

# CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

*A Case Study of Refugees in Towns*

Barnabas Ticha Muvhuti

# Contents

---

- About the RIT Project** **3**
- Location** **4**
- Introduction** **5**
- Methodology** **5**
- Overview of Refugees in South Africa** **7**
  - South African Refugee Policy 8
- Overview of Refugees in Cape Town** **9**
  - Mapping the Refugee Population 9
- The Urban Impact** **11**
  - Education Integration Challenges 11
  - Education and the Law 12
- The Refugee Experience** **12**
  - Language 12
  - Xenophobia & Integration 13
  - Somalis in Cape Town 13
  - Reflections on Collective Identity 14
- Conclusion** **15**
  - Obstacles and Lessons 15
  - The Future of Integration in Cape Town 18
- References** **19**

# About the RIT Project

---

This report is a case study of Refugees in Towns (RIT), a research project that aims to promote understanding of migrant and refugee experiences with integration—both formal and informal—in urban settings in the U.S. and around the world. Our case studies are ground in local knowledge. They are designed, conducted, and written by refugees and locals, capturing their voices and the perspectives of the communities in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen, and is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. It is funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

## Our goals are twofold

1. First, by gathering a range of case studies we are amassing a global data base that will help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant and refugee integration. These cases reveal global differences and similarities in the factors that enable and obstruct integration, and the different ways in which migrants and hosts perceive, co-exist, adapt, and struggle with integration. We draw our case studies from towns in resettlement countries (e.g. the United States); transit countries (e.g. Greece), and countries of first asylum (e.g. Lebanon). Our long-term goal is to build a global, grounded theory of integration.
2. Second, the RIT project seeks to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy and practice. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

## Why now?

The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policies through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. and globally are responding in a range of different ways: some are resisting national policy changes by declaring themselves to be “sanctuary cities,” while others are supporting travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we need deeper understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, other migrants, and their hosts interact. Local perspectives on these processes are not well represented in the scholarship on integration: our RIT project seeks to draw on—and give voice to—both refugee and host communities in their experiences with integration around the world.

## For more on RIT

On our website, there are many more case study reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world. Keep in touch: we regularly release more reports as our case study projects develop. There is also more information available about RIT’s researchers, goals, practical local outcomes, and theoretical analyses.

[www.refugeesintowns.org](http://www.refugeesintowns.org)

# Location

---



# Introduction

---

Six years ago, I was living on the historic Voortrekker Road in Parow, Cape Town, sharing a house with three brothers from the Democratic Republic of Congo. My next-door neighbors were immigrants from Kenya and Rwanda, and my Rwandan neighbor's two daughters were in Grades 8 and 9 at Maitland High School. Their mother was working at a family restaurant in Platteklouf, and she often asked me to help the girls with their homework. I noticed they were really doing well in Mathematics, but were struggling in subjects like History, Geography, and English. The elder one said she was not getting the help she needed from teachers and she struggled to cope. It seemed she was likely to repeat Grade 9 in the coming year. She had one close friend, a classmate from Kenya. The two siblings had less time to do their schoolwork when they started to help their mother at her work place. Their mother's income was not enough for rent, school fees, and to support the two younger siblings. A year later, the family was featured in a local paper, appealing for aid as the two siblings had been kicked out of school due to outstanding fees.

Two of the three brothers I was staying with had enrolled in different high schools. One said his

teacher for English language explained concepts in Afrikaans, a language he did not understand. He attended class with little help or motivation. He had no friends in the school. At the second brother's school the teachers were very helpful, and he even had a few South African friends with whom he would spend weekends. Despite their difficulties, both brothers passed their matric exams and completed Bachelor of Technology degrees at the Cape Peninsular University of Technology. They are now working in the city.

My experience with these families led me to focus this research project on the integration of first-generation immigrant students in Cape Town. I wanted to find out if conditions were still the same or have improved or worsened. I was also interested in the reasons for successful integration: were the brothers' different experiences more about their demeanors or about their schools? In this research, I am mainly interested in students' experience and how much schools are helping them integrate into South African society. This report documents some of this experience and makes suggestions about how first-generation students can be helped.

