



Identity documents, Employment and Livelihoods of Refugees in South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa receives more refugees and asylum seekers than any other nation in southern Africa because of its strong economic position. However, a large proportion of refugees and asylum seekers in need of protection experience lengthy delays in obtaining the identity documents that are a prerequisite for public and private services like housing, education, health care and justice. The lack of identity documents especially impedes the employment of refugees since they cannot be employed until they have proof of identity. Yet, employment is a critical source of income when the government of South Africa does not offer adequate financial assistance to refugees, or those seeking asylum in the republic. This paper argues that South Africa should fulfil its obligations to uphold refugees' fundamental rights, take a strong stance against any xenophobic attacks, and reduce processing timeframes for identity documents.

Keywords: identity documents; refugees; employment; livelihoods; South Africa

Introduction

Present rates of forced migration are higher than ever in history. At the end of 2021, 89.3 million people were displaced, including 4.6 million asylum seekers, 27.1 million refugees, and 53.2 million internally displaced persons (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021). A refugee is 'someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion' (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2021, . More than 28,300

people are forced to leave their homes every day due to persecution, extreme poverty, natural disasters, violent conflict, and human rights abuses. According to the United Nations General Assembly (2016) fifty per cent of refugees in the world are girls and women. Around one in three children living outside their country of origin are refugee children (United Nations Children's Fund, 2020). Eighty-five per cent of refugees are concentrated in the Global South; in other words, a significant number of refugees nowadays are moving between developing countries, commonly known as South-South migration yet research on migration tends to focus on a smaller number of refugees trying to reach countries in the Global North and pays little attention to the massive movement of refugees in less developed countries.

Southern Africa alone is home to sixty per cent of intra-regional migration (International Organisation for Migration, 2020). The region experiences all types of migration, including displacement, irregular migration, and labour migration, due to its strong economic position on the continent (Schockaert et al., 2020). Employment opportunities in mining, agricultural and manufacturing industries in Southern Africa countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Zambia attract all kinds of migrants from West Africa and the Horn of Africa (International Organisation for Migration, 2013). Many refugees residing in Southern Africa come from war-torn countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Burundi, Cameroon, Somalia, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Ethiopia (Nkomo, 2019). Unsafe living conditions, wars and natural disasters are some of the main factors causing refugees to take risky migration to South Africa for protection.

However, one of the neglected problems in the world is refugee access to identity documents (World Bank, 2017). Identity documents include birth certificates, passports, national identity document cards, visas, asylum or refugee permits, and residency permits. Many refugees struggle to prove their identity due to the lack of identity documentation. Refugees find it difficult to obtain documents, to include the correct information on those documents and to have those documents accepted. This can complicate access to basic services (Refugee Council of Australia, 2020). Identity documents are a prerequisite for ensuring access to public and private services like housing, education, health care and justice. Without proof of identity, refugees are unable to open bank accounts, register a mobile sim card, attend school, access health care, obtain social security grants, access employment, seek legal protection or participate in modern society (World Bank, 2017). Nevertheless, the impact of the lack of identity documents on

the livelihoods² of refugees is under-researched. Few scholars have indicated the importance of identity documents for employment, health, education, and the successful integration of refugees into host communities in the context of the Global North, and there is still a larger research gap in this area in the Global South (Behrends, 2018). This paper seeks to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the impact of the lack of identity documents on the employability of refugees in South Africa. Employment is one of the most important aspects of refugees' self-reliance, integration, financial freedom, and social inclusion in host countries (Ziersch et al., 2022).

South Africa is home to some 275 000 refugees and asylum seekers, more than eighty per cent of whom come from Zimbabwe, the DRC, Somalia, and Nigeria (Masuku, 2020). Traditionally, South Africa has been a refugee hub in Southern Africa because of its open-door refugee policy, which permits refugees to stay everywhere in the country (Crush & Skinner, 2017). There is a huge backlog of more than 190 000 applications for registration in South Africa, and some refugees have gone without a final decision for more than a decade (Ekambaram, 2020). Ninety-six per cent of the applications submitted by asylum seekers to the Department of Home Affairs were rejected in 2019 alone (Amnesty International, 2019). The process of acquiring identity documents in South Africa has become complicated and presents several challenges to refugees who are not familiar with the application procedures.

