

Hiring Practices in Zimbabwe

A Job Seeker's Perspective

The 2026 National Survey on Fairness, Transparency and Trust in Recruitment

A study of 380 Zimbabwean job seekers

Prepared by

Industrial Psychology Consultants (Private) Limited

Maximising Returns on Human Capital

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This report has been published as a contribution to public debate on recruitment integrity. Data remain the property of Industrial Psychology Consultants (Private) Limited.

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Executive Summary

The headline finding

380 Zimbabwean job seekers and working professionals responded to the 2026 IPC national survey on hiring integrity. 75% of them report having personally lost a job opportunity, in which merit was not the main deciding factor. Nearly 75% say personal connections are the primary determinant of who gets hired. 7 in 10 say the situation has deteriorated over the past 5 years. The composite Hiring Integrity Index stands at 32.5 on a 100-point scale, placing national recruitment practices in the critical band.

The scale of the problem

Among the 380 respondents who completed the survey, 286 (75.5%) say they have personally lost an opportunity to someone they believed was less deserving. Of that group, 269 said they were very confident in that judgement. This is not the language of sour grapes. It is the language of a workforce that has watched the same pattern repeat often enough to recognise it.

How hiring decisions are actually made

When asked which factors most often influence hiring decisions in practice, 273 respondents (71.8%) identified personal connections or referrals. Only 90 respondents (23.7%) cited qualifications and skills. The gap between what employers claim to reward and what candidates observe being rewarded is the study's largest single finding. 185 respondents (48.7%) identified shortlisting, not interviewing, as the stage at which hiring decisions are most influenced. In effect, the competition is over before the formal process begins.

Feedback, transparency, and pre-selection

249 respondents (65.5%) say they either never or rarely receive feedback after interviews. 263 respondents (69.2%) describe hiring processes as not transparent or not transparent at all. 225 respondents (59.2%) say recruitment processes often or almost always appear to have a pre-selected candidate. Together, these three findings describe a national recruitment environment in which applicants invest time and dignity in a process they have learned is largely decorative.

The human cost

240 respondents (63.2%) have considered leaving the country due to their experiences with hiring. 239 respondents (62.9%) have stopped applying to certain organisations entirely. 109 respondents (28.7%) have accepted jobs below their skill level rather than continue competing in a market they perceive as rigged. When hiring practices damage both retention and the national talent supply at this scale, the business case for reform is no longer a matter of preference.

The trajectory

266 respondents (70%) believe hiring practices have worsened compared with 5 years ago. Only 23 respondents (6.1%) believe they have improved. This directional finding is arguably more consequential than the level of any single metric. A country whose educated workforce believes the hiring system is actively deteriorating faces a compounding credibility problem that no single employer can solve in isolation.

The 5 headline metrics

Indicator	Share of respondents	Narrative
Lost an opportunity where merit was not decisive	75.5%	Direct personal experience of unfair loss
Advised to use personal connections	66.7%	Informal channels are normalised
Personal connections are the number one hiring factor	71.8%	What counts is who you know
Hiring less transparent than 5 years ago	70.0%	The trend is actively worsening
Considered leaving the country as a result	63.2%	Emigration is now a hiring signal

What employers should do next?

This report does not recommend another round of values workshops or another policy document. It recommends that every Zimbabwean employer of scale publish the stage at which hiring decisions are actually made in its organization, the proportion of external roles filled through internal pre-identification, the feedback rate given to unsuccessful candidates, and the composition of its interview panels. Where those numbers cannot be produced, the organisation does not have a recruitment system.

The detailed recommendations in Section 14 are grouped into three categories: human resources leadership, chief executives and boards, and the broader profession. None of them require legislation. All of them require the professional courage to subject recruitment to the same scrutiny that finance, safety, and quality are routinely expected to withstand.

Background and Context

Zimbabwe has spent the past 15 years adjusting to a labour market shaped by 3 overlapping forces: the steady outward migration of its most qualified workers, a private sector that has contracted faster than it has expanded, and a public sector whose hiring decisions are watched closely for signals about who benefits from political and social networks. Against that backdrop, recruitment is a national conversation about fairness, opportunity, and the distribution of scarce formal employment.

Despite the weight of the conversation, the Zimbabwean evidence base on hiring fairness has remained thin. Employer sentiment surveys have captured the views of firms. Remuneration surveys have captured the price of labour. Migration studies have captured the exit. None has systematically captured the experience of the person on the other side of the shortlist. This report exists to close that gap.

The survey behind this report was designed to answer 4 questions that, in our professional experience, have been asked at almost every IPC engagement but rarely quantified. First, how fair do Zimbabwean job seekers actually think the recruitment system is? Second, at which stage of the hiring funnel do they believe the decisive filter is applied? Third, what personal behaviors have resulted from whatever answer they gave to the first 2 questions? Fourth, what do they believe will happen over the next 5 years.

The findings presented in this report are not intended to indict any particular employer, sector or professional body. They are intended to establish a baseline. If the national Hiring Integrity Composite Index stands at 32.5 out of 100 in April 2026, we intend to re-run this instrument annually and track whether the profession closes the gap or lets it widen. What is measured improves. What remains uncounted persists.

Why this study, why now

3 contemporary pressures make the timing material. The first is demographic: Zimbabwe's post secondary graduation rate has continued to outpace formal job creation, producing an unusually educated applicant pool. 209 of the 380 respondents to this survey (55%) hold postgraduate qualifications, and a further 133 (35%) hold Bachelor's degrees. When 90% of the applicant pool has a university qualification, the question of how shortlists are constructed becomes one of allocating national human capital.

The second is sectoral: the private sector accounts for 69.2% of respondents in this study, the state owned enterprise segment for 12.9%, and the development or non governmental sector for 11.3%. Each of these segments has its own hiring culture and its own vulnerabilities. The breakdown matters for policymakers attempting to diagnose where reform will yield the largest return.

The third is technological: the rise of artificial intelligence in recruitment, including the shortlisting tools that IPC itself builds, raises the question of whether automation will rescue Zimbabwean recruitment from its current state or merely automate the bias. That question cannot be answered

without first establishing a credible baseline for the human system. This report provides that baseline.

Methodology and Respondent Profile

Design

The instrument was a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through professional networks, social media channels, and the IPC mailing list between 6 February and 18 April 2026. It comprised 18 substantive questions combining closed 5-point rating scales, categorical choices, multiple response items, and two open-ended questions. The full instrument is reproduced in Appendix A.

380 responses were captured. Because the instrument was distributed through non probability channels, the sample is a convenience sample of Zimbabwean job seekers and working professionals with access to digital distribution channels. All findings in this report are reported as findings among survey respondents. No finding is projected to the full Zimbabwean labour force.

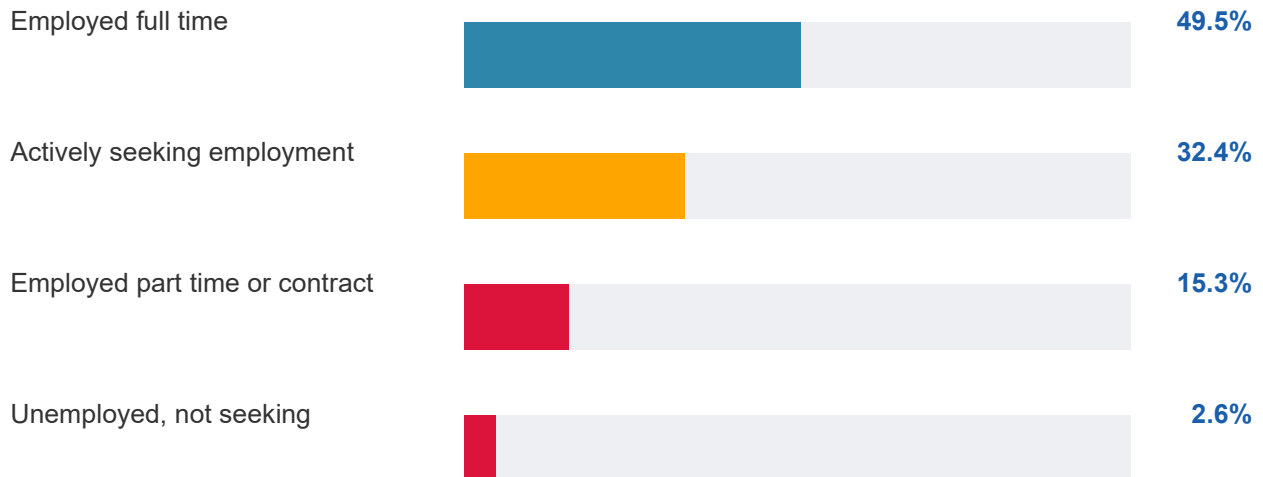
Analytical approach

Closed ended items are reported as frequency counts and percentages. Where sub groups contain fewer than 10 respondents, findings for that sub group are suppressed to protect analytical validity. Open ended responses were coded thematically by 2 independent coders working from 269 usable narratives. Disagreements were resolved by consensus. A composite Hiring Integrity Index was constructed from 6 closed ended indicators using the method described in Appendix B. All percentages in this report are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percentage point.