# Methodology

---

The research is a qualitative enquiry based on semi-structured questions, spatial mapping, and a desk review of existing documents on migrant integration in South Africa. I conducted ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews over four months from September to December 2017. My situation as a Zimbabwean immigrant who has been living in Cape Town for the past nine years, is crucial to this research. It influenced my assumptions and expectations and

the nature of the interviews I designed and carried out. Though I tried to be as objective as possible, I am conscious of my biases. This report does not aim to eliminate those biases, but rather to be aware of them and present *authentic* findings, rather than strictly *valid* findings (Mohamed & Saltsman, 2017).

After interviewing only two parents, I realized that most of the students were not going to voluntarily

avail their parents' phone numbers. Therefore, in line with adaptive sampling techniques (Thompson & Collins, 2002), I adjusted my line of questioning so that students let me know how often the school authorities get in touch with the parents, as well as checking this against what the authorities claimed to be doing for the parents, and how often.

Cape Town has a few Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working with refugees in schools and communities. Some have adopted or work with certain schools, mostly in the townships. Africa Unite, for example, works exclusively with schools in the townships of Gugulethu and "Europe." In order to include a diversity of experiences, I purposively selected four schools that are not in the townships but have a visible presence of immigrants, rather than going through referrals by the NGOs.

I was surprised by how difficult some administrative secretaries made it for me to meet the principals of the schools. Maybe they thought I would ask uncomfortable questions when they heard that my research focused on immigrants. At one school however, the friendly and welcoming Deputy Principal said to me: "If you are looking for this type of information, you have come to the right school." I was then surprised by how

uncomfortable and somehow confrontational the Principal of that school was — she tried to rush me through the interview. and denied me access to the teachers, saying I could only interview them if they volunteered to talk to me.

Except for two meetings I had with groups of students (one at the McDonald's eatery in Maitland and the other in the Cape Town Central Library), most of my interviews were at informal places like the train stations or the public taxi and bus stands. Interestingly, it was in these environments that the students divulged more information and were quite relaxed.



Students from different schools waiting for buses at the Tableview MyCiti Station to Parklands and other destinations.

### Interview Sampling Chart

Research participants and key informants	Men	Women
Number of individual research participants: N=40 Migrant participants were from the following countries: Democratic Republic of Congo (7), Zimbabwe (18), Rwanda (3), Lesotho (3), Swaziland (2), Burundi (2), Angola (1), Namibia (1), Mozambique (1). Zambia (1) and Saudi Arabia (1). All the migrants are enrolled in Grades 9-12 in the four high schools.	23	17
Age range	15-19	15-19
Number of key informants Key Informants and Organizations: Principals (2), Deputy Principals (2), Administrative Secretaries (2) and Teachers (2). Somali Association of South Africa, Scalabrini Centre, Western Cape Education Department.	4	5

I followed a non-representative “snowball” sampling strategy in choosing interviewees (Trost, 1986). I sought to interview at least ten students in each of the four schools. I knew a few of the students, especially the Zimbabweans, and asked them to introduce me to their friends or point me to foreign students they knew. Unsurprisingly, most of the interviewees in this sample were Zimbabweans. I tried to balance the numbers of males and females, and all the students I

interviewed fit within a 15-19 years age range. Most matriculants fall within this age cluster.

Of the 40 students I interviewed, 22 have study permits, 10 have asylum documents, and 8 have refugee status. Even though the media says South Africa has many undocumented immigrants, none of my interviewees openly admitted that they are undocumented.

# Overview of Refugees in South Africa

The migration of Africans from neighboring countries to South Africa can be traced back to the discovery of gold and diamonds. People came from as far as Malawi, Kenya, and Zambia to work on the mines of South Africa under the migrant labor system. Numbers of refugees escalated in the 1980s and 1990s because of civil wars in neighboring Mozambique and Angola. Economic and political problems in Zimbabwe post-2000, and the seemingly endless civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo have ensured that people keep trekking down south.

