do so even though their destinations are much closer (Table 18).

Another way of assessing the likelihood of staying in South Africa is by examining their developing ties to the country. As expected, old (white) immigrants are far more likely to have permanent residence in South Africa: nearly 80% of westerners versus only 56% of Africans interviewed. The latter, who are predominantly post-1991 arrivals, face considerable constraints on acquiring permanent residence. In fact, only 7% of the sample had work permits and had actually applied for permanent residence.

But how many temporary residents would opt for permanence if the climate was more conducive? Of the work permit holders, almost half (45%) said that they would want “to a large extent” to become a permanent resident. Other indicators also suggest a considerable interest in a more permanent commitment to the country: 9% of the sample have

Table 17: Connections with Home Country (%)

| In your home country, do you still: | Total | Western | African | Other |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Own a house (% yes) | 35 | 18 | 53 | 52 |
| Have a bank account (% yes) | 50 | 53 | 44 | 60 |
| Have investments (% yes) | 34 | 34 | 34 | 32 |
| Have a job to return to (% yes) | 19 | 15 | 21 | 36 |

Table 18: Frequency of Return to Home Country (%)

| “How often do you return to your home country?” | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Often | 16 | 18 | 10 | 32 |
| Occasionally | 27 | 31 | 22 | 20 |
| A few times | 13 | 17 | 9 | 4 |
| Once or twice | 32 | 26 | 40 | 32 |
| Never | 12 | 8 | 18 | 12 |

already applied for South African citizenship and one quarter (24%) express a high level of desire to become a citizen. Similarly, one quarter (25%) express a strong desire to retire in South Africa.

However, not everyone wishes to make such a commitment. This is not surprising since the sample picked up two different “types” of post-apartheid skilled foreign resident: individuals who are temporary residents by design or preference (e.g. employees of foreign companies or in contract posts) and those who would prefer to immigrate to South Africa permanently, but cannot.

African skilled workers are much more likely to express a strong desire to become citizens (37%). Even though more than 60% express some interest in obtaining citizenship, that does not always appear to translate into a desire to stay for the rest of their lives. Just over one-third are interested in retiring in South Africa, and only 20% would want to be buried there. Conversely, the older immigrants from the west are considerably more likely to express interest in retiring and being buried in South Africa. Almost one-half of the respondents (49%) said they wanted to stay in South Africa longer than five years.

Skilled non-South Africans do still display a significant level of symbolic and patriotic ties with their home country. Eight-in-ten (80%) respondents agreed that they were proud to be called a citizen of their home country, and two-thirds (66%) agreed that citizenship in their home country was an important part of their self-image. One half (54%) want their children to be citizens of their home country, and slightly less than half (46%) still feel that they have a duty to contribute to the development of their own country.

At the same time, it is important to note that these levels of assent are substantially lower than those given by a sample of ordinary South Africans about their South African patriotism.²² Europeans and North America tended to be less enthusiastic about their identification with their home countries, probably because they have been in South Africa much longer. Continued identification with their home countries does not seem to preclude assimilation within South African society. While 87% agreed that their fellow citizens continue to see themselves as citizens of their country, some 80% also agreed that they also “tend to blend in with the people of South Africa and their culture.”

PERCEPTIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA

The survey results reveal that the skilled non-citizens are very satisfied with their personal economic conditions in South Africa, their access to health care and quality schooling, and the cost of living. This extends across respondents from differing areas of origin (Table 19). The most

important exception is the dissatisfaction of Europeans and North Americans with the cost of living (64% dissatisfied or very dissatisfied).

The respondents were much less satisfied with the standard of services available in South Africa. By a wide margin, they are also dissatisfied with their level and share of taxation. Finally, there is an overwhelming concern about the lack of personal and family safety.

Regardless of where people perceive themselves to be now, a more important question is where they think they will end up and why. Are skilled non-citizens optimistic about their personal futures in South Africa? Here there was a clear difference of opinion between western and African migrants, between old and new immigrants (Table 20).