In this paper, I report the findings of secondary data analysis of published sources on refugees' employability, identity documents, livelihoods, and well-being to better comprehend the impact of a lack of identity documents on refugee employment and livelihoods in South Africa. The literature reviewed included peer-reviewed journals and other sources including government reports, policy documents, think tank publications, refugee studies books, and published posts on the official websites of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration, as well as media releases. The findings demonstrate that the lack of identity documents renders refugees vulnerable to poverty, homelessness, and human trafficking. Refugees are unable to find jobs in the formal and informal economies of South Africa and unemployment causes a shortage in needs such as food, clothing, housing, health care and education. Destitution causes those without identification

² A livelihood is a means of making a living that encompasses people's incomes, assets (both material and social resources) and capabilities essential to meet their basic needs of life such as food, clothes, and accommodation.

papers to venture into commercial prostitution, beggary, and serious crimes such as car hijacking, burglary, and drug trafficking to survive because they are not sufficiently supported or assisted by the South African government. At the same time, experienced refugees with accredited academic qualifications are unable to secure skilled employment due to the lack of evidence of legal status. Overall, the lack of identity documents hinders refugees from accessing essential services such as jobs, health care, employment, and education in South Africa. The papers develops these issues by considering in turn the context of refugee policy including amendments to the 1994 Refugee Act, the institutional and political framework of South Africa, the entrenchment of institutionalised xenophobia and the bureaucratisation of the Department of Home Affairs (DHA), the resulting issues for the employment and livelihoods of refugees in South Africa, and the place of refugees as adjunct employees in the informal economy of South Africa.

The Context and the Refugee Policy Dilemma

Since the birth of the democratic state in 1994, South Africa has been the favoured destination for asylum seekers and refugees in Southern Africa because of its progressive refugee policy (Schockaert et al., 2020). In the year from mid-2018, for example, South Africa has hosted 89 285 recognised refugees (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2019b). Unlike other Southern African nations, refugees live alongside the local population in South Africa. Through the non-encampment policy enshrined in the 1998 Refugee Act, refugees could study and work in South Africa (Kleinsmidt & Manicom, 2010). Unfortunately, the rights previously granted to refugees by the 1998 Refugee Act were revoked by the Amendment Act of 1 January 2020 which restricts refugees' access to work, political involvement, interaction with diplomatic missions, and the type of courses refugees can study in South Africa (Nyoka, 2020). Nevertheless, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa still protects the fundamental rights of everyone in the country, irrespective of legal status, including access to essential services such as employment, health care and education for refugees (Crush & Dodson, 2017).

Although the rights of refugees are laid down in the Constitution of South Africa, asylum seekers and refugees are generally viewed as economic migrants attempting to exploit the asylum-seeking system, though official statistics do not support this assertion (Khan, 2020). The Department of Home Affairs lacks consistent and accurate statistics on the country's number of refugees and asylum seekers (Amnesty International, 2019). Likewise, the African Check survey indicates that the refugee data in South Africa are

flawed, unreliable and often inconsistent (Stupart, 2016). The lack of accurate refugee data allows for assumptions that intensify prejudice and xenophobia towards refugees in South Africa (Lyon, 2014).

In South Africa's hostile environment, with the highest degree of inequality in the world, refugees do not receive any government assistance during an asylum application which leaves them with little means of subsistence (Claassen, 2017; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). The lack of support and the everyday challenges encountered by refugees pose a threat to their livelihoods and mental health in South Africa (Marshall, 2017). The delay in the asylum application process, determined solely by the Department of Home Affairs, which takes about 180 days to finalise the application, aggravates the problem of identification (Refworld, 2020). Protracted delays in the application process raised the number of pending applications to 184 200 cases in the recent past, rendering South Africa one of the countries with the largest number of cases pending for asylum seekers and refugees (Crush & Skinner, 2017). South Africa has the longest process of asylum adjudication in the world. Asylum seekers have sometimes stayed in limbo for more than a decade (Lawyers for Human Rights, 2018). South Africa has legislation and policies to protect the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers. Nevertheless, the country lacks the capacity and political will to enforce its laws, which is why refugees have been the target of xenophobic attacks (Amnesty International, 2019).

The complex crisis faced by refugees in South Africa is an urgent humanitarian issue that needs to be resolved to eliminate the prejudices and violations faced by innocent people fleeing conflict. The consideration of the livelihood problems encountered by refugees in South Africa is significant as their rights are protected by international law (Rutherford, 2020). Since 2008, South African communities have been continuously besieged by violent attacks on migrants and such violence has become a common daily activity towards those who cannot be identified as native South Africans (Landau, 2012). 'Xenophobia, especially against low-income, African and South-East Asian migrants and refugees, had been a feature of South African politics for many years' (United Nations Human Rights, 2022, p. 2). Xenophobic attacks in 2008 across South Africa caused 62 deaths, 670 were wounded, 100 000 were displaced, and many were raped in one month (Misago & Monson, 2010). At least twelve refugees were killed during xenophobic attacks in Cape Town in September 2019 (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2019c).

Based on the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights (Mr González Morales and Ms Tendayi Achiume), 'discrimination against foreign nationals in South Africa has become institutionalised, both in

government policy and in South African society as a whole' (United Nations Human Rights, 2022, 1). This results in violations of the rights to life and physical integrity and to a decent standard of living and the best health possible, as well as to increased risks of arbitrary arrests, torture, and forced deportation (United Nations Human Rights, 2022). Attacks on migrants and refugees have continued recently under the orchestration of Operation Dudula, a social media protest movement that has evolved into an umbrella for the mobilisation of violent demonstrations, 'vigilante violence, arson targeting migrant-owned homes and businesses, and even the murder of foreign nationals' (United Nations Human Rights, 2022, 2).