According to UNHCR (2016), South Africa received 35,400 individual asylum claims in 2016 (compared to 149,500 claims in 2009), of which Zimbabweans were the most numerous at 8,000, (a significant drop from the 17,800 Zimbabwean applicants in 2015). In 2016, there were 5,300 applications from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), 4,800 from Ethiopia, 3,300 from Nigeria, 1,600 from Somalia, and 2,800 from Bangladesh. By the end of 2016, 28,700 Somalis and 26,200 DRC nationals were living in South Africa. While many South Africans believe that African immigrants are flooding into their country, these figures are only a fraction of those received by poorer countries like Kenya and Uganda that are close to the epicenters of the

conflicts in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Burundi.

## Top 15 African countries of origin of asylum seekers

Country	Numbers
Zimbabwe	20,405
Ethiopia	10,176
DRC	8,029
Nigeria	7,431
Somalia	2,595
Malawi	2,310
Ghana	2,271
Congo Republic	1,485
Lesotho	1,437
Mozambique	1,220
Uganda	753
Burundi	678

National Immigration Information System, 31 January 2016

The South African government's figures for people applying for asylum in 2015 are somewhat different (Department of Home Affairs, 2017, p.29) from those of the UNHCR 2016, with 2015 figures much higher than those of 2016, but the top five sending countries are the same.

## South African Refugee Policy

---

South Africa's policy on asylum seekers and refugees largely follows internationally set regimes including the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (the centerpiece of international refugee protection). South Africa is party to these international treaties, as well as important regional conventions like the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa of 1969 and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of 1981.

The South African Refugees Act of 1998 and the Immigration Act of 2002 are the key pieces of national legislation (Ramoroka, 2014). Section 3 states that a person qualifies for refugee status if that person (PASSOP, 1998):

- [Fled] Out of fear of persecution for reasons of race, tribe, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group is outside of their country of their nationality and is unwilling or unable to give themselves to the protection of that country, or, not having a nationality and being outside the country of their former residence is unable, or unwilling out of fear, to return to it, or;
- Due to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disrupting public order in either part or the whole of their country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave their place of residence and seek refuge elsewhere or;
- Is a dependent of a person described above.

Asylum seekers are likewise protected, though they are not included in the refugee definition, as long as their application for asylum has not been rejected. (Ramoroka, 2014, p.13).

Data on the legal status of migrants are incomplete, particularly for those who are undocumented. The 2011 census showed almost 2.2 million people born in other countries, including economic migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. There is also a large population of undocumented migrants (Hanna, 2016). Of my interviewees, 22 have study permits, 8 have refugee statuses and 10 have asylum documents. For the sake of this study, the minimal benefits of finding out about undocumented status did not justify potential risks from their teachers and peers within the school and broader community. Most South Africans do not make any distinction based on legal status. They are all seen as "foreigners" or "refugees."

South Africa does not have a policy of putting refugees in camps. Both asylum seekers and those granted refugee status settle into local communities with the right to work, study, and start businesses. However, "While the policy of non-encampment can be fully justified, there was no provision made for providing indigent asylum seekers with basic food and accommodation, leading to the courts obliging the DHA (Department of Home Affairs) to consider issuing deserving cases with permits allowing them to work or study," (White Paper on International Migration, 2017, p.5). However, Crush (2017) argues that "the intention [of revising immigration laws as proposed in the White Paper] is to make South Africa undesirable by moving from an urban towards a border encampment model, denying asylum-seekers their current right to pursue livelihood while waiting for a hearing, and ensuring that no refugee ever qualifies for permanent residence."

In recent years, the government of South Africa introduced special permits to regularize the stay of Angolan, Lesotho, and Zimbabwean nationals in the South African Development Community (SADC). As stated in the White Paper (Department of Home Affairs, 2017, p.18), "While South Africa continues to advocate for the implementation of these regional policy instruments in various SADC platforms, it has adopted both unilateral and bilateral approaches in removing visa conditions

for SADC and other nationals outside of SADC. For instance, South Africa has implemented visa waivers, which are in line with the spirit of the Abuja Treaty with nationals of 11 of the 14 SADC countries. South Africa also implemented the Zimbabwe Special Permit (ZSP) and Lesotho Special Permit (LSP) to regularize the large numbers of Zimbabwean and Lesotho nationals residing in South Africa irregularly.”