Most Africans feel that the various elements of their personal economic future in South Africa will continue to improve, in marked contrast to the pessimism of white non-citizens. These differences in attitude are remarkably similar to those between white and black South Africans. Certainly, there is little reason why white non-citizens should not have imbibed many of the same gloomy attitudes as their white South African counterparts. The optimism of skilled Africans about the

Table 19: Perceptions of Life in South Africa

| | Total | Western | African | Other |
|--|-----------------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| Personal economic conditions | % satisfied/ very satisfied | | | |
| Job | 79 | 83 | 72 | 84 |
| Prospects for professional advancement | 69 | 49 | 70 | 72 |
| Job security | 63 | 68 | 55 | 67 |
| Income | 51 | 50 | 52 | 56 |
| Cost of living | 47 | 36 | 59 | 56 |
| Taxation | | | | |
| Relative share of taxes compared to others | 20 | 18 | 25 | 8 |
| Present level of taxation | 15 | 13 | 18 | 12 |
| Education and health care | | | | |
| Medical services | 66 | 62 | 71 | 56 |
| Education for children | 45 | 39 | 55 | 40 |
| Standard of services | | | | |
| The upkeep of public amenities | 35 | 19 | 53 | 44 |
| Customer service | 35 | 18 | 55 | 44 |
| Future of children in South Africa | 18 | 11 | 27 | 16 |
| Safety and security | | | | |
| Personal safety | 15 | 13 | 18 | 12 |
| Family's safety | 13 | 9 | 17 | 12 |

| Table 20: Expected Improvements in Next Five Years | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Total | Western | African | Other |
| Personal economic conditions | % satisfied/ very satisfied | | | |
| Level of income | 45 | 29 | 66 | 40 |
| Job | 42 | 22 | 69 | 40 |
| Job security | 39 | 17 | 67 | 40 |
| Prospects for professional advancement | 29 | 10 | 53 | 28 |
| Cost of living | 47 | 36 | 59 | 56 |
| Taxation | | | | |
| Present level of taxation | 14 | 4 | 27 | 12 |
| Relative share of taxes in comparison to others | 11 | 1 | 22 | 12 |
| Education and health care | | | | |
| Ability to find medical services for family | 32 | 7 | 64 | 24 |
| Ability to find a good school for children | 28 | 7 | 56 | 20 |
| Standard of services | | | | |
| Customer service | 32 | 12 | 58 | 36 |
| Upkeep of public amenities | 31 | 12 | 56 | 40 |
| Future of your children | 24 | 9 | 45 | 16 |
| Safety and security | | | | |
| Personal safety | 26 | 10 | 48 | 16 |
| Your family's safety | 25 | 10 | 45 | 16 |

country and their place in it is a reminder to South African policy-makers that the South African experiment enjoys wide support amongst skilled black Africans in the country.

A range of evidence from the media to systematic opinion surveys reveal that South Africans are highly xenophobic and opposed to immigration, and that migrant workers and refugees often find themselves on the receiving end of discrimination, intolerance and violence.²³ The question, therefore, is whether skilled non-citizens are in any way immune from the stereotyping and hostility that is assumed to apply to all foreigners. The survey seems to show that the professional and higher income status of this group shields them from much of the harsh treatment meted out to ordinary foreign workers, immigrants or refugees (Table 21).

Skilled migrants are certainly not unaware of the general negative bias in the country. About one-quarter (28%) said that South Africans hold very negative views – tellingly, 41% of skilled respondents from Africa feel this way. But only small minorities feel that their co-workers or others in their professions have a negative bias toward foreign

residents. A smaller proportion (17%) felt that South Africans had a negative view of people specifically from their home country - and again, this proportion jumped to 36% among skilled Africans.

Perhaps more important, only 4% reported that they their personal relations with South Africans were negative. Indeed, not one respondent chose the option “very negative.” Only very small numbers felt that people from their home country were discriminated against by ordinary South Africans or the South African government, or that they personally were discriminated against (Table 22).

In some sense these are remarkably tolerant and accepting responses, since the personal exposure to unpleasant incidents is not insignificant. As Table 23 shows, nearly 60% of skilled non-citizens have been robbed at some point, over a third have been harassed and one in five have been physically assaulted.