Nonetheless, despite an increase in instances of unconscionable discrimination and violence against foreign nationals, the livelihood challenges faced by refugees due to a lack of identity documents have been overlooked in South Africa (Marshall, 2017). Why do we need to care about foreign nationals in South Africa when South African citizens are safe? Currently, the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are being violated; tomorrow, the local population, lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender people, or women may be violated. Tolerating only one person to lose his or her constitutional rights legitimises a system of human rights abuses by the state that may lead most South African citizens to lose their rights (Lawyers for Human Rights, 2018). Left alone, refugees and asylum seekers depend for protection on the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights and international law such as the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. It is necessary to do more to protect their human rights.

Amendments to the 1994 Refugee Act

It has become more and more difficult to find refuge in South Africa. Three sets of amendments to the celebrated Refugee Act of 1998 were made in 2008, 2011 and 2017, but they did not take effect until January 2020 with the release of the corresponding regulations (Hobden, 2021). The 1994 Refugee Act was amended to include changes to the appeals process, the length of time a refugee can be granted permanent residency in the Republic of South Africa, the right of refugees to apply for work or study, and the reasons for which refugee and asylum status may be withdrawn (Moyo and Zanker, 2020; Nyoka, 2020). These changes are a blatant demonstration of the violation of the rights of those seeking asylum in South Africa. The modifications to the 1994 Refugee Act are disputable and reproduce unfair acts which have been extensively repudiated by the parliament of South Africa with input from civil society.

For instance, the changes to the appeals procedure tend to diminish the transparency of the appeals process. Prior to the changes, a quorum of

three staff members of the Refugee Appeal Authority were needed to make a judgement; now, just one staff member is sufficient (Olivier and Govindjee, 2021). The justification for this modification was that it would play a role in reducing the backlog but in reality it may result in the rejection of those who urgently require protection because of bias against foreign nationals (Hobden 2021).

The changes made to the Refugee Act of 1994 put the spotlight on a regime that is growing more restrictive, in part by making it easier to lose refugee status. According to Section 22 of the Refugee Amendment Act 2017, if a permit is not renewed after thirty days, it is considered to have been deserted (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). The serious consequence of such an approach is that it exposes asylum seekers to detention and expulsion and may subsequently contravene the principle of nonrefoulement. In the context of international human rights law, the concept of non-refoulement pledges that no one should be sent to a country where they would suffer torture, brutal, or humiliating treatment or other insurmountable harm (Molnár, 2016, Weissbrodt and Hortreiter, 1999).

Additional changes increase restrictions on the right to work, which was already difficult in practice (Amnesty International, 2019). Section 12 of the regulations under the amendment Act of 2017 came into force in January 2020 and require asylum seekers to declare their financial situation upon arrival; if they are able to support themselves for four months or have access to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees resources, they are denied the opportunity to work (Manby, 2020). There are restrictions also on the sectors of the economy in which refugees can work or study, as determined by the Standing Committee on Refugee Affairs within the department. The intelligence industry is one example of a field where asylum seekers are not authorised to work (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). These limitations make it obvious that the Department of Home Affairs is restricting labour opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers.

Before the amendments to the 1994 Refugee Act, refugee and asylum seekers were not banned by law from participating in political activities or related events. Refugees had the freedom to voice their opinions freely and were able to participate in political matters affecting their home countries (Olivier and Govindjee, 2021). With the introduction of new clauses contained in the amendment act (Article 4 subsection 2), refugees and asylum seekers are no longer allowed to participate in any form of political activity and if found to be participating in any activities that may be deemed political may lose their refugee status immediately (Hobden, 2020). Refugees are also now prevented from seeking help from the consular services of their countries in South Africa as they used to do when faced with

complicated issues related to their identity papers such as birth certificates, unfair treatment by case workers, or voting in elections in their home countries. This prohibition is quite shocking given the historical background of South Africa and anti-apartheid movements when many South African war liberation veterans had to seek refuge in neighbouring countries and participated in political matters of their country while in exile.

The broad political situation of countries in the southern African region requires cooperation to achieve democracy, and banning refugees from participating in political affairs of their respective countries worsens the refugee crisis in the region and continent at large rather than alleviates the influx of refugees and asylum seekers in the republic of South Africa.

The Institutional and Political Framework of South Africa

The institutional and political framework of South Africa now is dominated by exclusionary sentiments that perceive migrants and refugees as threat to the welfare of South African citizens. There are several political goals in refugee and migration governance. Migration governance is being used as a tool in local politics (Dodson and Crush, 2015). Xenophobic violence against refugee and migrant communities occurs on a regular basis since 2008 when the first spike of overt xenophobic attacks began. The restrictive approach works especially well as an instrument of leverage in blaming the government for its failures to address poverty and create jobs (Bourbeau, 2011). Refugees and asylum seekers are used as blameworthy parties, and refugee rights are continually eroded for domestic political gain. A focus on securitisation solidifies the anti-migrant and anti-refugee policy standpoint.