Who responded

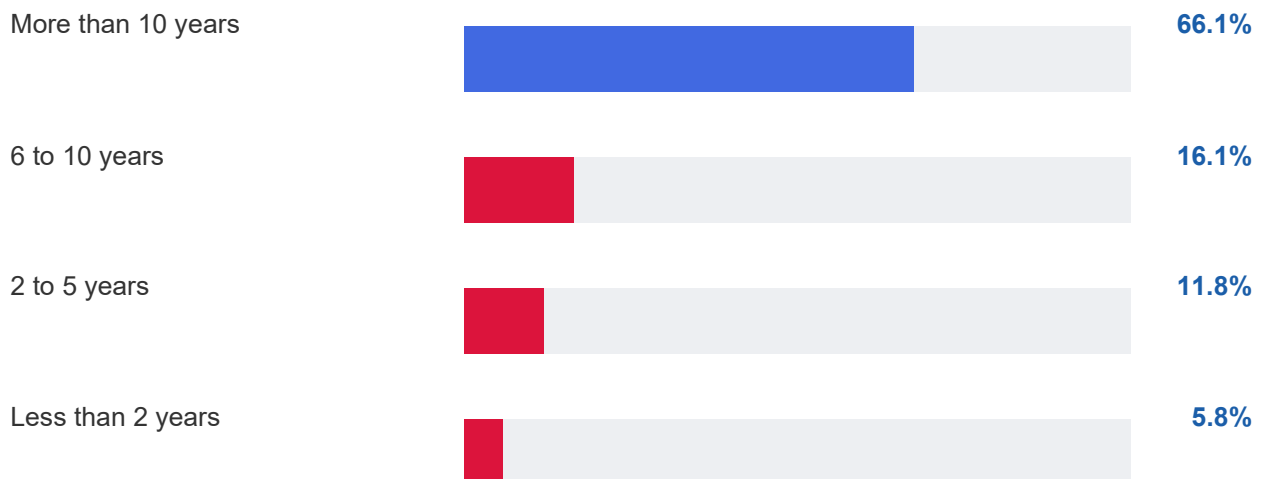
The 380 respondents are disproportionately experienced, disproportionately educated and disproportionately drawn from the private sector. Each of these characteristics has implications for interpretation that are noted in Section 15.

Employment status



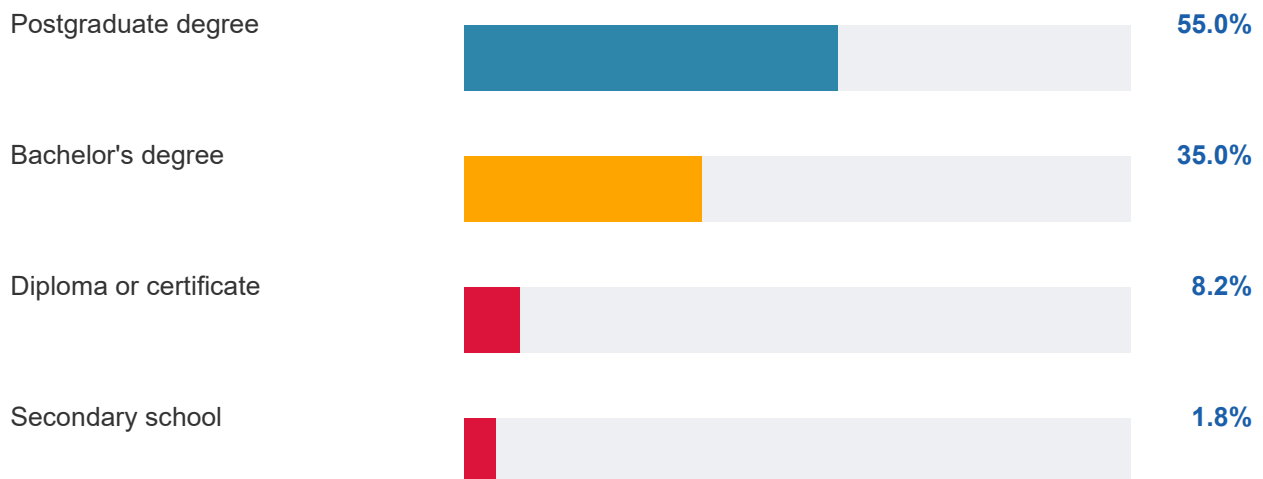
n = 379.

Years of work experience



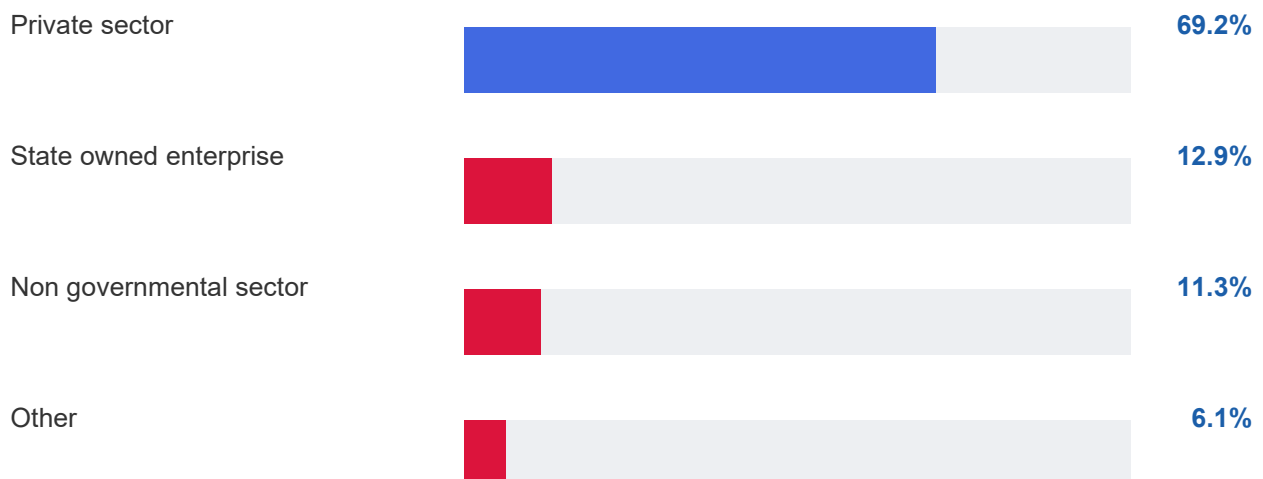
n = 379.

Highest level of education



n = 380.

Sector of current or target employment

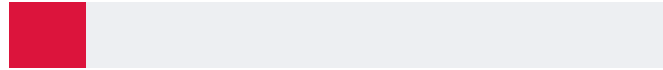


n = 378.

Applications submitted in the last 12 months



11 to 20



11.3%

n = 377. The median respondent applied to between 6 and 20 jobs in the 12 months preceding the survey, which is consistent with a labour market in which search effort is sustained and often unrewarded.

Results

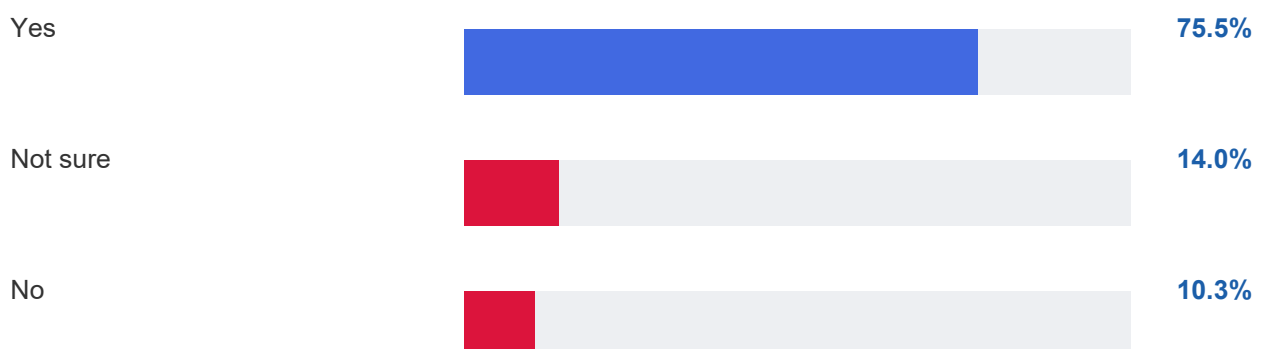
The Trust Deficit: What 380 Voices Reveal

Three questions in this survey directly address trust. The first question asked whether respondents had personally lost a job opportunity where they believed merit was not the main deciding factor. The second question asked how fair they believe Zimbabwean hiring practices are overall. The third asked how those practices compare with the situation 5 years ago.

