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No. 30: Zimbabwe's Exodus to Australia

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SOUTHERN AFRICAN MIGRATION PROGRAMME

ZIMBABWE'S EXODUS TO AUSTRALIA

SAMP POLICY BRIEF NO 30

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AUSTRALIAN DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Editorial Note

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1.0 Introduction

1.1. This paper focuses on emigration of Zimbabwe-born migrants to Australia, partly because Australia is largely omitted from the important text, *Zimbabwe's Exodus* even though it has become an important destination, and partly because the data is better for Australia, and for New Zealand, than for other major destination countries.¹ This profile discusses the characteristics of persons born in Zimbabwe and of Zimbabwean ancestry, by undertaking primary analysis of the 2011 Australian Census using the TableBuilder software of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, together with the settlement reporting facility of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP).

2.0 Zimbabwe's White Exodus

2.1. Between 1941 and 1957, the total population of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) rose from approximately 1.5 million to over 2.5 million.² During that period the number of Europeans rose from around 67,000 to 193,000 due to unprecedented immigration after WW2.³ At the time of the 2002 Zimbabwe Census, only 30,000 whites remained.⁴ This suggests that many whites who had arrived prior to independence in 1980, including those who had come as children, had either died or moved out.

2.2. The white population went into steep decline in the late 1960s. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) by the white settler government in 1964 led to the war of liberation, spearheaded by ZANU, the Zimbabwe African National Union.⁵ In the 1970s, as the security situation deteriorated, the number of emigrants began to rise. The year 1980 marked the end of UDI, and the creation of the Republic of Zimbabwe. This led to intensified white emigration.⁶ Between 1980 and 1985, nearly 100,000 residents, mainly whites, left the country rather than live under black majority rule (Table 1). More than half moved to apartheid South Africa, with the UK an important secondary destination. In the mid-1980s, the rate of emigration slowed with nearly 40,000 leaving between 1986 and 1995. By the early-1990s, the UK had overtaken South Africa as the primary destination, partly because there was little interest amongst whites in moving to another black-ruled country and partly because new South African immigration policies stopped favouring white immigration⁷

Destination	Calendar two-year time periods									
	1978/ 1979	1980/ 1981	1982/ 1983	1984/ 1985	1986/ 1987	1988/ 1989	1990/ 1991	1992/ 1993	1994/ 1995	1996/ 1997
South Africa	52.9	62.4	52.6	40.9	16.3	20.4	13.1	7.7	12.5	15.7
Other Africa	5.1	15.8	24.0	29.7	36.5	38.8	25.6	26.1	27.5	16.6
Americas	3.6	3.0	2.6	3.7	9.9	6.7	13.4	17.1	15.5	11.7
Asia	1.6	0.6	1.2	2.7	4.2	3.4	5.7	6.0	3.2	4.2
UK	24.7	11.0	11.4	14.2	20.1	17.8	23.8	26.8	23.5	22.1
Other Europe	7.6	2.7	3.4	4.9	8.5	7.5	11.2	11.4	10.7	9.7
Australia	3.2	3.9	4.2	2.8	3.5	4.4	6.1	3.8	3.8	3.0
Other	1.2	0.6	0.6	1.1	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.5	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	29,418	37,744	37,009	23,879	9,117	8,870	8,255	5,671	6,755	3,450

2.3 At independence, 42 per cent of the land area of Zimbabwe was owned by 6,000 white commercial farmers, who were producing about 90% of Zimbabwe's marketed food requirements.⁹ In the 1980s food production peaked during what Howden refers to as 'Robert Mugabe's honeymoon period with the white farmers'.¹⁰ However, in the late 1990s, Mugabe embarked on a programme to forcibly expropriate white-owned farms without compensation.¹¹ The land reforms initially impacted on white farmers, many of whom left the country, but subsequently contributed to the exodus of black Zimbabweans as the economy went into free fall. The farm expropriation policy intensified and in 2009 President Mugabe stated that a court ruling that 78 white farmers could keep their farms was 'rubbish' and that 'the few remaining white farmers should quickly vacate their farms as they have no place there'.¹²

3.0 Chronology of Zimbabwean Emigration to Australia

3.1 In 1981, 4,110 Zimbabwe-born people were resident in Australia (Table 2). The country was not a major destination for whites leaving Zimbabwe in the 1980s and 1990s although the number of Zimbabwe-born in Australia did increase to 8,352 in 1991 and to 11,734 in 2001. Kennedy considered that South Africans in Australia in the 1980s were politically divided whereas 'the 5,000 settlers from Zimbabwe' were much more united, with a strong esprit de corps after 15 years of 'pariah' status.¹³