The South African regime's securitisation approach to migration entails instilling fear in migrants and responding in an explicitly securitised manner, focusing on tight borders, detention, and deportations (Neocosmos, 2008, Hammerstad, 2012). South Africa is not alone in pursuing a securitisation agenda, but it joins a growing list of countries that have placed their trust in walls and fences, as well as externalisation processes, to keep out irregular immigrants (Bourbeau, 2011). This is not simply another example of what is taking place in the Global North, even though that helps to justify it. The goal of border security has a strong foundation in South Africa. Its origins can be traced back to the apartheid era, when the state erected electric fences along the Mozambican and Zimbabwean borders to control the influx of irregular migrants (Crush, 1999). Mthembu-Salter et al. (2014) argued that even in the post-apartheid period there has been a strong focus on securing the border and on deportation. There are also long-standing stories that immigrants are deported from a South African Police operated

centre in Musina without inspection by the DHA, and that border agents deny transit visas, effectively removing any opportunity to request asylum (Sutton and Vigneswaran, 2011).

Along with the political profiteering of xenophobic argumentation, there are also frequent mass arrests and deportations of foreign nationals. As a result, rather than searching for those responsible for violence, mass arrests of suspected undocumented migrants in preparation for deportation are a common response to xenophobic acts of violence. The xenophobic discussion and horrific police conduct, in turn, continue to allow a marginalised community to express their rage, a phenomenon dubbed by Hammerstad as ‘grassroots level securitisation’ (Hammerstad, 2012). A significant number of undocumented migrants were rounded up during the aggressive Operation Fiela (“sweep clean”), which was implemented in response to xenophobic violence in 2015 with an additional round in 2018 that violated numerous legal and human rights standards (Dodson and Crush, 2015). More than 15000 people were deported and over 9000 people arrested. The actions were labelled state-sponsored xenophobia by civil society organisations (Dodson and Crush, 2015).

South Africa, which has one of the largest economies on the African continent, governs migration as primarily being negative. This includes subjecting refugees and asylum seekers to ridiculously high levels of bureaucracy, which can be regarded as administrative violence (Landau, 2018). The governance of migration in South Africa includes a blurring of the demarcation between skilled migrants and humanitarian migrants, which widens the protection gap created by the overwhelmed bureaucracy.

South Africa is archetypal in its depiction of how immigration and refugee policies become interconnected and woven into political interests. Peberdy (2016) argued that the exclusionary policies against migrants and asylum seekers are a major pillar of domestic legitimacy and have been so for years, even though migration is not particularly high on a political agenda that is dominated by issues like the economy, corruption, and electricity. According to Landau (2010) exclusion is both bureaucratically institutionalised and socially legitimate. The oppressive and bureaucratic processes have resulted in an overwhelmed DHA and a restrictive system, as evidenced by the continuing reduction in rights to work and study for people seeking asylum and refugees.

Institutionalised Xenophobia and Refugee Policy

After the collapse of apartheid in 1994 and the rise in migration from the African continent, xenophobic sentiments started surfacing and have occasionally led to brutality and violent attacks against African migrants in

South Africa (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). According to Misago (2019), such acts of xenophobia have been an ongoing phenomenon in South Africa's democratic system. For example, sixty-two people were violently murdered, including twenty-one South Africans, and more than one hundred thousand people were displaced in May 2008 (Misago 2019). The foundation of xenophobic rhetoric is the idea that one builds their identity by othering others, and it is also associated with poverty and dire economic situations. The politicians and the media each use rhetoric to sustain and support xenophobic narratives and discourses (Pillay, 2021). However, the border town of Musina, between Zimbabwe and South Africa, indicates that such rhetoric is not necessarily genuine since migrants have contributed significantly to South Africa's economy through both informal and formal trade, for instance. As a multicultural township and a centre for trade for both South African and foreign nationals, Musina shows that political and community leaders can play a more dynamic role in influencing public opinion on the contributions made by immigrants to communities (Pophiwa, 2017; Rukema & Pophiwa, 2020). Because the positive contributions of immigrants to the South African economy are generally overlooked; instead, much emphasis is placed on denouncing people seeking refuge from neighbouring nations (Crush & Skinner, 2017).

Systemic xenophobia and securitisation, both of which may be used by the ruling class as political capital, have a significant impact on the increasingly restrictive environment for refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa (Landau, 2018). At the same time, when it comes to institutionalised xenophobia, the DHA's lack of political will in protecting refugees and making the best of an arguably defective but primarily development-oriented migration policy is accentuated. In everything from hospitals to schools to DHA institutions, xenophobia is institutionalised and pervasive (Neocosmos, 2008). Although xenophobic violence occurs at the local level and is frequently an opportunity for local leaders to profit from, it is ultimately fostered by a state that creates the circumstances and the discourse to foster it (Landau and Misago, 2009). Thus xenophobic violence against immigrant and refugee communities persists on a regular basis, with at best a lack of political will to address it and, at worst, involvement among a variety of government officials and civil servants, such as the police (Polzer and Takabvirwa, 2010). Politicians may openly condemn xenophobic violence, but they fail to implement the appropriate regulations to stop it.

