



## **Refugee Digest 72**

**November 2022**

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

As 2022 slowly draws to a close, it is worth noting that many delays, a lack of political will and numerous uncompleted tasks still riddle the mobile community landscape. It is also worth reflecting on the fact that each such act also has repercussions on the lives of people and threatens social cohesion.

One such reality is seen in the Auditor General's report on the Department of Home Affairs. It notes that only 69% of the tasks for the 2021/22 financial year were completed and it states bluntly that the cause lay mainly in poor governance and poor project management. It also mentions the unstable leadership in the internal IT section. Some of the projects have cost the department millions and still remain unfinished. The report also states that the DHA's report to the Auditor General's office contained many 'material misstatements'. The impact of this on already vulnerable people's lives is simply unacceptable at every level.

<https://www.sami.co.za/articles.php?TextNo=4473>

An example of what many think to be deliberate procrastination is that, after nearly a decade of court battles and delays from the DHA's side, the Epping-based Refugee Reception Centre in the Western Cape finally seems set to reopen early next year. This long overdue provision of services to the mobile community will cut down on the need to travel to distant ports of entry for operational process such as renewal of documents and determination of status. It will assist the community considerably.

<https://www.groundup.org.za/article/cape-town-refugee-reception-centre-finally-takes-shape/>

An opportunity to add meaningfully to the narrative around migration was missed in the government's statement for International Migrants Day, 18th December, a day observed by the United Nations to focus on the plight of migrants. The statement merely records the beginning of the observance in 2000, the international rise in migrant numbers, and the worldwide benefit of remittances. Nothing is said of the SA context or the hopes and sorrows of migrants in our country. Nor is anything said about SA's commitment to help in resolving this critical issue.

<https://www.gov.za/InternationalMigrantsDay2022>

The lack of employment, the rising levels of poverty, the lack of political will, and the demonising of others (which sometimes seems to be inadvertently supported by political speak and the slant of policy towards a system of exclusion), allows for fake news and xenophobic sentiment to develop, to the utter detriment of everyone. A recent tweet, re-tweeted tens of thousands of times, claimed that Eskom employed 1 000 Zimbabweans, Vodacom 5 000, and the government 10 000. These numbers were then interpreted as showing how much the government hates South Africans by offering so many jobs to Zimbabweans. Of course, it was shown to be entirely false, but much harm was done. The mischief that such fake information occasions is dangerous.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-10-13-viral-claims-on-migrant-employment-numbers-at-eskom-vodacom-and-sa-government-wholly-incorrect/>

In October, DHA announced that it had streamlined the online processes for obtaining refugee documents in an attempt to provide better, more efficient service to its targeted beneficiaries. This followed criticism that the system was often dysfunctional and unable to cope with the volume of traffic. The Auditor General's report referred to above highlighted poor governance and instability in the IT component of the Department.

<http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/notices/1606-online-application-for-enabling-documents-identity-travel-documents-for-refugees>

The above issues were also raised in a meeting between the Home Affairs Portfolio Committee and various organisations working in the sector, as well as the Department. Also in the discussion were issues pertaining to statelessness, safe environments for migrants who contribute to the economic wellbeing of the country, and the number of economic refugees as opposed to asylum seekers. The Minister told the audience that almost no one declared themselves as economic migrants and almost always used the asylum route. The issue of undocumented children being denied access to schooling despite the law being clear on the issue of access, is still a problem in several areas.

<https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/35586/>

At a meeting between the HA portfolio committee and Lawyers for Human Rights, LHR shared a number of concerns with regard to the mobile community. Many of those mentioned above were also raised by this group, thus emphasising the importance of the issues. They also spoke about high costs for important processes like DNA tests, the seemingly arbitrary list of requirements needed by the Department, and the need for a uniform way of recording births of children in South Africa, irrespective of their parent's status. The portfolio committee instructed the Department to supply answers to some of the questions raised.

<https://tinyurl.com/u2eb8cba>

Deputy Minister of Employment and Labour, Boitumelo Moloi, told a conference on the National Labour Migration Policy that SA sought to protect all workers from exploitation and unacceptable working conditions. He affirmed that SA supported various initiatives in this regard in the SADC region and said categorically that "South Africa's first duty is to provide a regulatory framework aligned to international labour standards and regional migration frameworks whose main objective will be to ensure that labour migration to and from South Africa is undertaken in the interests of both migrant workers and the South African economy and society." This is reassuring when seen against the growing unofficial practice of marginalising and exploiting migrants.

<https://www.gov.za/speeches/departments-employment-and-labour%E2%80%99s-national-labour-migration-policy-5-oct-2022-0000>

At the same conference an official of the department noted that sending countries made no provision for any benefits from the home country to continue support for citizens who have crossed borders. Mr Ndebele said that South Africa's approach to migrants was one of care, and that it was human-centred.

<https://www.gov.za/speeches/home-countries-migrant-labourers-are-not-accepting-and-acknowledging-their-responsibility>

Lastly, this article suggests that, as SA looks towards the 2024 elections, and as coalition politics looms, the issue of migration in various parties' manifestos needs to be thought through carefully, as a lack of clarity on this issue between parties could have serious consequences.

<https://www.sami.co.za/articles.php?TextNo=4480>

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