Table 2: Number of Zimbabwe-born in Australia and New Zealand, 1981-2011¹⁴

Census Year	Australia	New Zealand
1981	4,110	714
1986	6,479	n/a
1991	8,352	750
1996	8,954	1,443
2001	11,734	2,886
2006	20,157	8,151
2011	30,251	8,259

3.2 Australia was pro-active in facilitating the emigration of whites from Zimbabwe. As Denise Fisher, Australia's High Commissioner in Zimbabwe at the time, noted: 'A second area of consequence for us at the high commission was the dramatic influx of white Zimbabweans seeking visas so that they could leave. We had hundreds of applicants descend upon our small mission, many of them in a state of high emotion, seeking special entry conditions into Australia. I had very early contacted the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in Canberra, which responded promptly, sending extra officers to assist. The mission's staff did their job with great professionalism.'¹⁵

3.3 Australia's intake of the Zimbabwe-born was little more than a trickle until the mid-1990s (Figure 1). From about 1996 onwards, it began to increase rapidly, peaking in 2008 before falling off again. The number of Zimbabwe-born entering Australia quadrupled between 1999 and 2003. This increase is confirmed by census data which shows that between 2001 and 2006 the Zimbabwe-born in Australia nearly doubled, and grew by another 50% between 2006 and 2011 (Table 2). New Zealand experienced a similar proportional increase between 2001 and 2006 but little net growth thereafter.

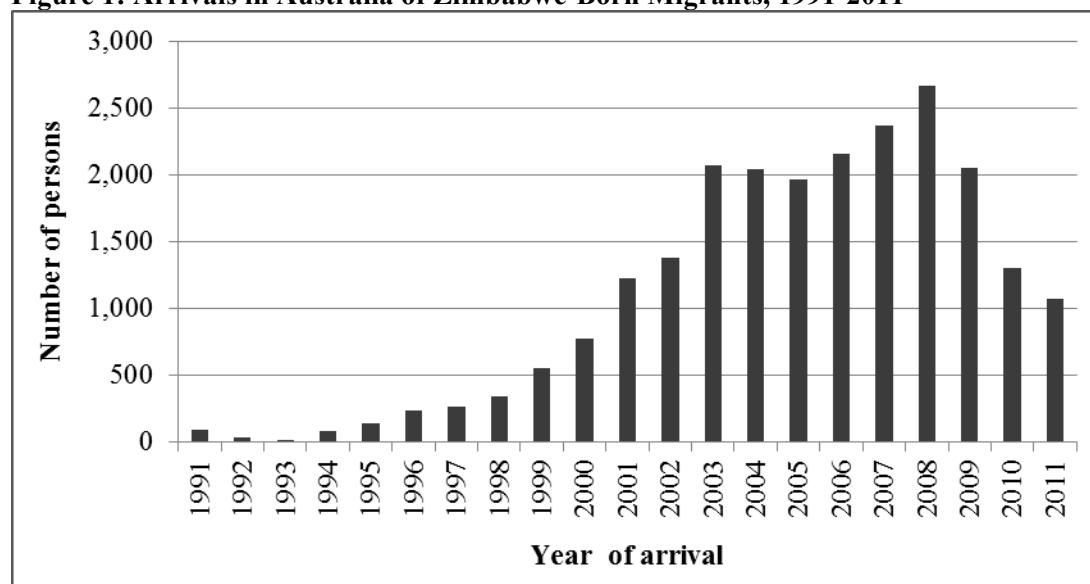
3.4 Table 3 therefore shows Zimbabwe-born in Australia by ancestry and year of arrival. The large proportion of Anglo-Celtic ancestry provides a reminder that immigrants to Rhodesia were largely from the UK; the Anglo-Celtic category includes British, English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish ancestries.

