



Refugee Digest 77

August 2023

Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Issues pertaining to immigrants of various status continue to be at the foreground of the South African political landscape and remain deeply contentious. In this Digest we look again at the multiple dysfunctions in the Department of Home Affairs, which the Minister has acknowledged; we look at the way anti-immigrant sentiment is strengthened by rooting it in particular contexts and thus also personalising it; and we look at the influence of the printed word and how it shapes consciousness in this sector.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-06-15-minister-motsoaledi-apologises-to-south-africa-for-the-mess-created-by-his-department/>

In recent days Minister Aaron Motsoaledi has indicated that there is a move afoot to review the whole gamut of refugee and immigration legislation and that a White Paper to this effect is before Cabinet. Such a move could see South Africa disengaging from the UN Refugee Convention temporarily and, after it has worked out its approach to this vexed topic, re-joining but with reservations.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-08-20-wholesale-review-of-immigration-regimen-may-see-sa-temporarily-exit-un-convention-on-refugees/>

Applications for work visas, including necessary scarce skills visas, continue to be difficult to obtain, and are subject to long waits, frivolous objections and downright incorrect decisions, thus providing a complex and unwelcoming environment for those who seek to fill jobs in South Africa. For many businesses it continues to be a source of frustration.

<https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/711162/new-visa-nightmare-for-south-africa-2/>

<https://www.theafricareport.com/315989/south-africas-visa-regime-leaves-essential-jobs-unfilled/>

<https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/home-affairs-criticised-for-rejecting-500-retirement-visa-applications/>

The following important article makes the point that the growing anti-immigrant sentiment in South Africa is stifling the implementation of common-sense immigration policies. The government feels the need to show itself strong and resolute against migrants and others who cross the border. This, according to the article, is why the Minister is reluctant to regularise the situation of those on the Zimbabwe Exemption Permit even when, a few years ago in less of a toxic atmosphere, it regularised the stay of Mozambicans after the civil war.

<https://www.polity.org.za/article/zimbabwean-migrants-south-africas-anti-immigrant-sentiments-are-hindering-policy-reform-2023-07-21>

The next article is a survey of attitudes with regard to foreign nationals in various publications. The article notes the tendency to use generalisations and negative images which, it argues, contributes to ongoing xenophobia and prevents social cohesion. It points out that what people read deeply influences their attitudes. This is true with regard to immigrants as well.

<https://tinyurl.com/46fs92jn>

It should be noted with regard to the above that, in the next article, we see an example of the kind of reporting that conflates two sets of facts and produces a negative image, with big gaps in the logic of the reports. For instance, the numbers given and the contraband confiscated are essentially two different categories but the report suggests that all those arrested were smuggling contraband, which is not true.
<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2023-07-05-hundreds-of-suspected-illegal-immigrants-arrested-at-sa-borders/>

Proof of the growing anti-immigrant rhetoric and the way it is contextualised by communities has been seen in a series of events in Limpopo province. The contextualisation of protest offers a certain sense of authenticity not found in generalised protests. It thus resonates well with people and helps build prejudices.
<https://www.sn124.com/dailysun/news/defenders-of-the-people-dop-gives-cop-shop-home-hffairs-demands-20230722>

The Limpopo MEC for Health, Dr Phophi Ramathuba, is to face the Medical Council for the remarks she made to a foreign national patient in one of the province's public facilities. In her imprudent remarks to the patient she also threatened that the medical bills would be sent to the government of Zimbabwe, the patient's country of origin.

<https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/limpopo-health-mec-phophi-ramathuba-to-face-the-music-after-remarks-to-foreign-patient-4a07165d-4259-4767-969b-bbae45a5f238>
<https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/phophi-ramathuba-says-medical-bills-for-illegal-zimbabweans-will-be-sent-to-president-emmerson-mnangagwa-a79dbd19-5cd8-40cd-b7c4-ec4e0507f7a6>

It should be noted that it is not only geographical areas which have adapted the anti-immigrant campaigns to fit their local situations (such as Limpopo, a border province) but also that certain sectors have fine-tuned their campaigns to their sector. One such example has been the truck drivers of South Africa, who hold that their jobs are threatened by foreign nationals. In both cases, the more personal the campaign is made out to be, the more likely it is to gain traction amongst people.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/politics/government/truck-violence-home-affairs-dept-does-not-give-foreign-drivers-working-visas-motsoaledi-20230715>

In the light of all of the above and the ever present threat of xenophobic violence, it is worth re-looking at this article, which tackles certain strong myths about foreign nationals in South Africa. It serves as a corrective to some of the wild allegations that stoke the negative sentiments.

<https://theconversation.com/5-xenophobic-myths-about-immigrants-in-south-africa-debunked-by-researchers-191194>

Despite the recent court judgements and the delay in suspending the ZEPs, its holders continue to feel vulnerable and continue to advocate for a definitive, favourable decision with regard to their future.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-07-20-zimbabwean-extension-permit-holders-hastily-relocate-to->

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-07-20-court-reprieve-for-zimbabwean-extension-permit-holders-does-little-to-quell-panic/>

Peter-John Pearson
Director
pearson@iafrica.com