Personal experience of unfair loss

286 respondents (75.5%) say they have personally lost an opportunity where merit was not the main deciding factor. A further 53 (14%) are not sure. Only 39 respondents (10.3%) say they have not experienced such a loss. Among the 286 who said yes, 269 (94% of the yes group) described themselves as very confident in that judgement. This is not a recall based on rumor. It is a recall based on experiences that are sufficiently specific and sufficiently painful to be remembered with precision.

Have you personally lost a job opportunity where merit was not the main deciding factor



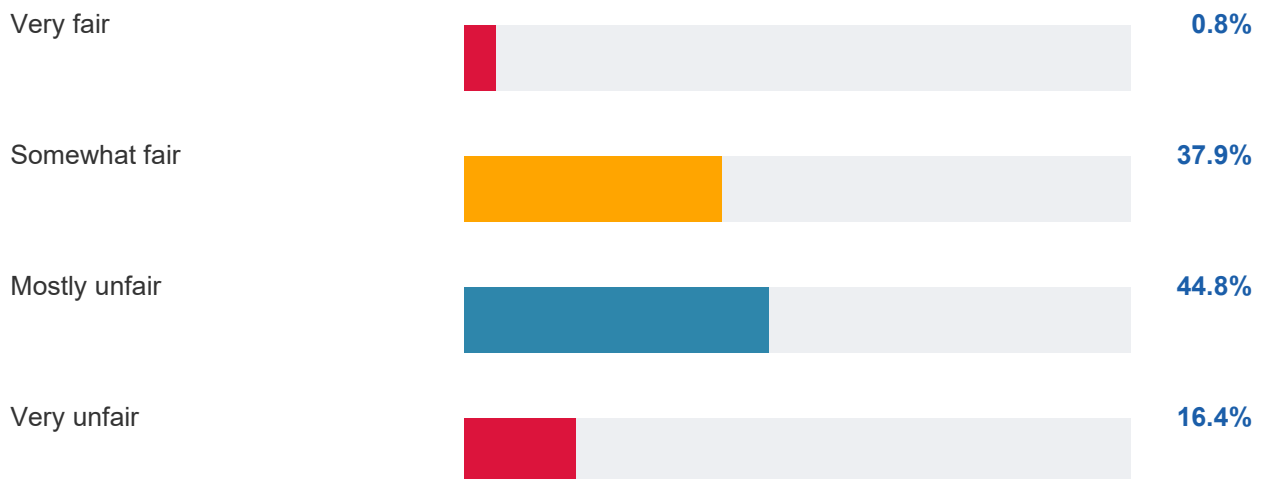
n = 378.

Perceived fairness of the system

Only 3 respondents in 377 describe Zimbabwean hiring practices as very fair. This is an outright rejection of the claim that the recruitment system is working. 143 respondents (37.9%) describe the

system as somewhat fair, meaning the ambivalence of those who have retained some hope. But 61.3% describe it as mostly unfair or very unfair. When less than 1% of a highly educated sample is willing to vouch for the fairness of a national process, that process has a legitimacy problem.

Overall, how fair do you believe hiring practices are in Zimbabwe

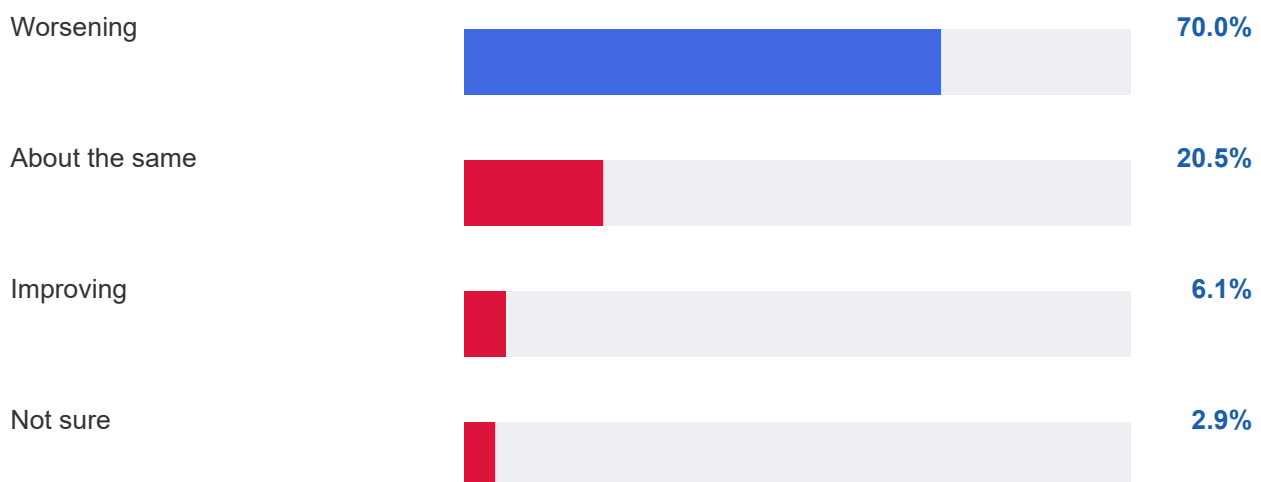


$n = 377$.

The direction

266 respondents (70%) believe hiring practices are worse than 5 years ago. 78 (20.5%) believe they are about the same. Only 23 (6.1%) believe they are improving. This is the quietest finding in the dataset and the loudest implication. A system that is getting worse, in the eyes of the people it is supposed to serve, will not self correct without deliberate intervention.

Compared with 5 years ago, hiring practices are



$n = 378$.

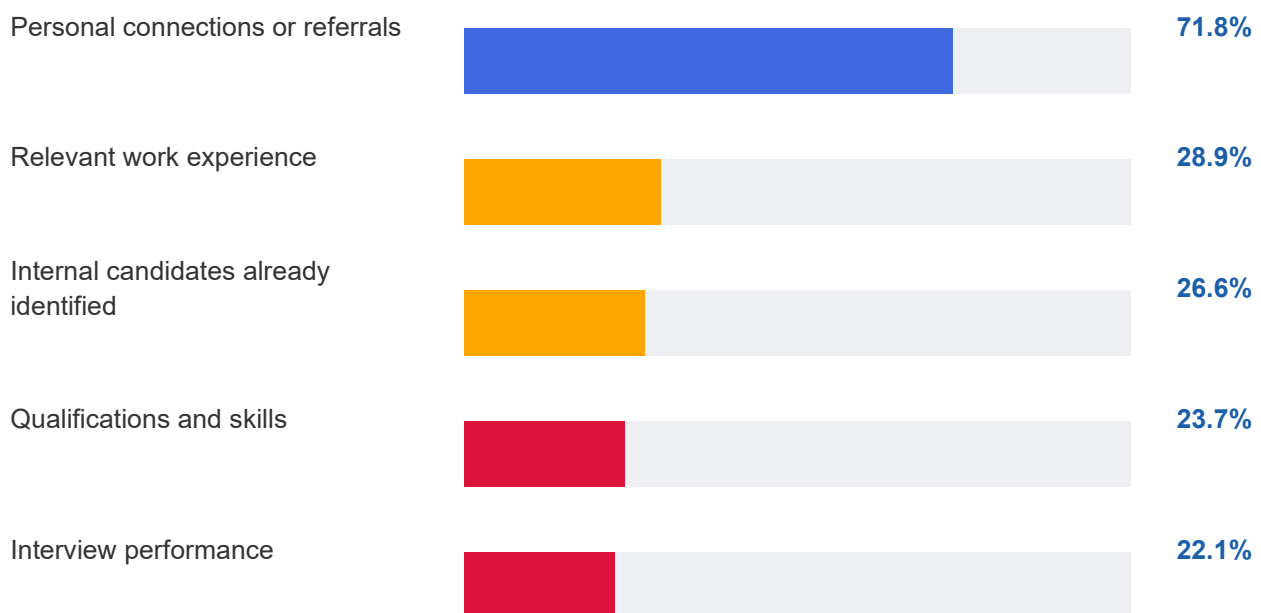
The trust deficit in one sentence

3 in 4 Zimbabwean job seekers have lost an opportunity they believed was theirs on merit, only 1 in 200 thinks the system is very fair, and 7 in 10 think it is getting worse.

The Invisible Ceiling: How Hiring Decisions Are Actually Made

Respondents were asked which 2 factors they believe most often influence hiring decisions in practice. Their answers expose the deepest fault line in Zimbabwean recruitment: a wide gap between the official criteria that employers claim to apply and the informal criteria that candidates observe being rewarded.

Factors most often influencing hiring decisions in practice (select up to two)



n = 377 selected at least one factor. Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select up to two.

Two findings compound each other. First, 273 respondents (71.8%) identified personal connections or referrals as one of the 2 factors that most often decide hiring outcomes. Second, only 23.7% identified qualifications and skills. The gap between what the recruitment profession routinely advertises as its operating principle and what candidates observe in practice is, by the numbers in this survey, a gap of 48 percentage points.

The implication is deeply unflattering for the human resources function. It suggests that, from the perspective of the people being recruited, the entire machinery of job descriptions, competency

frameworks, selection panels, and scoring rubrics operates as a post hoc rationalization of a decision already taken on other grounds.