A significant marker of such failures is a lack of policy implementation (Peberdy, 2016). The sluggish pace in implementation of the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (NAP), which took nearly twenty years

to be formally adopted in 2019, after first being committed to at South Africa's third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban in 2001, is a key example of the lack of political commitment (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). Xenophobia is difficult to address in South Africa because it is primarily viewed as an economic issue rather than a political problem. According to Chigumadzi (2019), the South African government frequently assigns blame for xenophobic violence to criminal activity as a means of dodging accountability.

Bureaucratisation of the Department of Home Affairs

The DHA is charged with several mandates. It is the guardian, curator and verifier of the identity and status of South African citizens and non-South African residents. Identity documents enable people to have access to opportunities and benefits in both the public and commercial sectors as well as exercise their individual rights. Moreover, the DHA facilitates and regulates immigration and the movement of people through borders and points of entry into South Africa. It provides civic and immigration services at foreign missions and determines the status of asylum seekers and refugees in accordance with international law. Thus the DHA plays a crucial role in maintaining national security, supporting good international relations, and ensuring economic development. It is at the core of a national question in South Africa regarding irregular migrants and the consequences of migration on employment availability (Landau, 2018). In South Africa, rampant xenophobia, and nativism fuel popular outrage at the dire situation of the DHA (Landau and Misago, 2009).

While the DHA performs complex and dynamic functions, it is blamed for problems with the application processes for the documentation of foreign nationals in South Africa, including skilled migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. One of the major issues raised is a lack of political will to enhance the DHA's administration, as well as difficulties in the execution of policies, court orders, and laws (Amnesty International, 2019). In addition to problems in policy implementation, immigration regulations have become increasingly restrictive in the last decade, one of the alleged aims being to restrict foreign nationals from flooding the country. The republic of South Africa has adopted a refugee system that still operates under the name of protection but is marked by blatant securitisation exacerbating administrative and technical obstacles to refugee and asylum application processes (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). Refugees and asylum seekers are caught up in the skilled migrants struggle whereby South African citizens blame citizens of other nations for taking their jobs.

Bureaucracy at the DHA has only increased the strain on Refugee Receptive Offices. The strain of regularly renewing permits, frequently travelling long distances, and standing in long lines is untenable and can take decades (Amnesty International, 2019). For example, in 2015, South Africa had the world's largest backlog of asylum applications at various stages of processing (UNHCR, 2016). In 2020, the UNCHR reported that 188 296 asylum cases were pending in South Africa. According to an audit of the immigration procedures at the DHA in South Africa in 2019, the Auditor General of South Africa highlighted that clearing the backlog would take sixty-eight years (Moyo and Zanker, 2020). This indicates endemic systemic problems within the structure of the DHA. In support of this, Mbiyozo (2018) argued that although the DHA, like most government ministries in South Africa, faces capacity problems and rampant corruption, the DHA's workforce also play a role in how policies are implemented. The DHA's general operation is further hampered by the xenophobic attitudes of personnel towards foreign nationals especially from neighbouring African countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Malawi. For instance, the current minister of home affairs, Aaron Motsoaledi, has a history of using rhetoric that is hostile towards immigrants, blaming them for overcrowded hospitals while he was the minister of health (Chigumadzi, 2019).

Amnesty International (2019) noted that asylum applicants now face more complicated administrative burdens, and the procedure might take anywhere between five and ten years, or even up to nineteen years in some extreme cases. A huge population of asylum seekers are dependent on civil society organisations for their livelihood means and survival because they are not permitted to work or move around as a result of financial or administrative challenges (Vanyoro, 2021). This shows how formal state government may depend on non-state entities providing humanitarian aid. Several asylum seekers and refugees are reliant on shelter and food in one of the few severely underfunded locations in appalling conditions while many are stranded in Musina waiting to acquire their initial section 22 permits, which can take a few months now instead of days (Vanyoro, 2021). According to civil society organisations such as Amnesty International, the crisis of Zimbabwean citizens is exacerbated by additional restrictions that prevent them from registering an application at refugee reception centres in the Musina township. According to Amnesty International (2019), Zimbabweans are unable to obtain the limited humanitarian assistance provided by non-governmental organisations unless they apply for asylum at refugee reception facilities.