Ancestry	Before 1980 %	1980 to 1989 %	1990 to 1999 %	2000 to 2006 %	2007 to 2011* %	Total %	N
Australian & New Zealander	2.4	1.7	1.4	0.5	0.4	0.9	256
Anglo Celtic	76.6	74.5	63.3	41.7	26.0	46.1	13,498
Zimbabwean	4.9	6.9	11.7	28.8	39.4	25.6	7,481
South African	4.1	4.5	5.7	3.2	2.7	3.6	1,040
African (so described)	1.1	2.0	4.2	12.4	19.4	11.5	3,360
Other African	0.4	0.5	0.6	3.2	6.2	3.3	960
European	9.1	7.0	7.1	4.7	2.6	4.9	1,441
Southern Asian	0.1	1.7	4.7	4.2	1.7	2.8	819
Other Asian/Middle Eastern	0.8	0.8	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.4	128
American	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.6	1.1	0.6	177
Other	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.4	0.4	112
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	29,272
N =	2,111	4,239	2,776	11,047	9,099	29,272	

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

Note: *period to 9 August 2011.

Figure 1: Arrivals in Australia of Zimbabwe-Born Migrants, 1991-2011



Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Note: includes persons who arrived as migrants and persons who arrived as temporary entrants and were later granted permanent resident status onshore.

3.5 While whites continued to emigrate to Australia after 2000, the marked increase shown in Figure 1 is because black Zimbabweans also began to arrive in growing numbers as part of a major wave of emigration from the country to escape growing political repression and the economic crisis. Another indicator of this relative shift towards black Zimbabwean immigration is arrivals and ancestry data (Table 3). The proportion with Anglo-Celtic ancestry, for example, dropped from 63% of arrivals in the 1990s to only 26% of arrivals between 2007 and 2011. Conversely, the proportion describing themselves as ‘Zimbabwean’ or ‘African’ increased from 16% in the 1990s to 59% between 2007 and 2011.

3.6 The fact that more recent arrivals include a larger proportion of black Zimbabweans is also confirmed by language data on arrivals (Table 4). The proportion with English as a first language remained well above 90% until around 2000 when it started to fall. Between 2007 and 2011, only 43% of arrivals gave English as their first language. The proportion who spoke Shona and Ndebele (the two main black Zimbabwean languages) was negligible before 2000, but jumped to over 50% for those arriving between 2007 and 2011. Interestingly, Shona-speakers outnumbered Ndebele speakers by a considerable margin (44% versus 6% between 2007 and 2011).

Language spoken at home	Before 1980 %	1980 to 1989 %	1990 to 1999 %	2000 to 2006 %	2007 to 2011* %	Total %	N
English	96.3	96.0	89.6	64.8	43.0	67.1	19,917
Other European	2.1	2.3	3.5	2.8	2.3	2.6	767
Shona	0.5	0.4	3.9	25.6	44.5	24.0	7,127
Ndebele	0.0	0.0	0.2	3.5	6.0	3.2	955
Other African	0.1	0.1	0.4	1.6	2.8	1.6	463
Other languages	0.6	0.9	2.0	1.3	0.8	1.1	320
Not clear	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.7	0.4	102
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	29,676
N	2,144	4,275	2,802	11,181	9,274	29,676	

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

Note: *period to 9 August 2011.

3.7 Immigration from Zimbabwe to Australia began to fall after 2008 (Figure 1). The numbers have continued to drop after 2011, to 1,014 in 2012 and 561 in 2013. The decline is attributable to the Global Financial Crisis and its impact on the Australian economy, recent improvements in the Zimbabwean economy and the diminishing stock of whites in Zimbabwe itself.

3.8 Table 5 summarizes the type of visa category for permanent arrivals in Australia. In all three periods (1991-2000, 2001-2008 and 2009-2013), the majority of Zimbabweans entered in the skilled migration category. This peaked in the period of greatest immigration at 85% of arrivals. The family category is the second most important (but less than 20%). A small proportion of Zimbabwean emigrants entered Australia under its humanitarian programme, peaking in 2008 at almost 10% of all permanent arrivals from Zimbabwe. Simply for purposes of comparison, another crisis-ridden African country with similar numbers of migrants to Australia is Sudan (Table 5). In sharp contrast to the Zimbabweans, less than 2% of Sudanese came to Australia as skilled migrants. The vast majority were humanitarian arrivals with an increase in family arrivals in the recent past.

Table 5: Migration Category of Immigrants from Zimbabwe and Sudan, 1991-2013

Country	Arrival Period	Migration category				N	Mean annual N
		Family (%)	Humanitarian (%)	Skilled (%)	Not stated/ Other (%)		
Zimbabwe							
	1991 -2000	20%	1%	73%	7%	2,621	262
	2001 -2008	9%	5%	85%	0%	16,218	2,027
	2009 -2013	16%	5%	67%	12%	6,373	1,275
Sudan*							
	1991 -2000	6%	90%	2%	2%	4,180	418
	2001 -2008	4%	96%	0%	0%	22,791	2,849
	2009 -2013	50%	47%	2%	0%	2,968	594

Source: Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

Note: *includes South Sudan.