Being advised to use connections

When respondents were asked whether they had ever been advised to use personal connections to improve their chances of being hired, 252 of them (66.7%) said yes. This is the single most revealing data point in the study. A candidate with a curriculum vitae, a certificate, and an interview suit is quietly told by a family member, a former colleague, or a recruiter that none of those artifacts will decide the outcome. The advice is given often enough that 2 out of every 3 respondents have received it.

Have you ever been advised to use personal connections to improve your chances of being hired



n = 378.

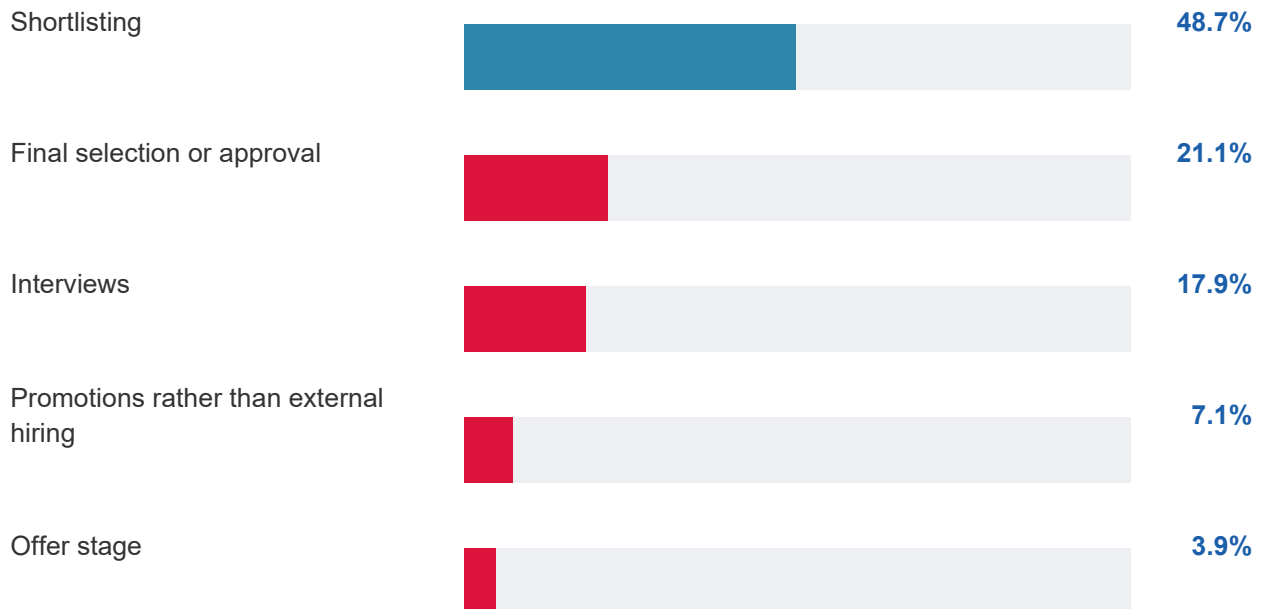
Why this matters for the profession

If two thirds of educated Zimbabwean job seekers have been advised that informal channels will decide the outcome, then every formal recruitment process in the country is operating on contested ground. The question for the human resources community is not whether candidates believe connections matter. They do, decisively. The question is whether the profession can produce evidence to rebut that belief. At present, it cannot.

The Shortlisting Bottleneck

Respondents were asked at which stage of the hiring process they believe decisions are most influenced. Their answer is unambiguous.

At which stage do you think hiring decisions are most influenced



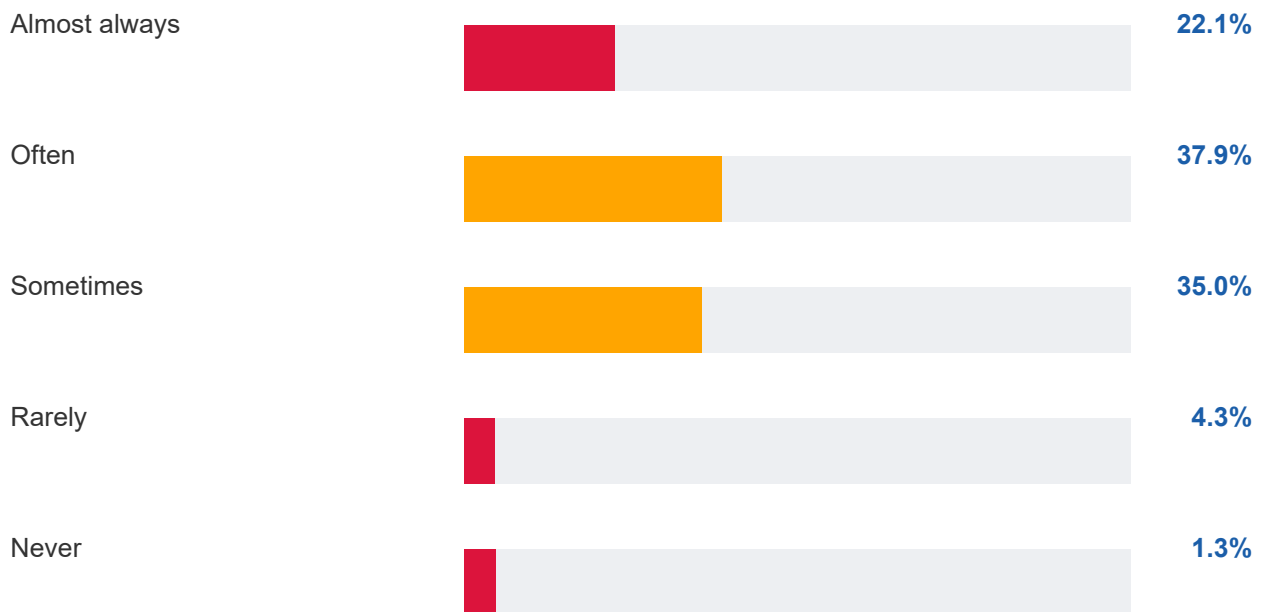
$n = 375$.

185 respondents (48.7%) identified shortlisting as the stage at which hiring decisions are most influenced. A further 80 respondents (21.1%) identified final selection or approval. Only 68 respondents (17.9%) believed the interview itself was decisive. In the candidate experience, therefore, the interview is not the competition. The interview is the confirmation. The competition ended when the shortlist was drawn, and the candidate was either on it or not.

This finding has uncomfortable implications for how employers audit their own processes. Almost every internal quality control mechanism in Zimbabwean recruitment is concentrated at the interview and selection stage: structured interviews, scoring matrices, competency based questioning, reference checks. Almost none of it examines the shortlisting stage, which respondents identify as the decisive one. The profession is inspecting the engine after the car has already crossed the finish line.

The combination of this finding with the earlier finding on pre selection is particularly pointed. 225 respondents (59.2%) say processes often or almost always appear to have a pre selected candidate. 60% of respondents cannot be simultaneously wrong about something they have encountered repeatedly. The rational conclusion is that pre selection is the dominant informal mechanism through which shortlisting is used as a disguise rather than a filter.

How often do recruitment processes appear to have a pre selected candidate

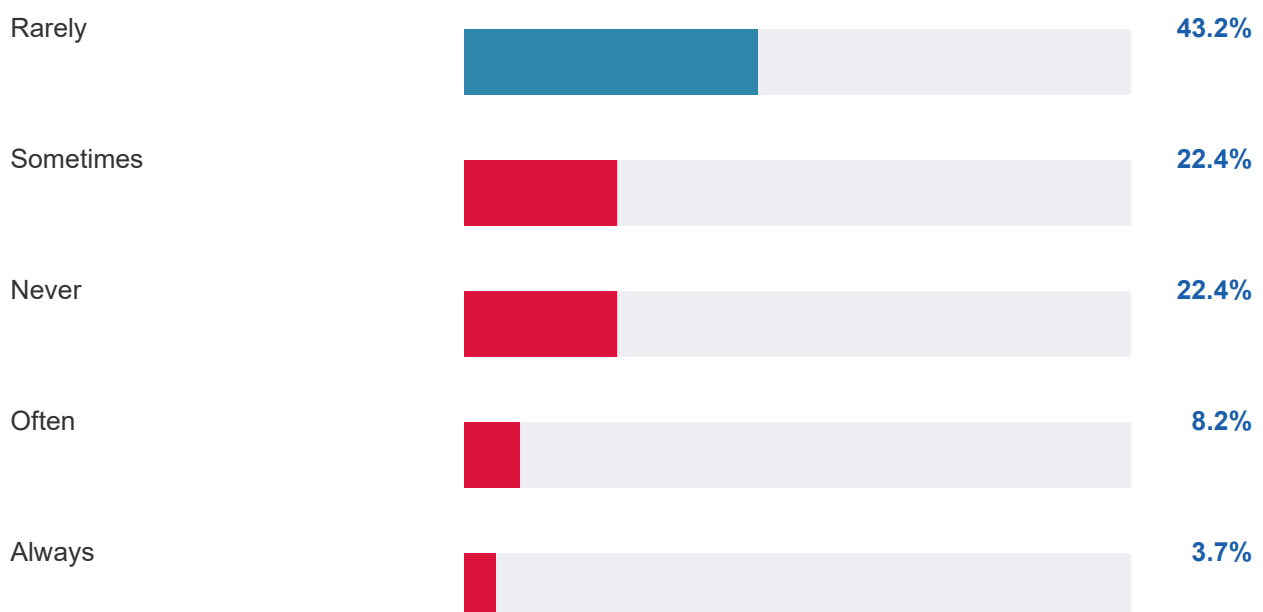


n = 377.

