



Refugee Digest 36

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Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons

In South Africa, groups of refugees, citing fears of xenophobic attacks, sought to pressurise the UNHCR to resettle them in foreign countries. As a strategy they camped outside the UNHCR office in Cape Town and later moved into a nearby church for protection after they were forcibly removed from their site of protest. They continued their protests from the church. Similar events transpired in Pretoria. The stance of the group of refugees was robustly contested within the broader refugee community and serious differences of opinion in that community were expressed. For many observers two distinct issues emerged. One, the harshness of the police action when removing the protestors, which was reminiscent of the way protests were broken up during the days of apartheid. Secondly, the merits and underlying issues around the demands of the protestors. In one of the interventions, church and community leaders including Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba were physically attacked. At the time of writing it would appear that several protesters have left the church and are seeking to be reintegrated into the communities which they had initially moved out of. These events have drawn attention to the complex intertwining realities that face displaced persons and the variations in demands and strategies in resolving the issues.

<https://www.polity.org.za/article/ifp-calls-for-urgent-plan-on-undocumented-foreign-nationals-2019-10-30>

<https://www.polity.org.za/article/water-cannons-fired-as-police-remove-foreign-nationals-outside-un-refugee-offices-in-cape-town-2019-10-30>

<https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-11-15-archbishop-thabo-makgoba-attacked-in-refugee-chaos-at-church-in-cape-town/>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-11-15-human-rights-commission-slams-refugees-attack-on-faith-leaders/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-06-unhcr-urges-refugees-to-stay-in-south-africa-despite-their-circumstances/>

Although not exactly under the same topic as above, the following report shows the tensions and flash points in the broader realities surrounding migrants and refugees in SA.

<https://www.polity.org.za/article/over-7-500-foreign-nationals-arrested-by-jmpd-since-2016-2019-11-01>

The SA government also indicated that it was on track (though behind schedule) with its submission to SADC on labour policies that would provide a balance between ensuring that SA citizens are employed, while not ignoring the skills and multiple contributions that migrants bring to the world of labour. Employment and Labour minister Thulas Nxesi stressed the need to “facilitate regulation and bring order to this difficult area, mindful of the sensitivities involved, including relations with our neighbours to the north [and] the divisive cheap labour policy being adopted by employers.” “The policy we are developing should not displace South Africans. We need to strike a balance – this process is a multi-departmental area that needs co-ordination while taking consideration of international conventions,” said Esther Thloane, one of the department’s chief co-ordinators of policy. This policy will be critical at many levels but especially in building social cohesion in SA and potentially defusing tensions between locals and migrants in the work place. It could also be helpful in

unclogging the backlog in the asylum system, as that route seems to be a preferred one for economic migrants as the only means of securing documentation.

<http://www.labour.gov.za/south-africa-on-track-to-finalise-draft-nlmp-by-march-2020-%E2%80%93-department-of-employment-and-labour>

<https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/public-opinion-versus-reality-on-immigrants-in-south-africa>

<https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/the-south-african-migration-policy-landscape>

<https://www.ilo.org/africa/areas-of-work/labour-migration/lang--en/index.htm>

<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/review/hsrc-review-dec-2018/low-skilled-immigration>

<https://ropretoria.iom.int/labour-migration-and-development>

These discussions also reflected and possibly contributed to the broader, international debate over the contributions which migrants bring to any receiving country. This has become a divisive discussion in some places.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/southafrica/publication/new-study-finds-immigrants-in-south-africa-generate-jobs-for-locals>

<https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/pb117.pdf>

<https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264085398-en>

https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_616038

<https://www.oecd.org/migration/OECD%20Migration%20Policy%20Debates%20Numero%202.pdf>

In the faith communities there is also support for a closer look at and appreciation of the benefits migrants bring to receiving countries.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/caritas-stresses-benefits-of-migration-and-development/11211>

Across the globe, displaced persons continue to come up against severe obstacles to their wellbeing, safe transit and protection. These obstacles range from new restrictive legislation, dangers attached to migrant smuggling and discriminatory practices. The following links offer some examples of these obstacles.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/nyregion/nj-immigration-ice.html>

<https://religionclause.blogspot.com/2019/11/switzerlands-rejection-of-asylum-claim.html>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-19-dutch-find-26-migrants-alive-stowed-away-on-uk-bound->

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-504862>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/lgbtqi-asylum-claimants-face-extreme-social-isolation-germany/>

Recently in Thailand, Pope Francis continued his advocacy on behalf of displaced persons. He spoke of the movement of people as one of the defining signs of our times and one of the key moral issues for our generation. Thailand has about 93 000 refugees living in 9 camps.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/pope-calls-for-an-end-to-tragic-exodus-of-migrants/>

Peter-John Pearson
Director