



## **Refugee Digest 51**

**March 19<sup>th</sup> 2021**

### **Migrants, Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Displaced Persons**

Through the long months of the national lockdown, the DHA has periodically issued extensions to the validity of documents of refugees and asylum seekers whose papers have expired. However, despite this, recent reports indicate that the expiration of documents is used as an excuse by employers for refusing to employ the holders of expired documents and that government bodies such as SASSA and the Companies and Intellectual Properties Commission have refused services to holders of expired documents. This is seen by many as part of a creeping policy of exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers, even when the law offers limited protection. In addition, despite a court ruling and clear directives from the government to the contrary, it is reported that some schools are still turning away undocumented and refugee children.

<https://www.sun.ac.za/english/Lists/news/DispForm.aspx?ID=7991>

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/schools-still-turning-away-refugee-children/>

The following perceptive article looks at the deepening inequalities experienced by mobile people, the lack of inclusion of many of the vulnerable communities in the SA government's relief programmes, and the failure of the government to take the experiences of displaced communities into account. It points to the social and mental pathologies that will flow from such exclusion, and makes a strong case for greater inclusion when considering policy responses.

<https://equityhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-020-01259-4>

At the very minimum, the closure of Refugee Reception Offices put such groups in a serious limbo with severe economic and social consequences. It is a fact that, while DHA services for South Africans have long been opened, those offices dealing with mobile people have remained closed.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-02-10-ongoing-closure-of-reception-offices-leaves-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-in-undocumented-limbo/>

One tiny spark of hope is that, since President Ramaphosa's strong assertion that undocumented migrants would be given the COVID-19 vaccine, voices within the health system have begun to affirm that health benefits should be available to all, including undocumented, migrants.

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/immigrants-must-be-given-health-care-even-if-their-permit-has-expired-health-department-confirms/>

The UNHCR, the DHA and the Refugees Appeal Authority have embarked on a four year project to attempt to sort out the backlog of refugee applications. In 2020 a *Special Report of the Auditor General* said that if the DHA continued at the pace it was going, it would take 68 years to clear the backlog.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-03-09-home-affairs-claims-it-will-fast-track-68-year-backlog-in-refugee-applications-in-four-years/>

<https://www.gov.za/speeches/home-affairs-and-un-high-commissioner-refugees-launch-asylum-backlog-project-8-mar-5-mar#>

Replying to Parliamentary questions on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2021, Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Patricia de Lille, indicated that the controversial border fence between Zimbabwe and South Africa was not fit for purpose and would be taken down by June 2021. The government, she said, was looking at more sustainable solutions for integrated border management.

<https://www.702.co.za/articles/411511/beitbridge-border-fence-to-be-taken-down-de-lille-tells-parly>

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/not-fit-for-purpose-patricia-de-lille-explains-why-beitbridge-border-fence-wont-be-repaired-20210316>

The 'Temporary Protected Status' for Venezuelans in the USA is of special interest to SA policy advocates, as it is an example of 'special permits'. SA has at present a similar arrangement for holders of permits from Zimbabwe, Lesotho and Angola. These expire at the end of 2021. The USA Catholic Bishops, in welcoming this provision 'to remain and work' while conditions in the home country are 'deemed unsafe', added that this category included 'civil unrest, severe food insecurity and loss of life.' All three aspects provide substance for consideration of the creation and extension of special permits. We would urge SA policy makers to think in a similar vein when considering the extension of the special permits at the end of the year.

<https://www.usccb.org/news/2021/usccb-chairmen-welcome-designation-temporary-protected-status-venezuela>

Around the world the situation of mobile people continues to be vulnerable, especially during the pandemic. The following links point to just how varies and widespread their hardships are. The border between the USA and Mexico has given rise to fresh tensions and new arrivals of refugees. The Biden Administration has recommenced the Central American Minors Program, which amongst other things allows for children being processed to be located in the USA, and not Mexico as under the Trump Administration. The Biden Administration has also introduced a Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelans for an 18 month period.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/mar/13/mexico-smugglers-migrant-bracelets-us-border>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/world/2021-03-12-number-of-migrant-children-in-us-border-facilities-soars-amid-growing-crisis/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/latest-issues/>

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085642>

The exploitation (and tragic deaths) of migrants in Qatar as the country prepares for the World Cup has raised much criticism.

[https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022?CMP=Share\\_AndroidApp\\_Other](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other)

In an interesting article UN officials analysed the work of migrants before, during and after the various spikes in the COVID-19 pandemic in Asian-Pacific countries. This narrative counters the often repeated claims of migrants being a drain on the host country's economy.

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086832>

On 1<sup>st</sup> March the Vatican announced the theme of the next World Day of Migrants and Refugees. It is '*Towards an ever widening we*', and it calls people, especially the Church, to greater solidarity with mobile people.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-02/pope-francis-theme-migrants-refugees-day-message.html>

With regard to the pandemic and migration, as of 1<sup>st</sup> March emigrants from countries with the highest number of COVID-19 cases accounted for about 31% of the total migration stock, and were responsible for 37% of all remittances globally, sent to their countries of origin.

<https://migrationdataportal.org/themes/migration-data-relevant-covid-19-pandemic>

Lastly, an example of NGOs doing advocacy for increased support for asylum seekers adversely affected by COVID-19 restrictions in the UK.

<https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/news/joint-letter-on-increasing-asylum-support-rates-in-response-to-the-covid-19-crisis?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIrfaf-ra57wIVCb tCh2AyA 5EAAYASAAEgIYM D BwE>

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