Employment and Livelihood in the Formal Economy

The right to work is critical for alleviating vulnerability, increasing resilience, and ensuring dignity (Carciotto & Ferraro, 2020). Harnessing refugees' skills can also benefit local economic activity and national development (Zetter & Ruadel, 2016). The right to decent employment, labour rights and social protection are key pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2030, which call for equality beyond legal status (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017). Unemployment undermines the ability of refugees to maintain their livelihoods in South Africa and elsewhere globally (Wedekind, Fakoush, & Alla-Mensah, 2019). It is difficult for refugees to survive without identity documents, in particular refugee or asylum permits (Crea, Loughry, O'Halloran, & Flannery, 2017). Refugees are a category of vulnerable people who have lost all their assets and lack the resources to meet their daily needs when they arrive in host countries. Similarly, when they fled their home countries due to war and persecution, they may not have had the time or opportunity to collect their belongings, including identification documents (Refugee Council of Australia, 2020). Denying them basic services is simply a continuation of the persecution they fled in search of better lives for themselves and their families.

The right to work, education and freedom of movement previously granted to asylum seekers and refugees by the 1998 Refugee Act was retracted by the Amendment Act to the 1998 Refugee Act which came into effect on 1 January 2020, as noted above. The Amendment Act prohibits refugees from competing in the labour market (Crush & Skinner, 2017) and from participating in any political affairs (Nyoka, 2020). The amendments marked the end of the generous asylum seeker and refugee system, which allowed refugees to find formal and informal employment in South Africa (Government Gazette, 2020).

Under the restrictions set out in the new Act, asylum seekers and refugees will not be allowed to take any form of employment during their first four months of arrival in South Africa. The ban on refugees seeking employment with pending adjudications exacerbates their livelihood crisis by creating difficulties in getting basics such as food, clothing, and rent (Government Gazette, 2020). Refugees and asylum seekers are not allowed to work in the private security sector, which means that they have limited choices compared to other people. Historically, the security industry has provided migrants with innumerable job opportunities as employment in this sector does not require professional qualifications. The changes do not support the argument often cited by politician that refugees take jobs in South

Africa since migrants often work in jobs that South Africans do not want, such as security, cleaning, and waiting (Landau, 2018). Another empirical study suggests that immigrants create jobs in South Africa rather than taking up jobs for local citizens (Ngota et al., 2017).

The employment of refugees in South Africa's formal economy is difficult because refugees must prove their legal status in the country, impossible without identity documents (Schockaert et al., 2020). The formal sector consists of highly paying jobs in banks, government offices, schools, higher education institutions, hospitals, clinics, and large stores such as Pick 'n Pay, OK, Spar and Mr Price. Formal jobs come with a wide array of benefits, such as health and unemployment insurance, pension benefits, healthy working conditions, and job security (Freedman, Crankshaw & Mutambara, 2020). It is difficult for refugees to acquire formal employment, primarily because they lack the identity documents required everywhere in the formal sector to prove they are legally in the country and have working rights (Greenwood, 2018). The challenges range from the lack of legal documentation and the xenophobia of employers against foreigners to the bureaucratic obstacles imposed on the labour market by different government agencies to protect South African employees (Kavuro, 2015).

The permits issued to refugees are not enough to prove eligibility for formal employment in South Africa, as employers do not accept temporary permits in most cases (Schockaert et al., 2020). While some refugees have good academic credentials, it is still difficult for them to get permanent or qualified employment in South Africa. A one refugee said:

After the studies, I didn't find a job and therefore I have always to look for something to help the family. The children must eat, you must see how to make them comfortable ... What can I say, the way I have been saying, it is by the grace of God we are surviving? By myself, I do not find a way. Maybe you go somewhere and do something, a little job, you find a little piece job, the minimum for the family (Crea et al., 2017, p. 673).

Refugees have expressed frustration at the type of permits granted to them by the Department of Home Affairs, which are not accepted by employers in the public sector. A refugee male has claimed:

It says asylum-seeker, it is written 'Work and study in the Republic'. I never get a job with my asylum papers. It is just helping me get around when the police are searching.

‘Where’s your paper’ Then I give them the paper. Then they leave me alone. Yeah. That is it. (Schockaert et al., 2020, p. 43).

Similarly,, another refugee said that:

Life is very difficult because they do not give us documents. Because the asylum papers that I have I cannot get work. They say you cannot work with this. Sometimes I saw a good job and because of the qualifications that I have, I was qualified, then I had to take them my documents. If I show them asylum papers. ‘Sorry. We need someone with a passport or ID’. I explained everything to them, but they did not understand (Schockaert et al., 2020, p. 43).

Simultaneously, language barriers also impede refugees from accessing formal sector jobs (Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). South Africans dominate the formal sector, and since some of the refugees do not speak English, they cannot converse well with their workmates. Many refugees come from other African countries to South Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, where English is a second language (Rogerson, 2016). They come to South Africa with a negligible degree of English proficiency which makes it difficult for them to communicate in professional businesses. Not being able to communicate in English effectively hinders the ability of refugees to seek formal employment in South Africa (Rugunanan & Smit, 2011) and a limited degree of English competence impedes refugees from interacting with other people in society.