One plausible explanation is that they compare their situation in

| | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Attitudes towards foreign residents held by: % negative / very negative | | | | |
| People from South Africa | 28 | 19 | 41 | 12 |
| Co-workers | 9 | 7 | 10 | 16 |
| People in profession | 6 | 5 | 6 | 16 |

| | Total | Western | African | Other |
|---|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Do you generally have negative relations with people from South Africa? (% positive) | 96 | 98 | 95 | 88 |
| To what extent are you personally treated fairly by the SA government? (% fairly/ very fairly) | 93 | 90 | 97 | 92 |
| To what extent are you personally treated fairly by South Africans? (% fairly/ very fairly) | 95 | 98 | 92 | 96 |
| To what extent are people from your home country treated fairly by the SA government? (% fairly/ very fairly) | 88 | 88 | 88 | 96 |
| To what extent are people from your home country treated fairly by South Africans? (% fairly/ very fairly) | 92 | 99 | 81 | 100 |

| | % yes | | | |
|-----------|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Total | Western | African | Other |
| Harassed | 35 | 29 | 45 | 16 |
| Assaulted | 18 | 15 | 23 | 12 |
| Robbed | 57 | 56 | 59 | 48 |

South Africa favourably with conditions back home. Certainly this seems to be the case when it comes to personal economic conditions; most skilled non-citizens feel that they are better off in South Africa. Only with regard to job security and levels of taxation do significantly more people feel that they would be better off at home. That is hardly surprising given current government policy towards the employment of non-citizens. Skilled migrants from African countries are consistently more likely to think that things are better in South Africa (Table 24).

The picture begins to change when we shift to comparing standards of services. Differences according to region of origin become particularly stark: with the majority of Europeans and North Americans saying these things would be better at home, and at least two-thirds of African respondents saying things are better in South Africa than in their home countries.

Favorable evaluations of South Africa are at their lowest ebb with regard to safety and security. Only 7% and 8% respectively feel that their family safety and personal safety are better in this country. In contrast, 77% and 88% say these matters would be better at home. This ought to be a sobering finding for South Africans. There is a widespread perception that the rest of Africa, in particular, is a chaotic and violent place. Yet, for skilled Africans, South Africa is a far more threatening and dangerous environment.

Perhaps the most important question a skilled worker asks him or herself when considering staying on in South Africa is whether their life has improved as a result of the decision to come in the first place. The survey reveals quite clearly that coming to South Africa has been a positive career move for themselves and other fellow nationals (Table 25). Fully seven-in-ten (70%) say that the lives of the fellow nationals they know who have come to South Africa have improved as a result of the move. More significantly, 65% say that their own lives have improved. Very small minorities feel their lives have worsened, with the balance saying that things have remained as they were.

The general thrust of the analysis is that skilled non-citizens in South Africa are generally far more interested in putting down roots in South Africa than is permitted by current policy. What would happen if the government were to adopt a more immigrant-friendly stance? Here the statistical method known as Multiple Regression Analysis is useful to answer the question: "what factor, or combination of factors, best explains the length of desired stay in South Africa?" Or, more generally, which of the factors included in the survey will ultimately determine how long South Africa will hold onto the skilled foreign population already inside the country?

The statistical analysis indicates that a very limited set of factors

account for variations in the likelihood of skilled respondents' of staying in South Africa. It also reveals important differences between skilled westerners and skilled Africans. With regard to the former, the most important explanations (in a statistical sense) for a desire to stay in South Africa is the degree to which they believe their personal economic prospects will improve in the next five years and the degree to which they foresee improvements in the general state of services and the future of their children in this period.

Thus, regardless of their satisfaction with their present personal conditions, or state of services, it was those people who felt that those things would continue to improve who were significantly more likely to want to stay in South Africa indefinitely (conversely, those who expected things

| | Total | Western | African | Other |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------|---------|-------|
| Personal Economic Conditions | % satisfied/ very satisfied | | | |
| Cost of living | 58 | 47 | 75 | 32 |
| Job | 57 | 46 | 75 | 36 |
| Level of income | 46 | 27 | 71 | 36 |
| Job security | 33 | 19 | 50 | 36 |
| Taxation | | | | |
| Level of taxation | 16 | 11 | 22 | 16 |
| Relative share of taxation | 14 | 8 | 23 | 16 |
| Standard of services | | | | |
| Medical services | 36 | 11 | 71 | 32 |
| Upkeep of public amenities | 34 | 8 | 67 | 36 |
| Customer service | 33 | 9 | 61 | 48 |
| Education and health care | | | | |
| Ability to find a good school | 27 | 8 | 51 | 24 |
| Future of your children | 20 | 5 | 39 | 16 |
| Safety and security | | | | |
| Personal safety | 8 | 1 | 16 | 8 |
| Family safety | 7 | 1 | 16 | 4 |