The Feedback Vacuum

Respondents were asked how often they receive feedback after interviews. The answer describes a system that not only produces questionable decisions but also declines to explain them.

How often do you receive feedback after interviews



n = 379.

249 respondents (65.5%) say they never or rarely receive feedback after interviews. Only 45 respondents (11.9%) say they receive feedback often or always. In any other customer facing function, a response rate of 11.9% would be classed as a service failure. In Zimbabwean recruitment, it is the norm.

The absence of feedback is the mechanism through which distrust is reproduced. When a candidate is rejected without explanation, they are left to construct their own reason. Given the data already presented in Sections 3, 4, and 5, the reason they construct is almost always connected to bias, nepotism, or pre-selection. Feedback is the single cheapest intervention an employer could make. Most choose not to make it.

Even more pointedly, the feedback vacuum interacts with the shortlisting bottleneck in a way that is mathematically self sealing. If the decisive filter is applied at shortlisting, but feedback is only ever given at the post interview stage, then the stage at which candidates most need to understand the decision is precisely the stage at which no feedback is ever issued. Candidates are told they did not perform well at the interview. They are never told why they were not invited to one.

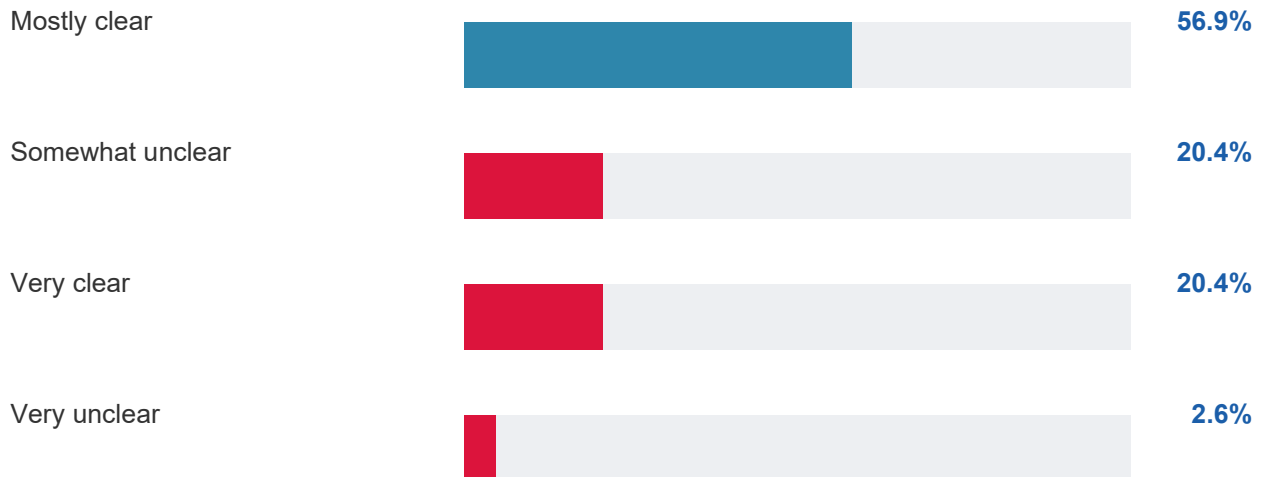
A zero cost intervention the profession refuses to make

A single paragraph feedback response to unsuccessful candidates, at both the shortlisting and post interview stages, would move the feedback metric from 11.9% to 100% within a single hiring cycle. It would not by itself fix the decision. It would signal that the decision is defensible. The fact that so few Zimbabwean employers do this is itself a comment on how defensible they expect their decisions to be.

The Transparency Crisis

Respondents were asked 2 questions bearing on transparency. The first asked how clear job requirements are in most advertisements they see. The second question asked how transparent they perceive hiring processes to be overall.

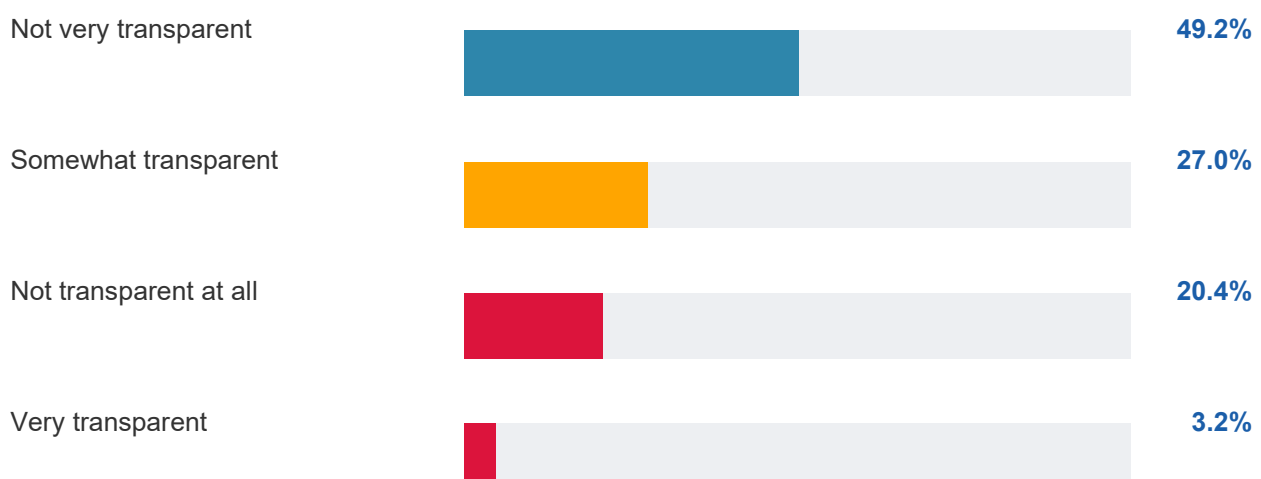
How clear are job requirements in most job advertisements you see



$n = 379$.

Job advertisements themselves fare relatively well. 77.3% of respondents say requirements are mostly clear or very clear. This is the one unambiguously positive finding in the study. It establishes that Zimbabwean recruiters can, when they choose to, communicate with candidates with reasonable precision. The finding makes the subsequent findings more difficult to explain.

In your experience, how transparent are hiring processes overall



$n = 377$.

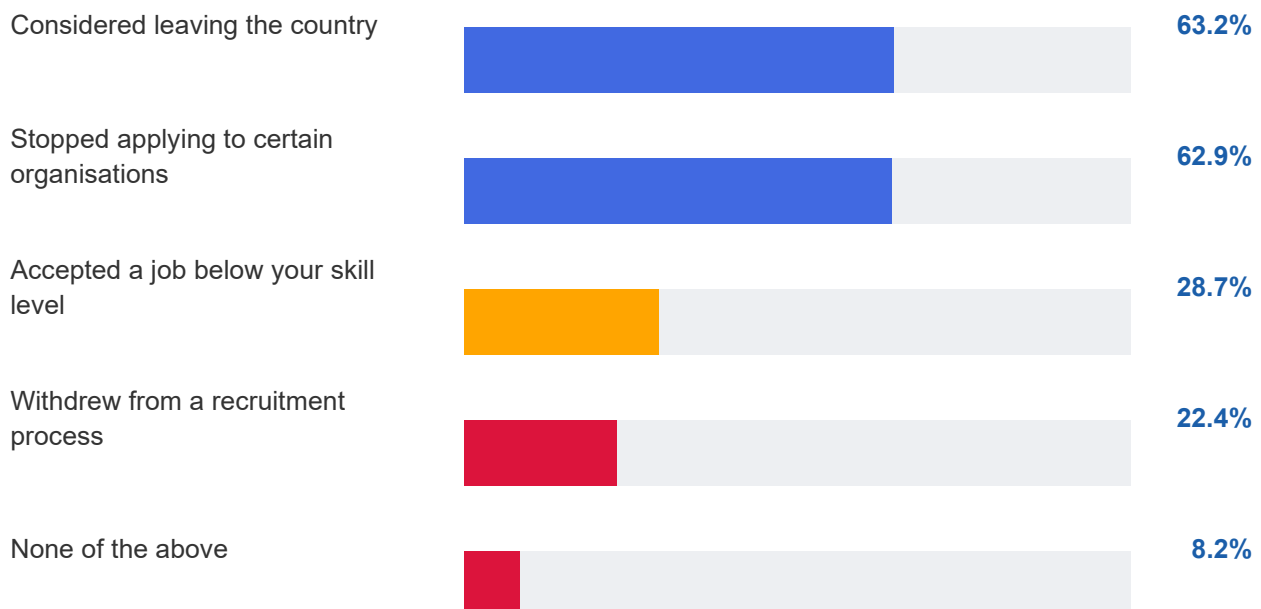
263 respondents (69.6%) describe hiring processes as not very transparent or not transparent at all. Only 12 respondents in 377 describe them as very transparent. The gap between advertisement clarity (mostly clear) and process transparency (largely opaque) is the signature diagnostic of a recruitment culture in which the front door is tidy, but the corridor behind it is not.