The lack of formal employment makes refugees susceptible to chronic poverty in South Africa (McKenzie, Kelly, & Shanda, 2018). Jobs are difficult to find in the formal sector. Desperate refugees end up taking low paid jobs in the informal sector. Wages in the informal sector are not enough to meet refugees’ basic needs, such as food purchases and paying rentals (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). Yet the ability to hold full-time employment depends on legal documentation, such as asylum seekers or refugee permits (Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). Each refugee wants identity documents but struggles to possess them because of the complicated immigration system. Their livelihoods have been impacted in many ways. For example, refugees cannot afford to pay their bills, such as electricity, gas, and rents, which are exorbitant in South Africa (Nkomo, 2019).

Refugees make up the largest number of homeless people on the streets of South Africa and are often targeted by the police (Tenai & Mbewu, 2020). Many refugees are unable to pay their housing bills; thus, they are forced to live in shared accommodations. Shared accommodation poses many challenges to the well-being of refugees, such as a lack of privacy, sexual harassment of women, and cohabitation (Freedman et al., 2020). For example, a room costs about 3000 Rands per month and homelessness is on the rise in South Africa when few refugees can afford that sum if they are unemployed (Roets et al., 2016). Again, many refugees cannot afford to buy food because they are unemployed. Explaining how the lack of documentation has made refugees financially and socially vulnerable in South Africa, one refugee said, ‘there are the most vulnerable people living there. They could not even afford to buy bread, buy something to eat’ (Schockaert et al., 2020, p. 43).

The restrictive legislation instituted by the government of South Africa impoverishes many refugees (Le Courant, 2015). Refugees are ready to work for less than the minimum wage (R3500 per month), and women are often likely to work for even lower wages than men. Lower wages threaten the livelihoods of refugees (Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh, & Singh, 2005). Refugees are unable to provide basic needs for themselves and their children, such as adequate food, shelter, and clothing in South Africa (United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2019b). Poverty impacts refugees’ livelihoods and leaves them with no choice but to venture into the informal sector to support their lives.

In some instances, business owners tend to use violence to reduce foreign competition in the labour market (Greenwood, 2019). Extensive xenophobia attacks occurred in South Africa between 2008 and 2015, and refugees are still being hounded out of their homes if they fail to provide valid identification documents (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2016). One of the refugees said:

... I’m living with people who are not from where I am and sometimes, I don’t feel safe ... They are South African, so I do not know how they feel about it. Sometimes I feel like I am not safe because I do not know what people there think about me (Crea et al., 2017, p. 673).

The attacks on migrants between 2008 and 2015 were responsible for the destruction of property and the loss of livelihoods of refugees in South Africa (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009). Many of the refugee owned Spaza (informal, convenience) shops have been destroyed,

leaving people in poverty because they relied on income from their businesses. Moreover, poor socio-economic and service delivery conditions in South Africa provide a fertile ground for competition between citizens and refugees over scarce employment, business opportunities, housing, and social services (United Nations General Assembly, 2011). The competition for scarce resources instigates violent xenophobic acts against foreigners under the pretext that refugees are eating a share of the cake, which should be enjoyed by local people. These ill-fated attitudes hinder refugees from seeking formal employment and living decently in South Africa (Schulze, 2011). Xenophobic attacks result in the discrimination, abuse, and exploitation of refugees, creating a hostile environment for refugee involvement in public spheres.

Refugees as Adjunct Employees in the Informal Economy

Many refugees in South Africa have no alternative but to work in the informal sector (Stupart, 2016). Informal sectors that often employ refugees include restaurants, construction companies, the retail industry, agriculture, and the security sector (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2016). In the absence of financial and social assistance from the government or the Commission for Refugees, one of the main livelihood strategies of refugees is to create work for themselves in the informal economy (Crush & Dodson, 2017). Informal sector employment is characterised by low wages, lack of job security, discrimination, and long working hours (Mansour-Ille, 2018).

The hostile environment in the public sector has left no space for immigrants without the requisite legal documentation to get jobs, leaving refugees with limited survival strategies (Carciotto & Ferraro, 2020). Securing a regular high-paying job as an asylum seeker or a refugee is always challenging, if not impossible. Employers do not choose to recruit workers with temporary work permits (International Organisation for Migration, 2018). Almost all refugees work as informal employees - as security guards in parking areas, in car washes, hair salons and selling sweets and refreshments on the streets (Schockaert et al., 2020). Employers are hesitant to hire displaced persons with documents valid for a short period of time. Local authorities and the police may not recognise refugee identity cards and permits. As a result of desperation, refugees indulge in risky economic practices such as robbery and drug retailing (Landau et al., 2005).

However, risky as it is, the informal sector plays a critical role in sustaining the livelihoods of refugees in South Africa. By working in small jobs, refugees can raise money for their accommodation, food, clothing, and children's school fees (Crush & Skinner, 2017). Refugees do not benefit from government bursaries due to the lack of proof of identity. Nevertheless, they

are entitled to these rights under the Constitution of South Africa. The current restriction on the ban on refugees from employment in South Africa increases poverty and destitution, particularly in urban areas where many refugees live (Crush & Dodson, 2017).