3.9 Not all Zimbabweans living and working in Australia are permanent residents. At 30 June 2011, there were 1,432 Zimbabwe-born holders of temporary 457 visas.¹⁶ In 2012, Public Services International released a study of 478 female migrants from 57 countries who

had come to work in Australian healthcare, primarily as nurses.¹⁷ About half of the sample had travelled on temporary 457 visas. Zimbabwe was one of the top five countries of origin of survey respondents. Several Zimbabwean nurses on temporary visas felt that they were disadvantaged compared to permanent residents.

4.0 Profile of Zimbabwean Immigrants

Using data from the 1996 Census, Graeme Hugo commented on the concentration of Zimbabwean immigrants as follows: ‘Most striking is the fact that the largest community of Zimbabwe-born is in Western Australia, especially Perth (30.2 percent).’¹⁸ Hugo also noted the concentration of the Zimbabwe-born in Queensland.¹⁹ The 2011 Census confirms that Western Australia and Queensland remain the preferred destinations for Zimbabwean immigrants to Australia (Table 6). In addition, 75% resided in major urban centres (especially Perth, Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne). The 20 Local Government Areas (LGA) with the most Zimbabwe-born are shown in Table 7. Brisbane is at the top but this is because it is an unusually large LGA, covering a large part of the metropolitan area. Apart from Western Australia and Queensland, only the Australian Capital Territory is in the top ten.

State/Territory	Location (%)		
	Major Urban	Other	Total
Western Australia	25.1	7.4	32.5
Queensland	19.5	8.1	27.6
New South Wales	14.3	4.4	18.6
Victoria	10.3	2.2	12.5
South Australia	2.9	1.2	4.1
Australia Capital Territory	1.8	0.0	1.8
Northern Territory	0.9	0.9	1.9
Tasmania	0.4	0.6	1.0
Total	75.3	24.7	100.0
N	22,770	7,481	30,251

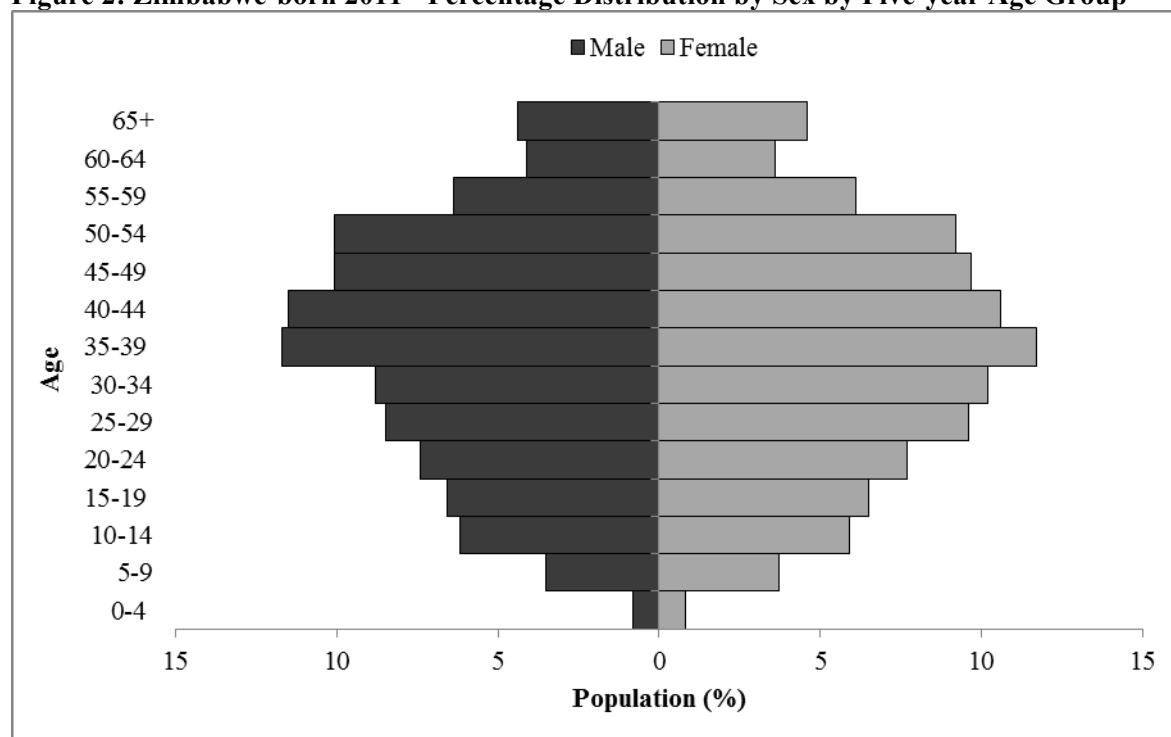
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing.