| In general, would you say your life today is better, about the same or worse than it was in your home country? | Total | Western | African | Other |
|--|-------|---------|---------|-------|
| Better / much better | 65 | 62 | 70 | 52 |
| About the same | 25 | 25 | 22 | 36 |
| Worse / much worse | 9 | 8 | 8 | 12 |

to get worse were significantly more likely to want to leave sooner).

Five other factors also were significant determinants of the length of desired stay in South Africa: (a) the more people were dissatisfied with present levels of tax and the relative share they were paying, the more likely they were to want to exit the country in the next few years; (b) to the extent that people felt that they were discriminated against by the South African government, they were less likely to want to stay; (c) to the extent that people felt they were personally doing better than others in South Africa, they were more likely to want to stay; (d) the more they are involved in professional associations in South Africa, the longer they are likely to stay; and (e) to the extent that they felt that South Africans had positive views of foreigners, they were also more likely to stay.

In the case of skilled Africans, only one variable emerged as a significant predictor of desired length of stay in South Africa: they are significantly less likely to want to stay in the country to the extent that they have negative relations with South Africans or feel they were discriminated against by ordinary South Africans and the South African government. Because the impact of discrimination was so strong in differentiating between those skilled Africans who wanted to leave South Africa soon, and those who wanted to stay for an indefinite period, it is important to ask what would happen if levels of discrimination/ intolerance against Africans could be reduced to zero.

To answer the question, these variables were removed from the equation. The result was that satisfaction with present personal economic conditions became the sole predictor of skilled Africans' desired length of stay. In other words, by simply removing the effect of discrimination, skilled Africans who are satisfied with the state of their personal economic conditions are significantly more likely to want to stay in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

While we need to be cautious about generalizing from this sample of skilled foreign workers to all skilled foreign workers in South Africa, the survey provides us with many rich insights and propositions that can be tested in the future with surveys of more systematically selected samples of foreign workers, or by other types of systematic research.

“Brain drain” pessimism has focused mainly on the exit of skills from South Africa with little focus on what South Africa can do to attract more skilled workers from abroad or to keep those who stay here.

Lurking behind much of this one-sided focus is the misguided assumption that national development and skills migration are incompatible. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Skilled foreigners in South Africa (old and new migrants, Europeans and Africans) – by wide margins – feel that their lives have been made better by virtue of coming to the country. They are very satisfied with their personal economic conditions and their access to schooling and quality health care. They are also relatively optimistic about their personal prospects in South Africa over the next five years. However, they do show concern over the quality of other types of services, taxes, and especially the area of personal and family safety. More importantly, they worry about the future of their children, and the prospects of declining services and an even further deterioration in their security.

Continued economic prosperity and improvements in commercial and public services and standards, such that they feel assured of their children's future, seem to be the most important factors in keeping these skilled workers in the country. The recent economic recovery, as well as the recent tax cuts in the new budget should presumably have important positive effects among this group.

In contrast, a whole range of potential issues, such as movements toward an even more progressive taxation scheme, or a return of the deteriorating currency, high interest rates and high inflation that was experienced during the recession of 1998 could have the opposite effect.

There are clearly very important changes afoot in the composition of the skilled foreign workforce in South Africa. Compared to the situation just a decade ago when a similar survey would have been hard pressed to find significant numbers of black skilled workers from the rest of Africa, 41% of this sample were from Africa. This seems to suggest that South Africa could capitalize on its comparative developmental advantage over the rest of the continent as an attractive destination for skilled workers.

It is interesting to compare the survey results with a companion survey of skilled South Africans. This reveals that, with a few exceptions, skilled white South Africans are consistently more pessimistic about South Africa (both in terms of present and future conditions in South Africa, as well as comparisons of South Africa with other countries) than are skilled Europeans and North Americans – the very people with whom white South Africans would presumably identify. At the same time, that survey demonstrated that few white South Africans have any regular direct experience with the very countries that they list as their most desired destinations. The skilled foreigner in South Africa at least has the advantage of having seen what the grass looks like on both sides

of the fence in forming their evaluations – and by and large, they prefer the grass in South Africa.