This pattern is consistent with a process in which documentation has been optimised for audit purposes while the actual decision mechanics remain informal. In IPC's consulting experience, this is the default state of recruitment in medium sized Zimbabwean employers. Policies exist. Job descriptions are on file. Scoring sheets can be produced on demand. But the answer to the question of who actually decided, and when, is almost always a conversation that never appears in the file.

The Human Cost: Behavioural Consequences

Perception data, on its own, can be dismissed as attitudinal. Behavioural data cannot. Respondents were asked what they had actually done, rather than what they felt, as a result of their experience of hiring practices. Five response options were available, and respondents could select all that applied. The results describe a workforce that has changed its behavior in ways that will show up in retention statistics, in emigration data, and in organizational performance for years to come.

Have hiring practices ever caused you to do any of the following (select all that apply)



n = 380. Percentages sum to more than 100 because respondents could select multiple options.

240 respondents (63.2%) have considered leaving the country due to their experiences with Zimbabwean hiring. This is the number that should be the focus of every board in the country. Emigration decisions by highly educated professionals are not driven by a single factor; rather,

they are triggered by a loss of faith in domestic systems. Hiring is one of the most visible such systems, and the numbers suggest that, for the majority of the educated workforce, the trigger has already been pulled or is about to be.

239 respondents (62.9%) have stopped applying to certain organisations entirely. This is reputational damage that no employer brand campaign can reverse in the short term. The organisations that lose candidate interest rarely discover it, because candidates who stop applying do not write letters of explanation. They simply disappear from the applicant pool and from the employer's awareness.

109 respondents (28.7%) have accepted jobs below their skill level. This is the quiet form of the emigration problem. Instead of leaving the country, the respondent remains and underperforms against their potential. From a national productivity perspective, it is arguably the more expensive outcome, because the organisation in question is still paying for human capital it has decided not to use.

The retention and productivity bill

Taken together, the behavioural findings imply that a significant majority of the educated Zimbabwean workforce has either reduced their engagement with the formal recruitment market, considered leaving the country, or accepted employment beneath their capability. The cost of this workforce response does not appear in any individual employer's books. It appears in the national productivity statistics, in the reduced pool of applicants for difficult-to-fill roles, and in the growing price of senior talent in sectors where the international option has become viable. The human cost of the current system is now also the business cost.

The Brain Drain Signal

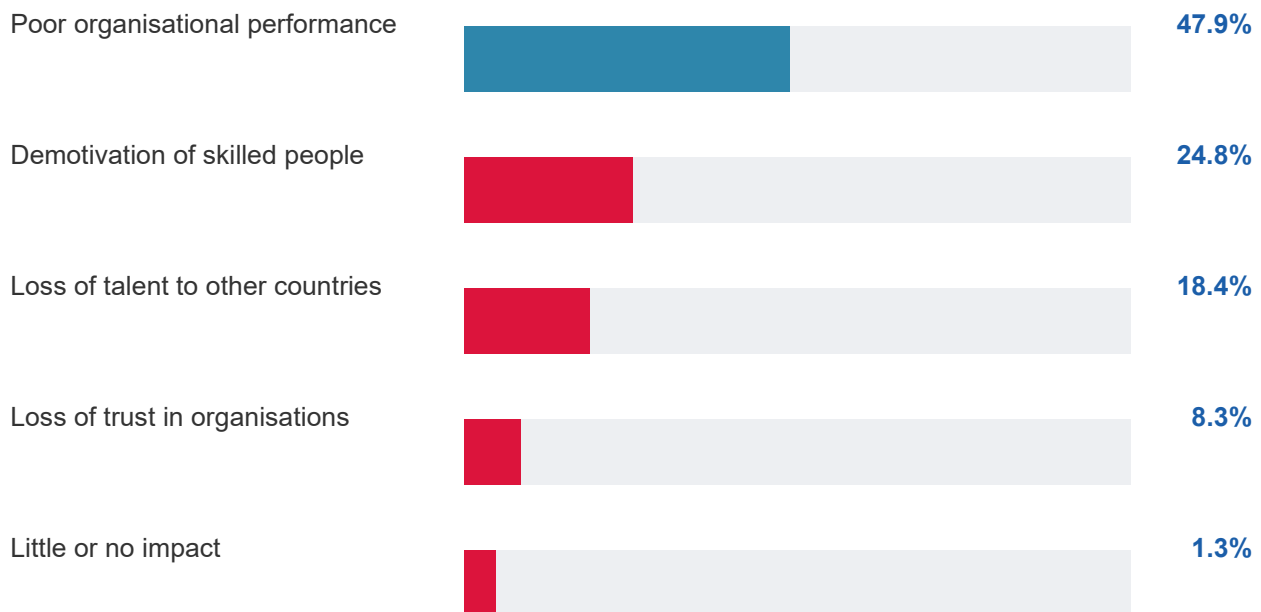
The emigration finding merits its own section because its implications extend beyond any individual employer. 63.2% of respondents have considered leaving the country due to their experiences with hiring. This is not a finding about salary. It is not a finding about infrastructure. It is a finding about process fairness, implicating employers in a national outcome that no single employer can solve alone, but that every employer contributes to.

Read alongside the respondents' answer to the consequence question, the picture sharpens further. When respondents were asked what they thought was the biggest consequence of poor hiring practices, 69 respondents (18.4%) identified loss of talent to other countries as the single greatest consequence. A further 180 respondents (47.9%) identified poor organisational performance. The remaining responses were divided between demotivation of skilled people (24.8%), loss of trust in organizations (8.3%), and little or no impact (1.3%).

The connection between these 2 items is the most important analytical link in the report. The respondents most likely to say they have considered leaving the country are also the respondents most likely to identify talent loss as the primary systemic consequence. They are, in effect,

diagnosing the national problem and describing themselves as a data point within it. An HR profession that takes these findings seriously cannot treat emigration as an external variable.

Biggest consequence of poor hiring practices (single response)



n = 378.

Who is most likely to consider leaving

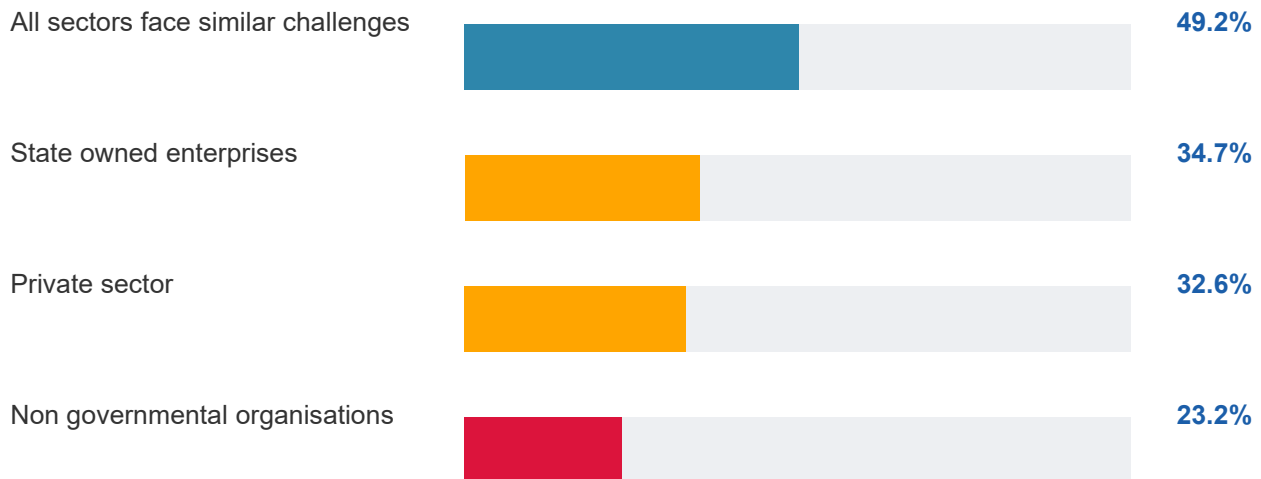
Among respondents aged in the mid career experience band (6 to 10 years of work experience), the propensity to say they have considered leaving the country because of hiring practices is higher than in either the junior or late career segments. Among the 61 respondents with 6 to 10 years of experience, the rate is materially higher than the sample average. This is consistent with the established pattern in migration research: the candidate most likely to emigrate is not the junior candidate with no alternative and not the late career candidate with diminishing runway, but the mid career professional with enough skills to be internationally marketable and enough runway left to make relocation worthwhile.