Table 7: Distribution of Zimbabwe-Born by Local Government Areas, 2011		
State/Territory	LGA	No
Queensland	Brisbane	2,654
Western Australia	Joondalup	1,338
Western Australia	Wanneroo	1,077
Queensland	Gold Coast	753
Western Australia	Stirling	738
Queensland	Sunshine Coast	727
Queensland	Moreton Bay	672
Australia Capital Territory	ACT	538
Queensland	Toowoomba	529
Western Australia	Swan	504
Western Australia	Canning	497
Queensland	Logan	496
Western Australia	Melville	484
Queensland	Mackay	382
Western Australia	Cockburn	352
Western Australia	Rockingham	318
Queensland	Townsville	309
Western Australia	Kalamunda	307
Western Australia	Gosnells	306
New South Wales	Liverpool	297

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing

There are slightly more females than males in the Zimbabwe-born population in Australia (51% versus 49%) (Figure 2). The youngest age-groups contain relatively few persons because children born to Zimbabwean parents after emigration are classified as Australia-born. The ageing of the general Australian population is not reflected in the small proportion (less than 5%) of Zimbabwe-born persons aged 65 and over, which in part reflects Australia's immigration selection criteria which give points to younger adult applicants.

Figure 2: Zimbabwe-born 2011 - Percentage Distribution by Sex by Five-year Age Group



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing

The 1996 Census showed that ‘one of the distinctive features of the Zimbabwe-born is their high average socioeconomic status.’ They had ‘one of the highest educational profiles of all overseas groups’, were ‘significantly overrepresented in the professional/ managerial categories’ and had ‘a lower level of unemployment (6.5 percent) than the total population.’²⁰ These features of the ‘middle-class’ Zimbabwean diaspora persisted, even as its racial composition began to change. Zimbabwean immigrants are readily assimilated into the Australian community and labour and housing markets.²¹ Similarly, Pasura argues that ‘the majority of Zimbabwean in Britain are highly educated professionals and belong to middle- and upper-class families in Zimbabwe.’²² The 2011 Australian Census found that the Zimbabwe-born adult population included a substantial proportion of university graduates: 33% of males and 32% of females (Table 8).

Age	Post-graduate	Bachelor degree	Advanced diploma & diploma	Certificate	None	Not stated	Total
Male	9.8	23.4	15.5	24.4	22.9	4.0	100.0
Female	7.5	24.3	24.0	10.8	28.0	5.4	100.0

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing

In terms of the occupational breakdown, managers and professionals are disproportionately represented although this has changed over time, with a significant fall in the proportion of male and female managers and a slight decrease in the proportion of male professionals (Table 9). There has also been (a) a gradual increase in the proportion of male immigrants in technical and trades occupations from 22% of the total in the 1990s to 27% after 2006; (b) there has been a significant increase amongst both male (from 4% to 12%) and especially female immigrants (from 11% to 30%) in community and personal service work; and (c) the proportion of female immigrants in clerical and administrative has declined over time (from 29% to 15%).

What is not clear from the data is whether there has been a process of deskilling in which people are over-qualified for the jobs they perform. This question requires further analysis. According to Christopher Merrett, many Zimbabweans in South Africa are ‘accountants, doctors, health workers, and public servants reduced to hawking goods by the roadside or working as security guards.’²³ In the UK, the personal care sector (particularly old-age and frail care facilities) is a major employer of over-qualified Zimbabweans.²⁴ The rapid growth of ‘community and personal service’ workers as an occupational category amongst Zimbabweans in Australia suggests that something similar may be happening there. Of Zimbabweans working as aged, disabled, nursing support or personal care workers in Australia, 21% of males and 15% of females hold a degree or higher qualification while 26% of both sexes have no post-secondary qualification (2011 census).