At the moment, these African respondents are widely satisfied with South Africa, and fairly optimistic about its future. What is required to keep them is, first and foremost, a change in their treatment at the hands of ordinary South Africans and their government. In this regard, the problem of keeping skilled Africans appears to be the same problems confronting the formulation of a more rational immigration policy in general: xenophobia, intolerance and discrimination against foreigners, particularly those from the rest of Africa.

Finally, is there anything from this research to guide efforts by business and government to increase the entrance of foreign skills into the South African economy? While more systematic research would have to be done among skilled people in other countries to assess their images of South Africa, the views of those already there can provide an important start. In answering the question often posed by puzzled South Africans to skilled foreigners, “Who would want to move here?,” the survey suggests at least one answer.

Even with all the uncertainties and changes that accompany periods of rapid political and economic transition, skilled people can make their lives better. South Africa is a dynamic society with a substantial economy still capable of producing the quality of lifestyles that highly qualified people desire (whether they be from the First or Third Worlds). At the same time, the results also suggest that without sending clear signals that will increase certainty about the future, and without a sharp reduction in xenophobia and then communicating that reduction to skilled people outside the country (especially to those living in Africa), it will be increasingly hard to convince skilled people that there is any green grass in South Africa.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Although we are critical of these aspects of the White Paper's arguments, in its defence, it does also recognize that the existing mechanisms for managing the entry of skilled migrants and immigrants are deeply-flawed and that the country needs a more efficient and less-bureaucratized system for those it wishes to let in.
- 2 A distinction between immigration (for permanent residence) and migration (for temporary residence) is a necessary starting-point. A further distinction is necessary between contract migration and migration (primarily skilled) under the Aliens Control Act. There has been little restriction of contract migration. Indeed, the proportion of non-South Africans in the mining and farming industries has increased since 1994. This is because apartheid and post-apartheid migration policy gives these sectors virtual *carte blanche* to hire labour from where they wish.
- 3 Sally Peberdy and Jonathan Crush, "Rooted in Racism: The Origins of the Aliens Control Act" In Jonathan Crush, ed., *Beyond Control: Immigration and Human Rights in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town, 1998); Sally Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: Nationalism and National Identity in South Africa's Immigration Policy, 1910-1998*, PhD thesis, Queen's University, 1999.
- 4 Maxine Reitzes, "Divided on the Demon: Immigration Policy Since the Election" Centre for Policy Studies, Policy Issues and Actors, 1995; Sheila Croucher, "South Africa's Illegal Aliens: Constructing National Boundaries in a Post-Apartheid State" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998).
- 5 Jonathan Crush, "Fortress South Africa and the Deconstruction of Apartheid's Migration Regime" *Geoforum* 30 (1999).
- 6 David McDonald et al, *Challenging Xenophobia: Myths and Realities About Cross-Border Migration in Southern Africa*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 7, Cape Town, 1998; Robert Mattes et al, *Still Waiting for the Barbarians: South African Attitudes to Immigrants and Immigration*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 14, 1999; Ransford Danso and David McDonald, *Writing Xenophobia: Immigration and the Press in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 17, 2000.
- 7 Although see Jonathan Crush et al., eds., *Losing Our Minds: Skills Migration and the South African Brain Drain*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 18, Cape Town, 2000; and Centre for Development and Enterprise, *Becoming The World's Most Promising Emerging Market": Is Government's White Paper On International Migration Good Enough?* Johannesburg, February 2000.
- 8 Skilled migrants (rather than immigrants) are of increasing importance in a global economy, a fact which South African policy has yet to recognize; see Allan Findlay, "Skilled Transients: The Invisible

