



## ***Refugee Digest 76***

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

Over the past few weeks, countries which have the power to influence international narratives, policies and practices around issues relating to mobile people have robustly engaged in activities that have emphasised the politics of exclusion. We should be under no illusion that these trends will have an adverse influence on the security and wellbeing of this community. They will intensify the vulnerability that these communities already labour under, and will in many cases keep them captive to violence, poverty and the negative consequences of natural catastrophes. They will also deeply influence the negative approach of other countries in attempts to exclude mobile people from support and stability.

In the UK, where Rishi Sunak made the exclusion of migrants a key plank in his campaign for Prime Minister, recent policies allow for quick deportation for those arriving illegally, curtailing their access to the asylum system even though the majority to date come from countries such as Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. Critics have labelled the new policies as racist, unworkable and likely to create fresh problems, as well as doing nothing to resolve the backlog of 166 000 applicants.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/09/uk/uk-immigration-refugees-echr-illegal-bill-gbr-cmd/index.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/may/14/small-boats-bill-no-longer-will-of-people-to-turn-our-back-on-asylum-seekers>

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/09/uk/uk-immigration-refugees-echr-illegal-bill-gbr-cmd/index.html>

The Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking on this legislation in the House of Lords, called it “isolationist, morally unacceptable and politically impractical”. He reminded the House that 80% of migrants are located in nations of the global south and that the UK has cut aid to such countries, thereby worsening conditions and minimising available help in those countries.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wX7ayGMQrOk>

Across the Channel in France there has also been a crackdown on migrants and refugees. Reports in early May pointed out that French authorities sent unaccompanied minors back to the countries over whose borders they sought to cross. This is against various national and EU regulations.

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/48774/france-sending-unaccompanied-minors-back-to-italy-msf>

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/analysis/2023/01/09/EU-pushbacks-legal-asylum>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/podcasts/2023/5/10/why-is-france-cracking-down-on-migrants-in-the-indian-ocean>

Likewise, in the USA, the ongoing tensions around immigration, especially after the expiry of Title 42, have increased. Title 42, which was enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowed migrants to be returned across the southern border without due process. With the expiry of Title 42 many fear that the influx of migrants will now increase and that the immigration services will not be able to cope. It is predicted that migration and related issues will become key issues in next year's presidential elections.

<https://tinyurl.com/5x6f24a4>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/us-unveils-rule-rights-groups-say-stifles-right-to-seek-asylum>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/16/border-crisis-migrants-camps-solutions/>

The Catholic Bishops of the Border region of the USA have expressed solidarity with the migrants and pledged to serve them in the best ways possible.

<https://www.usccb.org/news/2023/statement-bishops-us-communities-along-us-mexico-border>

The comments of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishops of the southern border of the USA, and the reflection of Pope Francis for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees, all point to an entirely different discourse about mobile communities. Their words are a counter to the negative hegemonic discourse that has emerged, and the developing faith-based narrative must be used more robustly, especially in policy advocacy. Pope Francis' new message is below. The faith-based documents emphasise the centrality of human dignity as opposed to political expediency; the challenge of what is sometimes called 'burden sharing' (the joint responsibility to care for and protect the vulnerable); and the critical importance of enhancing safe, legal routes for migration.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/20230511-world-migrants-day-2023.html>

In SA, the deadline for the expiry of the Zimbabwe Exemption Permits looms ever closer. Many await the judgement of the Pretoria High Court on the ZEP cases. Some reports indicate that some ZEP holders will stay on in SA either until the last minute, or 'under the radar', if a positive outcome is not obtained.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=n-WZEwlJngQ&feature=endscreen>

<https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/zep-expiry-many-permit-holders-intend-to-stay-in-sa-until-very-last-minute-zimbabwean-ambassador-20230427>

At the end of March the Department of Home Affairs issued an extension until 31<sup>st</sup> December 2023 specifically for holders of long-term visas, namely work, business, study, relative and accompanying spouse visas. There has been confusion as to whether this applies to ZEP holders. It does not. The *status quo* for ZEP holders remains the same – they can apply for either waivers or alternative visas, as advised by DHA.

<https://neasa.co.za/zep-permits-clarity-amongst-confusion/>

The remnant of a group that began a long campaign for relocation to a third country, and was then offered either a return to their countries of origin or resettlement in local communities, still maintains that a return to local communities is dangerous.

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/refugees-say-they-fear-death-if-they-return-to-local-communities-20230513>

The long shadow of xenophobia continues to cover the land and, as has been pointed out recently, it contributes to the emotional landscapes at both personal and social levels. This is reinforced by political-speak and stereotyping, which we may expect to increase as next year's elections approach.

<https://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/473738/the-reality-of-living-in-south-africa-fear-racism-anxiety-xenophobia-crime>

The overall situation for migrants, refugees and displaced persons looks very bleak at the moment. We should thus take up the challenge posed by Pope Francis in the 109<sup>th</sup> Message for World Refugee and Migrants Day: "Joint efforts are needed by individual countries and the international community to ensure that all enjoy the right not to be forced to emigrate, in other words, the chance to live in peace and with dignity in one's own country."

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