The transfer of skills from Zimbabwe to Australia which began with white immigration in the 1980s therefore continued after 2000. This reflects a more general ongoing outflow of professionals from Zimbabwe. In a survey of working professionals in Zimbabwe in 2001, conducted ‘just as the outflow of skilled migrants began to intensify’, 27% of respondents said that they were likely to or very likely to emigrate within six months, and 9% gave Australia/New Zealand as their preferred destination.²⁵

Table 9: Zimbabwe-Born by Occupation and Year of Arrival, 2011					
Occupation	Before 1980	1980 to 1989	1990 to 1999	2000 to 2006	2007 to 2011
Males					
Managers	22.7	25.4	22.0	17.7	10.8
Professionals	33.4	28.4	31.6	29.6	27.4
Technicians/Trades	15.9	19.1	21.7	23.2	27.2
Community/Personal Service	4.6	3.7	3.9	6.5	12.4
Clerical/Administrative	5.6	7.6	6.0	5.7	4.0
Sales	5.7	4.8	5.3	5.5	4.2
Machinery Operators and Drivers	5.4	5.3	4.3	4.6	5.2
Labourers	5.0	4.5	4.1	6.3	8.0
Inadequately described	1.6	1.2	1.2	0.9	1.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	754	1,692	1,217	4,167	3,086
Females					
Managers	13.6	10.8	10.7	6.7	4.0
Professionals	37.5	37.2	36.4	41.8	34.0
Technicians/Trades	2.7	3.3	3.4	2.7	2.4
Community/Personal Service	9.6	8.1	10.9	13.9	30.3
Clerical/Administrative	26.2	30.3	28.8	22.6	15.3
Sales	5.5	6.5	6.6	8.2	6.7
Machinery Operators and Drivers	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.3
Labourers	3.4	2.7	1.8	2.8	6.3
Inadequately described	0.4	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	675	1,530	1,030	3,857	2,708

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census of Population and Housing

Unemployment rates are low with labour force participation rates above 94% for males aged 25-54. The unemployment rate for males is below 3% for males aged 30-54 years, and 4% overall, compared with an unemployment rate of 5% for Australia-born men of the same age distribution. Unemployment is higher for women, 5% overall for both Zimbabwe- and Australia-born females.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The exodus of Zimbabweans to Australia can be divided into two over-lapping phases. The first, from Zimbabwean independence in 1980 to the end of the 1990s consisted mainly of white residents of Zimbabwe leaving the country. Although this movement continued after 2000, an increasing proportion of migrants in the second phase (from 2000 to the present) were black Zimbabweans. The two groups had a number of things in common: first, they were well-educated and skilled and the majority entered Australia as skilled immigrants. Second, they tended to settle in the same parts of Australia (especially Western Australia and Queensland). There are also some differences between the two groups. The first group tends to maintain a nostalgic connection with Zimbabwe as it was in the past during UDI and the early years of independence. Very few have family still in the country. The second group maintains much stronger material linkages with Zimbabwe and family there including remitting and other forms of diaspora linkage. Most white Zimbabweans in Australia are unlikely to ever return but it remains to be seen whether black Zimbabweans will stay on in Australia or decide to return.

Endnotes

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- ² Alois Mlambo, “A History of Zimbabwean Migration to 1990” In Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe’s Exodus*, pp. 52-76. The terms ‘European’ (preferred in official statistics) and ‘white’ (preferred by the media) are used interchangeably. European does not necessarily mean Europe-born since movements of whites to and from South Africa were common.
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²⁰ Hugo, *Atlas of the Australian People*.

²¹ James Forrest, Ron Johnston and Michael Poulsen, “Middle-Class Diaspora: Recent Immigration to Australia from South Africa and Zimbabwe” *South African Geographical Journal* 95(2013): 50-69.

²² Dominic Pasura, “Regendering the Zimbabwean Diaspora in Britain” In Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe’s Exodus*, p. 208.

²³ Christopher Merrett, “Zimbabwe’s Tragedy is South Africa’s Disgrace” *Canberra Times* 12 January 2009.

²⁴ JoAnn McGregor, “Between Obligation, Profit and Shame: Zimbabwean Migrants and the UK Care Industry” In Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe’s Exodus*, pp. 179-206.

²⁵ Daniel Tevera and Jonathan Crush, “Discontent and Departure: Attitudes of Skilled Zimbabweans Towards Emigration” In Crush and Tevera, *Zimbabwe’s Exodus*, pp. 112-32.