- Phenomenon” In Robin Cohen, ed., *The Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 515-22.
- 9 Demetrios Papdemetriou and Stephen Yale-Loehr, *Balancing Interests: Rethinking US Selection of Skilled Immigrants* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment, 1995); Robyn Iredale, “The Analysis of Factors Generating International Migration. The Need to Import Skilled Personnel: Factors Favouring and Hindering Its International Mobility” Paper presented at Technical Symposium on International Migration and Development, The Hague, June 1998.
- 10 David Kaplan, Jean-Baptiste Meyer and Mercy Brown,, “Brain Drain: New Data, New Options,” *Trade and Industry Monitor* September 1999; pp. 10-13.
- 11 Statistics South Africa (1999) *Tourism and Migration, April and May 1999*, p. 5.
- 12 The ANC has been reticent about developing or openly declaring its own official immigration policy. The recommendations of the ANC-aligned Presidential National Labour Market Commission on migration and immigration have been ignored. Both of the two major policy documents, the Green and White Papers on International Migration, were written by independent task teams. The ANC – unlike other political parties, the unions and NGO’s – has not officially reacted to either document. In 1998,an attempt by the Chair of the Portfolio Committee on Home Affairs to craft an ANC policy document based on the Green paper did not bear fruit. The ANC’s position on the White paper and draft Immigration Bill is unclear although the ANC-dominated Portfolio Committee appears to have major concerns both about content and procedure.
- 13 For a complementary general analysis that is not confined to skilled immigrants, see David McDonald et al, *The Lives and Times of African Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, SAMP Migration Policy Series No. 13, Cape Town, 1999.
- 14 For further information and analysis, see Mercy Brown, David Kaplan and Jean-Baptiste Meyer, “The Brain Drain: An Outline of Skilled Emigration from South Africa” *Africa Insight* (in press).
- 16 Official Data is from Statistics South Africa. *Statistical Releases, Tourism and Migration*. P0351, Jan 1989-Set 1998; and Statistics South Africa. *Statistical Reports, Tourism and Migration*. 03-51-01, 1989-1997.
- 17 Human Rights Watch, “*Prohibited Persons*”: *Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in South Africa* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1998).
- 18 Government Gazette No. 20889, *Draft Immigration Bill*, 15 February 2000.
- 19 The fieldwork was coordinated by Idasa’s Public Opinion Service and conducted by Decision Surveys International (DSI) in June and July

1999. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted approximately 45 minutes each. At least 15% of each interviewer's questionnaires were "back-checked." Interviewees had to be foreign (and not South African) citizens; 20 years or older; have matriculated and be in possession of a Technikon diploma or University degree from a recognized institution (or were in their final year of studying for a diploma or degree); and be currently economically active (employed or looking for employment). The only exceptions were people who had not matriculated from high school and / or graduated from a tertiary institutions, but who nonetheless occupied a senior management position in their occupation: i.e. owner, manager, supervisor, professional worker, commercial farmer, or commissioned officer in the military. Within each metropolitan area a "snowball" sampling method was used. As a first step, interviewers contacted a range of firms thought to employ significant number of skilled foreign workers and develop other contacts and networks to find potential respondents. Once initial contact was made and an interview completed, these respondents were then asked about other skilled foreigners they might know, and many of these people were subsequently interviewed when possible. Only one interview was conducted within each household.

20 The procedure therefore under-sampled the immigrant pool who came to South Africa in the 1980s as part of the homeland strategy since numbers of these immigrants have remained in those areas.

21 See also David McDonald, Lephophotho Masike and Cecilia Golden, "The Lives and Times of Migrants and Immigrants in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in David McDonald, ed., *On Borders: Perspectives On Migration In Southern Africa* (Cape Town and New York: SAMP and St. Martins Press, 2000); for complementary qualitative analyses see Alan Morris, "Our Fellow Africans Make Our Lives Hell: The Lives of Congolese and Nigerians Living in Johannesburg" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998); Marion Sinclair, "I Know A Place that is Softer Than This: Emerging Migrant Communities in South Africa" *International Migration* 37 (1999); and Jonathan Crush and David McDonald, eds., "Transnationalism, African Immigration and New Migrant Spaces in South Africa" Special Issue of *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 34 (2000).

22 See Robert Mattes, Hermann Thiel and Helen Taylor, "Citizens' Commitment to Democracy" In Moira Levy and Wilmot James, eds., *Pulse* (Cape Town: Idasa Publishing, 1998).

23 On South African attitudes toward immigrants more generally, see Robert Mattes, David McDonald, Donald Taylor, Abigail Poore and Wayne Richmond, "South African Attitudes to Immigrants and Immigration" in McDonald, ed., *On Borders*.

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