



Refugee Digest 49

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Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

People on the move of all categories continue to bear the brunt of the fallout from the pandemic. This is sometimes referred to as the 'disproportionate effect.' Three not unrelated issues on the South African political landscape have underlined this: the closure of the land border crossings; the call for comments on the draft *One-Stop Border Post* policy; and the discussion already underway about the desirability of providing the vaccine to undocumented migrants.

Pope Francis' words help provide a hermeneutic in approaching these issues: "The coronavirus crisis has highlighted the need to ensure the necessary protection for refugees in order to guarantee their dignity and protection."

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-06/pope-angelus-appeal-care-creation-migrants-refugees.html>

Some commentators have begun to explore the nexus between these three issues.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-01-08-drones-dinghies-and-an-army-helicopter-why-the-states-new-toys-wont-help-south-africas-response-to-covid-19/>

In SA, as the country entered its second spike, the President announced the closure of all 20 land border crossings for travel into and out of South Africa, with some six exceptions. One of the necessities for those wishing to cross borders is the possession of a negative COVID-19 certificate. 100 cases of COVID have been detected at the Beitbridge border post, intensifying the fear that congestion at border posts is potentially a 'super spreader' event.

<https://www.businessinsider.co.za/first-lockdown-extension-of-2021-what-this-means-for-borders-travel-and-restaurants-2021-1>

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2021-01-14-covid-19-closed-border-posts-creates-chaos-in-sa/>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2021-01-11-land-borders-shut-as-sa-struggles-to-contain-covid-19-infections/>

On 12th January 2021 the DHA Portfolio Committee visited the Beitbridge border post and witnessed the challenges at that crossing. In a statement later that day they called for the rapid passage of legislation and its implementation in order to avoid chaos at the borders, and requested an increase of SANDF and SAPS personnel, especially at a time when closed borders could result in an increase of illegal migration.

<https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/media-statement-one-stop-border-post-and-implementation-bma-solution-challenges-beitbridge>.

On 31st December 2020 the DHA called for public comments on the draft *One-Stop Border Post* policy. The idea of this policy is to streamline the passage of goods and people. It would, according to the draft, contribute to the African Continental Free Trade Area, and would also help avoid congestion at border posts.

https://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/draft-one-stop-border-post-policy-to-be-released-for-public-comment-in-early-2021-2020-12-04/rep_id:4136

<https://www.parliament.gov.za/news/one-stop-border-post-touted-solution-challenges-beit-bridge>

<https://pmg.org.za/call-for-comment/1010/>

The question of the accessibility of migrants and undocumented people to the COVID vaccination is emerging as a contentious issue. Some commentators fear that it will be a repeat of the hard-fought battle to ensure that anti-retroviral were available for everyone, regardless of status or documentation. Many argue that various categories of mobile people are amongst the most unprotected and therefore amongst the most vulnerable, and should thus have access to vaccinations. There is a strong argument for the government to protect the most vulnerable, and that mobile people should be included in plans for rolling out vaccinations.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/28/world/africa/covid-19-vaccines-south-africa.html>

<https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/11/e004085>

<https://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2021/1/5fff1afe4/qa-including-refugees-vaccine-rollout-key-ending-pandemic.html>

Around the world the desperation of migrant groups for a better life continues. A migrant caravan has begun in Central America and is moving towards Mexico in an attempt to cross into the USA. They have a belief that the new Administration will be more welcoming.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-55714865><https://www.npr.org/2021/01/18/958092745/migrant-caravan-thousands-move-into-guatemala-hoping-to-reach-u-s>

President Joe Biden is on record as saying that he hopes to resettle more refugees in 2021 than in the past few years. Many hope for a different narrative on mobile people under his administration than that which has dominated the past four years.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/biden-to-open-us-to-refugees-with-increase-in-resettlements-71531>

Mr Biden has also promised that he will sign an executive order re-uniting migrant families separated at the border. This will reverse one of the most cruel border policies.

<https://www.msnbc.com/american-voices/watch/biden-will-sign-executive-order-to-reunite-migrant-families-separated-at-the-border-99586118000>

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