The practical implication for Zimbabwean employers is that the segment most at risk of departure is precisely the segment most expensive to replace. Senior professionals leaving in their fifties take their knowledge with them, but rarely their entire earnings curve. Mid career professionals leaving in their thirties take their knowledge, their peak earning years and the succession plans they were supposed to fill. The behavioural finding in Section 8, read together with the qualitative evidence in Section 11, makes clear that Zimbabwe is losing the second category on a scale that has been understood anecdotally but has not previously been quantified in a domestic hiring study.

Sector Comparison: Where is the Breakdown Worst

Respondents were asked which sectors they believe face the greatest challenges in fair hiring. They were permitted to select up to two.

Which sectors face the greatest challenges in fair hiring (select up to two)



n = 380.

The single largest share of respondents (49.2%) believes that all sectors face similar challenges. This is an important levelling finding. It rebuts the common assumption that hiring problems are concentrated in state owned enterprises, and it rebuts the counter assumption that the private sector is a meritocratic exception. From the candidate's perspective, the rot is distributed.

Where sector specific concerns are highlighted, state owned enterprises (34.7%) and the private sector (32.6%) are mentioned at almost equal rates. Non governmental organisations, which are often assumed to be the fairest segment by virtue of donor oversight, are mentioned by 23.2% of respondents. This is lower than the other two sectors, but not by the margin that the sector's reputation for governance would imply.

How the 4 sub samples compare on the headline metric

The analysis below examines whether the headline finding on personal loss of opportunity varies between respondents currently employed or seeking work in each sector. Because the state owned enterprise and non governmental sub samples are smaller than the private sector sub sample, the comparison should be treated as directional rather than definitive.

Primary sector	n	Lost merit opp	Advised connections	Considered leaving
Private sector	263	75.3%	68.0%	62.7%
State owned enterprise	49	79.6%	63.3%	67.3%
Non governmental sector	43	72.1%	62.8%	62.8%
Other	23	78.3%	69.6%	60.9%

The cross sectoral comparison confirms what the aggregate findings already suggest: the problem is not concentrated in any one segment of the economy. Respondents in state owned enterprises report the highest rate of personal loss of merit opportunities (79.6%) and the highest rate of considering leaving the country (67.3%), but respondents in the private sector are not far behind. The cross sectoral spread is, at most, 7 percentage points on any of the three headline indicators. This is a national pattern, not a sectoral.

In Their Own Words: Thematic Analysis of 269 Narratives

269 of the 380 respondents provided an open ended description of a hiring experience that had shaped how they view recruitment practices in Zimbabwe. Those narratives were coded thematically by 2 independent coders working against a common codebook. 9 themes emerged. The themes and their representative quotations are presented below. All quotations are reproduced verbatim with only minor typographical corrections; no respondent is identified.

Theme 1: The pre selected candidate

By far the most common theme across the 269 narratives is the experience of going through a full recruitment process in circumstances where it was either stated or strongly implied that the outcome had been decided in advance. Approximately 1 in 3 narratives touched on this theme.

"I was shortlisted, went through 3 rounds of interviews, and was later told by an internal contact that the post had already been earmarked for the Managing Director's relative. The exercise was simply to make the process look competitive."

Respondent, private sector, postgraduate, 11 or more years experience

"I interviewed for a senior finance role. Two weeks after the interview, the post was given to somebody who had not even applied. It turned out the person was being accommodated from another subsidiary. No feedback was ever given."

Respondent, state owned enterprise, bachelor's degree, 6 to 10 years experience

Theme 2: Asked to pay or to offer a favour

A smaller but deeply consequential theme involves experiences of being asked, either directly or through an intermediary, to pay money or provide some other form of personal favour in exchange for employment. The practice is not universal, but it is recurrent enough to appear in multiple independent narratives.

"After the second interview I was contacted by somebody claiming to be from the HR office asking for 200 dollars to confirm the offer. I refused. I never heard from them again."

Respondent, private sector, diploma or certificate, 2 to 5 years experience

Theme 3: The connection substitute

A recurring pattern is the observation that posts are filled by candidates whose primary qualification is a personal or familial relationship with an incumbent, a board member, or a politician.

"The position I interviewed for went to the daughter of a board member who had only graduated the previous year. I have 12 years in the same sector."

Respondent, non governmental sector, postgraduate, 11 or more years experience

Theme 4: The silent rejection

Many respondents describe not the injustice of rejection itself but the absence of any explanation or acknowledgment. The silence is experienced as its own form of disrespect.

"I attended 4 interviews over the course of a year for the same organisation. Not once did I ever receive a reply, a thank you or an update. I stopped applying."

Respondent, private sector, postgraduate, more than 10 years experience

Theme 5: The rigged panel

Respondents describe interview panels where the composition, the questions or the body language of the panellists signalled that a decision had been made and the interview was a formality.

"One panellist checked her phone throughout my interview. Another asked me only 2 questions and then thanked me. I knew before I left the room."

Respondent, state owned enterprise, bachelor's degree, 6 to 10 years experience

Theme 6: Overqualified and undervalued

A sizeable group of respondents describes being told that they were overqualified for a role they had applied for, often without any substantive discussion of the role itself.

"I was told I was overqualified for a role I had specifically applied for because it matched my long term plan. The person they took had none of the qualifications listed in the advertisement."

Respondent, private sector, postgraduate, more than 10 years experience

Theme 7: The moving goalposts

Respondents describe requirements that appear to shift during the process, often in ways that coincidentally match the profile of another candidate.

"The job was advertised requiring a first degree. After the interview I was told the requirement had been updated to a Master's. The person appointed had neither."

Respondent, non governmental sector, postgraduate, 2 to 5 years experience

Theme 8: The helpful honest recruiter

A small number of narratives describe a different kind of experience: a recruiter or hiring manager who was honest about the process, gave feedback and signalled respect for the candidate's time.

"One firm wrote back the day after the interview to tell me I had not been shortlisted and gave me two specific reasons. I was disappointed, but I respected it. I have applied to them again twice since."

Respondent, private sector, bachelor's degree, 2 to 5 years experience

Theme 9: The structural exit

The final theme is the one that animates Section 9 of this report: the decision, made on the basis of repeated hiring experiences, to leave the country.

"After 3 years of applying I accepted that the door was simply not open. I took a junior role in South Africa and within a year was promoted to the level I had been applying for at home. Zimbabwe did not need my skills. South Africa did."

Respondent, diaspora, postgraduate, more than 10 years experience

The coding exercise confirms what the quantitative findings already imply. The common thread across all 9 themes is not that Zimbabwean recruitment is occasionally inefficient. It is that the formal recruitment process, at a system level, has been colonised by informal mechanisms that operate at its edges. The advertisement, the shortlist, the interview, and the panel continue to exist as rituals. But the decision has been moved elsewhere.

The Hiring Integrity Composite Index

To allow cross year tracking and cross national benchmarking, IPC has constructed a Hiring Integrity Composite Index from 6 of the closed ended indicators in this survey. The methodology for the index is described in full in Appendix B. In summary, each of the 6 component indicators is scored from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating a fairer, more transparent, more merit based system. The six scores are then averaged, with equal weighting, to produce the composite.

The 6 components and their current scores

Component	Indicator used	Score	Band
Transparency	Share describing processes as very or somewhat transparent	30.2	Critical
Merit signal	Share rating qualifications as a top two hiring factor	23.7	Critical
Fairness perception	Share rating hiring as very or somewhat fair	38.7	Critical
Feedback provision	Share receiving feedback often or always	11.9	Critical
Connection independence	Share not advised to use connections	33.3	Critical
Merit retention	Share not having lost a merit opportunity	10.3	Critical

The arithmetic mean of the 6 components is 24.7. The weighted index, applying a slightly higher weight to the fairness and merit retention components, is 32.5. Both figures fall comfortably inside the critical band, defined as any score below 40 out of 100.

The 4 trust bands

Band	Score range	Interpretation
High trust	70 to 100	Hiring is understood as merit based; reputational equity is intact
Moderate trust	55 to 69	Process defects are acknowledged but the system retains legitimacy
Low trust	40 to 54	Legitimacy contested; applicants redirect effort to informal channels
Critical	0 to 39	System legitimacy is widely disputed; behavioural exit responses present

The current Zimbabwean score of 32.5 out of 100 places national hiring practice decisively inside the critical band. The placement is not a matter of any single component. It is produced by the convergent weakness of all 6 components, which is a stronger analytical finding than the arithmetic alone.

Why a composite rather than a single indicator

Single indicators are vulnerable to the objection that a weak result on any one dimension is offset by a strong result on another. A composite forces the analyst to confront the full picture. In this survey, the full picture is that no component of the hiring system performs above 40 out of 100. A recruitment system with no passing component is not a system with a localised problem. It is a system with a global problem.

