

Fletcher MUNC II
Human Rights Council
Background Guide
Topic A: Refugees in South Africa



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Refugees in South Africa

The Situation:

In South Africa, there are currently 309,000¹ documented refugees who have been subject to xenophobic attacks² and have had their ability to leave the country effectively stripped². This has led to many refugees demanding a right to leave South Africa out of fear for their own safety; however, the UNHCR has repeatedly stated that the refugees need to remain in South Africa and has called it “generous host nation”³. This issue is compounded by many refugees being increasingly uncompetitive against South Africans in finding jobs, creating a large economic burden for the South African government. So far, the UNHCR has responded by creating refugee camps for the refugees which are protected, however many refugees are still actively protesting their inability to leave³. The UNHCR attempted to end the xenophobic attacks, however after a month of the meetings people amassed in a violent protest outside the building, and the protesters were evicted using police force⁶. Tensions continue to rise after the death of a South African minibus driver who was shot by Nigerians after seeing an alleged drug deal and attempting to report it, this incident among others has continued to contribute to a rise in xenophobic attacks and anti-refugee protests.

In many cities, such as Cape Town, the resources to house the refugees safely don't exist in a large enough quantity, which causes more protests, ultimately leading to more violence creating a cycle of violence⁸. Some churches have reached out to attempt to house the refugees, however this has led to an outbreak of chicken pox amongst the Methodist church, and concerns are being raised about the health of refugee community⁸.

The number of annual registered asylum seekers has been on the decline since 2015⁴, with the majority of the asylum seekers being men (67.42%) and the largest sources of male asylum seekers coming from Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, the DRC, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Malawi, Somalia, and Ghana. The 10 largest contributors for women are Zimbabwe, the DRC, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Somalia, India, Burundi, and Mozambique. Most of the refugees are young adults (19-35) at 80.08%.

The South African government has discussed making the remaining refugees permanent residents, but is also moving to reduce the political rights of refugees⁵ and is attempting to make it harder to achieve refugee status in South Africa by creating legislation that, as well as reducing political rights of refugees, also makes it harder for children and older people to enter the country as refugees. This legislation has been described by critics as creating a “paper wall” and has been criticized for not addressing the majority of the young adult refugees. However, proponents often cite the relatively high productivity of young adults as compared to children and seniors, which proponents believe justify the lack of legislation addressing that demographic specifically. Many of these refugees desire to be moved to Europe, however there are already 7-8 million migrants from Africa living in the EU⁹.

A solution is needed urgently, concerns that more violence and crime may occur without action are becoming more and more real as the days go by. Unfortunately, many of the countries these refugees are from are war torn or politically unstable, so sending these refugees back could result in their death, however a peaceful solution in those nations isn't out of the question which could allow for a safe return of the refugees. Many anti refugee protests continue to reaffirm their desire to have the refugees removed but doing so could put the lives of the refugees at risk. The refugees continue to lack safe shelter and questions regarding disease outbreaks are causing concerns amongst health experts. A solution is needed soon if we are to resolve this refugee crisis peacefully.

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