The government of South Africa has expressed its intention to reduce the number of foreign-owned companies in South Africa (Polzer, 2010). Government officials claim that the domination of refugees in the informal sector has nurtured violence against foreign-owned enterprises and many South Africans claim that refugees compete unfairly and force them out of business (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2016). The positive economic impacts of foreign-owned businesses are intentionally overlooked to distort reality, however, and it is difficult to believe that immigrants are creating competition. There are no reliable data on the number of refugees employed in South Africa (Lawyers for Human Rights, 2018). But available evidence indicates that refugees are taking up low-paying jobs in the informal sector, such as cleaning and security. As a result, refugees are not competing in the job market with South Africans.

The informal economy has been one of the livelihood channels of refugees in South Africa. However, several foreign-owned companies and successful entrepreneurs have been targeted by the local population under state-sponsored xenophobic raids (Tawodzera & Chikanda, 2016). The purpose of the raids was to expel foreign business owners from South Africa. Distorted information that refugees generate competition incites hostility, which also results in violent protests. For example, in 2008 and 2012, the provincial government of Limpopo allowed harsh demonstrations against asylum seekers and refugees working in the informal sector. Many refugees were beaten up and deported back to their home countries, from which they had fled to seek protection and better life in South Africa (Crush & Skinner, 2017).

In 2012, informal businesses run by refugees were wrecked under “Operation Handstick”, an aggressive military-approach campaign to chase away foreigners (Stupart, 2016). In April 2015, another nationwide attack, Operation Fiela, as noted above, targeted migrant-owned enterprises (Rogerson, 2016). Since then, it has become difficult for refugees to set up businesses in South Africa which has severely impacted their livelihoods. Small businesses, such as Spaza shops, have sustained refugee livelihoods for an extended period (World Bank, 2017). The justification provided by the state for conducting Operation Fiela was that the government wanted to manage undocumented migrants. The main intention, however, was to fight refugees running businesses in South Africa. Specifically, Spaza shops have been targeted (Crush & Skinner, 2017).

Naledi Pandor, the Minister of International Relations for South Africa, said that South Africans believe that foreigners are taking advantage of their opportunities. The minister claimed that the migrant community had “displaced South Africans from what they thought would be new job opportunities for them, hence this rise in... anger” (Porter, 2019). Both formal and informal sector conditions are undesirable for developing the lives of the refugees in South Africa. Life is difficult as homeless persons do not have access to essential social services in South Africa. The government has not been willing to support the livelihoods of those fleeing from conflict and seeking international protection. There are many refugees who are agitated. They regret fleeing to South Africa because of the livelihood problems they experience every day in the country (Schockaert et al., 2020). A Congolese refugee, for example, said that

There is uncertainty in all aspects. There is that pressure. I want to go back home but there is no life at home. I want to stay but there are no papers and I do not know what will happen tomorrow. Then there is also xenophobia in South Africa, where everywhere you pass you are a foreigner. ‘You came for our job, you came for our women, you came for this and that’. So, you feel like you are left in the air. You don’t know from which leg to dance (Schockaert et al., 2020, p. 47).

The future of refugees is bleak in South Africa. Local authorities have a more significant role to play in ensuring that refugees have equal access to the job market. Employment is a significant indicator of poverty resilience and vulnerability (Carciotto & Ferraro, 2020). It is necessary to enact legislation that acknowledges the working rights of refugees (Betts, Omata, Rodgers, Sterck, & Stierna, 2019). The conditions for refugees to have access to the labour market both in the formal or informal sector without restrictions are vital to their integration and the sharing of local responsibility.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the employment challenges encountered by refugees without identity documents in the formal and informal economy of South Africa. The paper provided the context and some of the causes as to why it is difficult for asylum seekers and refugees to obtain identity documentation. The securitisation and exclusionary stance adopted by the South African republic towards immigrants and non-South African citizens

is largely contributing to the plight asylum seekers face in applying for identity papers. In addition, the arguments in the paper show that the lack of identity documents is a substantial impediment to the livelihoods of refugees in South Africa. For instance, refugees cannot be employed until they have proof of identity as employers do not accept temporary permits which most refugees possess. Yet, employment is a critical livelihood source of income, provided that the government of South Africa does not offer adequate financial assistance to refugees, or those seeking asylum in the republic. Refugees are struggling as the protective policy in South Africa has not been transformed into protective practices. Although South Africa is a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, and the South African Constitution recognises refugee rights, refugees do not enjoy their rights as enshrined in both domestic and international laws.

The incompetence of the Department of Home Affairs due to bureaucratisation, which takes far too long and fails to provide identity documents to refugees in a reasonable timeframe, is also to blame for the difficulties that refugees and asylum seekers face in South Africa. Desperation forces refugees to work in the informal economy where they are exploited and given low wages inadequate to secure their livelihoods. I argue that South Africa should honour its commitments to refugees' fundamental human rights and take a firm stance against racist and xenophobic attacks, which persist in the country despite the grave consequences for victims, the national economy, and the country's international reputation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude for the financial support provided by the Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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