Even those who were undocumented or with fraudulent documents were granted amnesty and

given a chance to regularize their stay. Based on this gesture, I argue that South African immigration laws uphold the concept of *Ubuntu*. This concept is not easy to explain in a foreign language like English, but Mokgoro (1998, p.2) attempts to define it as a “philosophy of life; represents personhood, humanity, humanness and morality; a metaphor that describes human solidarity [and] is central to the survival of communities.” There is a sense of *Ubuntu* in these policies, trying to respect and help the broader African family by South African authorities.

# Overview of Refugees in Cape Town

Cape Town is the legislative capital city of South Africa, and where the House of Parliament is located. It is the capital of the Western Cape Province, one of South Africa’s nine provinces. The city receives many immigrants from African countries and other parts of the world. Most are from the neighboring Southern African Development Community (SADC) member states. While most do apply for asylum on arrival, many are economic migrants fleeing hardships in the underdeveloped economies of the region (Lemanski, 2007). Among them are families, and many unaccompanied minors. The international migrants are joined by many rural South Africans coming from the Eastern Cape and other provinces.

## Mapping the Refugee Population

Stiff competition for jobs and other resources has led to vigorous local criticism of the country’s immigration model. There were outbreaks of violent xenophobia in 2008 and 2015 as locals blamed foreigners for stealing their jobs, and for escalating levels of crime. Those perceptions are encouraged by the negative



Southern Africa

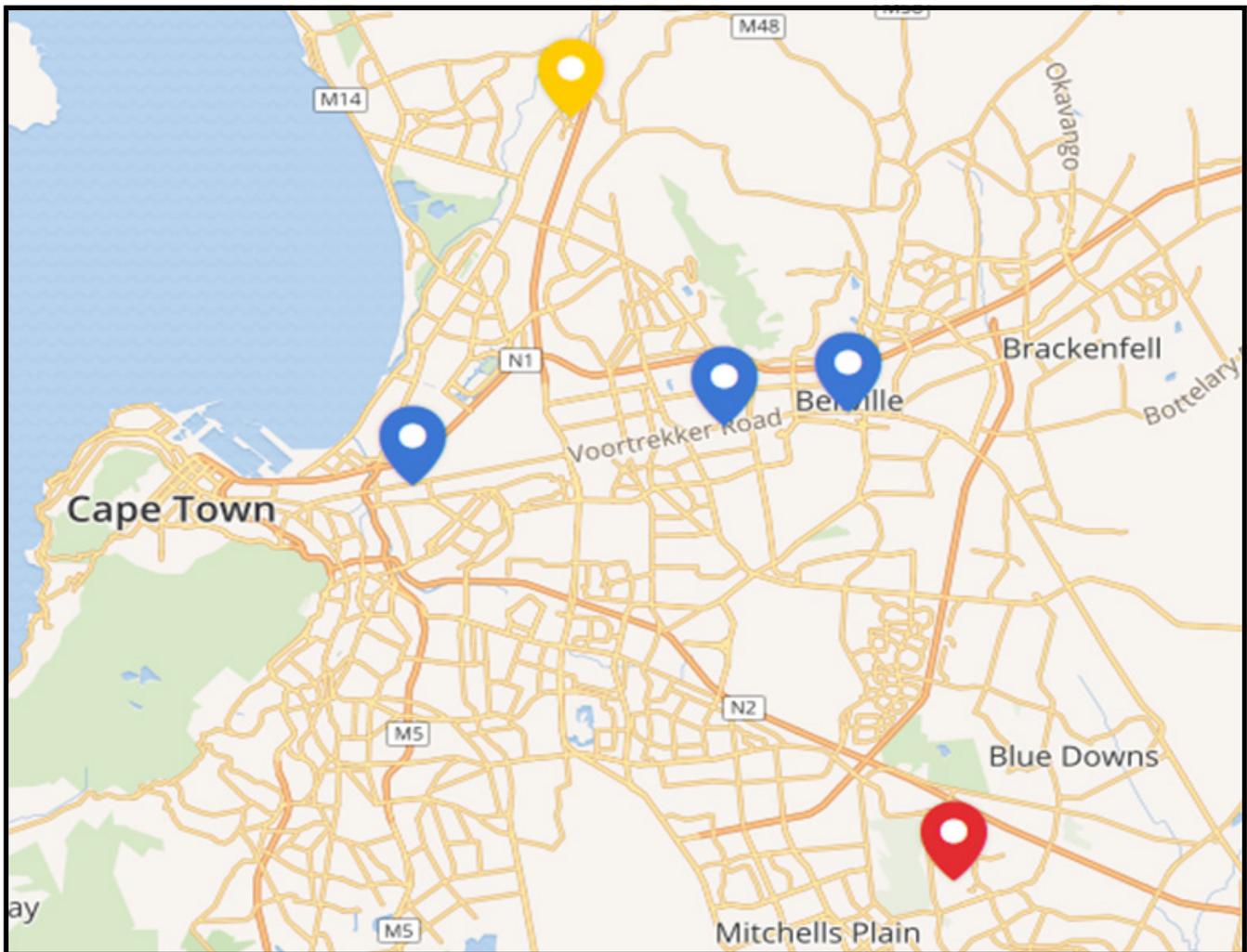
coverage of foreigners in the press and populist pronouncements by politicians. Clarence Tshitereke calls this the “frustration-scapegoat” attitude by the locals toward foreigners (IRIN, 1999). In the aftermath of the xenophobic attacks some African immigrants opted for safer areas outside the townships, which were the epicenters of the outbreaks.