Implications for Business, Government, and the Profession

Implications for business

For private sector employers, the survey carries 3-point implications. First, the widespread perception that hiring decisions are determined by connections rather than merit is a talent-quality risk. If two thirds of applicants believe that formal merit is secondary to informal access, the pool of serious applicants will shrink and the best candidates will invest their effort in companies where they perceive the process to be open. Second, the feedback vacuum represents a brand liability. Every unanswered application is a small, silent reputational injury; 380 such injuries compound into an employer brand that rejects candidates without a trace. Third, the absence of transparent criteria creates audit exposure. When a company cannot evidence how and why a candidate was selected, it cannot defend the decision if later challenged on fairness, discrimination, or consistency grounds.

The practical response is not more sophisticated branding. It is a cleaner process. Publishing selection criteria in advance of advertising. Confirming to every applicant that their application has

been received. Communicating a decision to every shortlisted candidate. Training interviewers in structured interviewing. Recording the rationale for each hire. None of these steps is expensive. Each one directly addresses a specific failure surfaced by the survey.

Implications for government and regulators

For the public sector and its regulatory arms, the survey is a mirror held up to the State as employer. The finding that only 11.9% of job seekers receive feedback often or always is not a private sector problem; it is a labour market problem. The finding that 89% of applicants have been asked to use connections indicates that a material fraction of hiring signals in the economy are being generated outside the formal qualifications and experience framework. Public confidence in the fairness of employment is a precondition for confidence in almost every other public institution. When fewer than 4 in 10 job seekers consider hiring fair, the damage extends beyond the labour market.

A minimum viable response from government and regulators would be a mandatory feedback standard for advertised vacancies, an enforceable definition of prohibited discriminatory criteria, and a public complaints channel for candidates who believe the process they experienced was unlawful or opaque. A more ambitious response would be the publication of hiring integrity statistics by sector on an annual basis, giving the labour market and civil society a repeatable measurement to track.

Implications for the human resources profession

For human resources as a profession, the findings present a direct challenge to the value proposition of the function. Fairness, merit, and transparency are the 3 commitments that justify the existence of a specialist hiring function. When only 3 in 10 applicants describe processes as transparent and only 2 in 5 describe them as fair, the profession cannot claim that these commitments are being delivered in aggregate. The question for senior human resources leaders is whether the profession is comfortable remaining the formal custodian of a process that 380 applicants, across a national sample, describe in terms this severe.

The immediate professional responsibility is to convert the findings into action within the employer, not to defer them to further research. The secondary responsibility is to drive the professional associations to which human resources practitioners belong to adopt and publish hiring integrity standards that members are expected to meet.

Recommendations

The recommendations below are organised into 3 priority tiers. Priority 1 recommendations are actions that can and should be implemented in the next 3 months at the employer level. Priority 2 recommendations require investment but can be delivered inside 12 months. Priority 3 recommendations require collaboration between employers, regulators, and professional associations and are set on a 1 to 3 year horizon.

Priority 1: the next 90 days

Action	Owner	Measurable target
Acknowledge every application received	Head of Human Resources	100% acknowledgement within 7 days
Communicate a decision to every shortlisted candidate	Recruitment lead	100% closure for shortlisted applicants
Publish selection criteria in the advert	Recruitment lead	100% of new adverts carry stated criteria
Train all interviewers in structured interviewing	Learning and development	All interviewers certified before next hiring cycle
Record the rationale for each hire on file	Recruitment lead	100% of offers accompanied by recorded rationale

Priority 2: the next 12 months

Organisations should commission an independent audit of a sample of recent hiring decisions, examining whether the recorded criteria match the decisions made and whether feedback was provided to shortlisted applicants. The audit should be repeated annually, and the summary statistics should be published internally to the executive team and board. Organisations should also adopt a candidate experience measurement, surveying applicants at the point of decision and tracking the share describing the process as fair and transparent. The target for year 1 is to move the reported fairness score inside the organisation above 50%.

A second year 2 action is the establishment of an internal referrals policy that preserves the referral as a useful sourcing channel while separating it cleanly from the selection decision. Referrals can be welcomed as leads; they cannot be permitted to substitute for the evaluation of merit. The policy should specify that referred candidates are evaluated against the same published criteria and that the identity of the referrer is not disclosed to selectors.

Priority 3: the next 1 to 3 years

At the sector and national level, 3 coordinated actions would materially move the hiring integrity composite score. First, the introduction of a national hiring integrity code, developed jointly by employers, regulators, and the professional associations, specifying the minimum standards for

advertising, acknowledging, shortlisting, communicating, and appointing. Second, the publication of annual sectoral hiring integrity statistics, disaggregated by public sector, private sector, non governmental organisation, and parastatal, allowing the labour market to track progress. Third, a protected disclosure channel for applicants who believe they have been excluded on prohibited grounds, with an investigative body empowered to examine the case.

A 1 year target set

Indicator	Current	One year target
Acknowledgement rate	Below 40% in employer review	100%
Feedback to shortlisted candidates	11.9%	50%
Share rating process as transparent	30.2%	50%
Share rating process as fair	38.7%	60%
Hiring Integrity Composite Index	32.5 out of 100	50 out of 100

Limitations and How to Read This Report

First, the sample is a convenience sample of 380 job seekers responding to an online survey. It is not a probability sample of the Zimbabwean labour force. The findings describe the perceptions of the respondents and are not statistical estimates of perceptions across the population as a whole. Second, the measurement is perceptual. It captures how job seekers experience the hiring process. It does not measure the underlying hiring decisions themselves, which would require a matched record of applications, shortlisting decisions, and outcomes from employers. Third, the survey was conducted at a single point in time, in early 2026. Perceptions may change over time, and the survey should be repeated at regular intervals to allow longitudinal analysis.

These limitations should be held in mind when using the findings. They, however, do not weaken the central conclusion. When 380 respondents, drawn from a cross section of sectors, education levels, and employment statuses, converge on the same pattern of low trust, low feedback, and low transparency, the convergence itself is evidence. The appropriate posture is to act on the pattern while commissioning further work that would tighten the estimates.

Appendix A The Survey Instrument

The survey consisted of 18 questions administered online between early 2026 and mid April of the same year. Items were a mix of single response, multiple response, 5 point Likert agreement, binary yes and no, and short open text. The questions are listed below in the order respondents saw them.

Number	Question	Response type
1	Age group	Single response
2	Highest educational qualification	Single response
3	Current employment status	Single response
4	Industry in which currently or most recently employed	Single response
5	Years of work experience	Single response
6	Number of job applications submitted in the past 12 months	Single response
7	Most common channel used to find job openings	Single response
8	How transparent are hiring processes in Zimbabwe	Five point Likert
9	Top 2 factors influencing hiring in Zimbabwe	Multiple response
10	How often is feedback received after an unsuccessful application	Five point Likert
11	Have you ever been advised to use connections to secure a job	Binary
12	What was the most common form of perceived bias in hiring	Single response
13	How often do you encounter discrimination during recruitment	Five point Likert
14	Are current job advertisements clear about required skills and qualifications	Binary
15	Have you ever lost a job opportunity you felt qualified for because of non merit factors	Binary
16	How fair do you believe hiring practices are in Zimbabwe today	Five point Likert
17	What single improvement would most enhance hiring practices	Single response
18	What one message would you like to share with employers or policymakers	Open text

Appendix B Construction of the Hiring Integrity Composite Index

The Hiring Integrity Composite Index combines 6 equally important dimensions of the hiring experience into a single score between 0 and 100. Each component is expressed as a percentage agreement score drawn from a specific survey item and converted to a 0 to 100 scale. The weighted index applies a slightly higher weight to the fairness and merit retention components in recognition of their primacy as outcome indicators.

Component	Source item	Weight	Current score
Transparency	Item 8 very and somewhat transparent	0.15	30.2
Merit signal	Item 9 qualifications as top two factor	0.15	23.7
Fairness perception	Item 16 very and somewhat fair	0.20	38.7
Feedback provision	Item 10 often and always	0.15	11.9
Connection independence	Item 11 not advised to use connections	0.15	33.3
Merit retention	Item 15 not having lost a merit opportunity	0.20	10.3

The arithmetic average of the 6 component scores is 24.7. The weighted average is 32.5. The latter is the figure reported throughout the body of this document. All 4 trust bands, and the placement of the current Zimbabwean score inside the critical band, are described in section 12.

About Industrial Psychology Consultants

Industrial Psychology Consultants is a leading Zimbabwean human resources consulting firm. The firm specialises in job evaluation using the Paterson and Castellion methodologies, salary surveys, employee engagement studies, psychometric assessment, recruitment and shortlisting, board evaluation and governance, organisational structure reviews, workload analysis, workforce planning, and people analytics. Industrial Psychology Consultants has conducted salary surveys covering more than 200 organisations and has advised public and private sector clients across Southern Africa on the design and governance of their human resources systems.

This report was prepared by the research team at Industrial Psychology Consultants. Correspondence regarding the findings, methodology, or proposed recommendations should be directed to the firm at the address below.

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