



Refugee Digest 54

8th July 2021

Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons.

World Refugee Day is celebrated on 20th June. In a terse statement, the SA Government acknowledged the courage and resilience of refugees who leave their homes under trying circumstances.

<https://www.gov.za/WorldRefugeeDay2021>

The IPSOS Global Survey of Attitudes to Refugees, conducted in preparation for the 2021 World Refugee Day in 28 countries amongst 19 000 people, including South Africa, revealed very sobering results. Over 70% agreed that people in conditions of war and situations of persecution had the right to seek refuge elsewhere, but very much lower numbers believed that their governments should allow more refugees into their countries, or spend more on refugees. They were also basically suspect of people claiming refugee protection.

https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/202106/Ipsos%20World%20Refugee%20Day%202021%20report_1.pdf

South Africa's acknowledged shortage of skills has hampered its economic growth and resilience. The following article argues that the official list of highly-needed, critical skills listed by President Ramaphosa in February 2021 is inadequate and that the process is too rigid. It argues for wider migration possibilities for those possessing the skills needed in SA. It argues for greater alignment to economic needs and greater ease in bringing such skills into the country

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-25-south-africas-rigid-policy-on-immigration-of-skilled-people-is-hard-to-fathom/>

On Africa Day 2021, migrants in SA called on South Africans to show greater tolerance, unity and social cohesion.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-24-migrants-in-south-africa-call-for-tolerance-unity-and-social-cohesion/>

This article discusses the role of Mozambican miners and migrants, probably some five million such migrants over the past years. It looks at their contribution to the mining industry, the harsh conditions under which they migrate, and the paltry returns for their labours. Sadly this is an ongoing misery.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-05-26-there-is-a-train-that-comes-from-mozambique-a-harrowing-history-of-sas-migrant-mine-labour/>

Immigrant shop owners have accused police of stealing monies from them after Operation Okae Molao. Immigrants were arrested and taken to a local police station where police demanded bail money. They were never charged and no bail was required, but police had taken their monies under false pretences.

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/spaza-shop-owners-accuse-police-stealing-their-cash/>

A new report by the Democracy Development Project on the contribution of migrants to the South African economy makes the point that such contributions are often under reported. A close reading also deconstructs the narrative that suggests that all migrants are a drain on the economy. It shows new possibilities for trade across the region that flow from with migrants' connections outside of South Africa; and it makes the point that these contributions are sorely needed in our attempts to grow the economy after COVID-19.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/columnists/guestcolumn/opinion-migrant-entrepreneurship-is-good-for-south-africas-economy-20210518>

A report by the UNHCR on 11th June 2021 estimated that 70 000 residents fled the city of Palma, in northern Mozambique, in the past three months. This brings the total number of people displaced in the area to about 800 000. Tanzania now refuses to accept any refugees and many have fled to South Africa and Eswatini. The UNHCR has called for those fleeing to be afforded asylum and for the principle of non-refoulement to be respected.

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2021/6/60c312e94/insecurity-northern-mozambique-continues-forcibly-displace-thousands.html>

<https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=51197>

The next article deals with the tragic consequences of mental fragility, despair and anxiety that are so much a part of many displaced persons' personal journeys. These are stories that are still very much in the shadows.

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/life-and-death-immigrant-dog-whisperer/>

In a discussion on the access of refugees and asylum seekers to tertiary institutions, this article points to the many barriers of access to such institutions and the ongoing classifications of such students as international students, thus further restricting access, especially to funding.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-06-18-world-refugee-day-sa-aggravates-the-plight-of-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-for-higher-education-funding/>

On the international front, anti-migrant sentiment continues to fester, and there is proof of attitudes actually hardening towards various categories of foreigners during the pandemic. This is contrary to the more compassionate, hospitable, and inclusive societies that many had predicted would flow from the trauma of the pandemic.

In his speech commemorating World Refugee Day, the UN Secretary General spoke of the ways in which refugees were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, and of the need for the world to stand together to rebuild after the pandemic. He called for the needs of refugees to be factored in when determining policies with regard to health, education and sport.

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20776.doc.htm>

Next is a reflection on World Refugee Day, underlining the move during the pandemic to concentrate on personal survival at the expense of those, like refugees, who are already excluded. It speaks to the faith commitment of inclusivity, and challenges people to realise a practical solidarity with refugees and migrants.

<https://international.la-croix.com/news/religion/refugees-matter-because-each-is-a-human-being/14497>

In a recent appeal, the UNHCR underlined the surge in displacement of peoples over the past years and pleaded with world leaders to intensify efforts towards peace-making and conflict resolution in order to reverse these spiralling numbers.

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2021/6/60ca09a74/unhcr-world-leaders-must-act-reverse-trend-soaring-displacement.html>

On 13th June Pope Francis drew attention to recent loss of lives of migrants in the Mediterranean. He again called it ‘Europe’s biggest cemetery.’ More than 500 migrants died in crossings between January and May 2021.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/06/13/Pope-Francis-mourns-migrant-dead-in-Mediterranean-europe-s-biggest-cemetery->

The Vatican Secretary of State, Cardinal Parolin, spoke about the need to develop an understanding of refugees based on solidarity, to see persons, not statistics, and for the countries of Europe to move away from the polarised positions they have taken on the issue.

<https://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=51237>

Greece has embarked on building walls around refugee camps, and is installing various security and monitoring devices, including drones, to oversee activities in and around the 24 mainland camps. EU monies are being used for this purpose, and this has occasioned outcries from EU MPs about monies being used for such purposes.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/5/25/concrete-walls-and-drones-greek-plans-for-refugee-camps-decried>

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