Townships like Khayelitsha and Dunoon, located at the peripheries of Cape Town, are low-income, mixed housing (including informal housing, shanties, and untarred roads) areas, mainly populated by black South Africans, and where most foreigners would rather not live for fear of xenophobic attacks. The Congolese, for example, are concentrated in predominantly mixed-race suburbs like Parow and Maitland. Somalis are clustered in another such suburb, Bellville, which is nicknamed “Little Mogadishu” or “Som Town.” These suburbs are mixed use, and provide residencies and livelihoods for migrants: “It is estimated that about 5,000 Somalis live and own businesses in the Bellville CBD, and each month

### The term “township”

The term “township” has no formal definition but is commonly understood to refer to the underdeveloped, usually (but not only) urban, residential areas that during Apartheid were reserved for non-whites (Africans, Coloureds and Indians) who lived near or worked in areas that were designated ‘white only’ (under the Black Communities Development Act (Section 33) and Proclamation R293 of 1962, Proclamation R154 of 1983 and GN R1886 of 1990 in Trust Areas, National Home lands and Independent States). Pernegger and Godehart (2007, p.2)

**Map showing: (Blue) The areas of Maitland and Parow where there are many Zimbabwean and Congolese immigrants, and Bellville, where the Somali community is concentrated, all located along the historic Voortrekker Road (Orange) The periphery township of Dunoon (Red) The periphery township of Khayelitsha**



about 50 more Somalis enter the area,” (Nicholson, 2011).

The Somalis seem to prefer to cluster together for religious and business reasons, traveling to and from the townships daily where they operate tuck-shops or *spaza* shops (small food-selling retails). However, statistics show that Somalis are being harassed and even killed (in xenophobia-related murders) in those townships (Whittles,

2017). Congolese and Nigerians also cluster in areas away from the townships. However, Basotho, Swazis, and Zimbabweans can be found in the townships living among black South Africans. Their main integration advantage seems to be that they speak Bantu languages, which are the same family as IsiNdebele, IsiXhosa, IsiZulu, SeTswana, Venda, and others spoken locally. Therefore, they quickly adapt to speaking the local languages.

# The Urban Impact

## Education Integration Challenges

---

In South Africa there are academic, economic, and psychological challenges facing African refugee students that adversely affect their ability to integrate and cope well in school (Kanu, 2008). The challenges include language, foreign students' ability to establish friendships with their South African counterparts, changes in curriculum, the extent to which the educational environment was discriminatory (e.g. not being addressed by derogatory names by colleagues and teachers), equality of resource accessibility, and freedom to share cultural differences in a friendly and inclusive school environment that embraces diversity. These challenges can be overcome through support programs within the school and in the broader community.

The 15-19-year-old students in this study arrived in South Africa after completing their primary education in their respective countries (Angola, DR Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe). They were raised and educated in environments quite different from South Africa. For most of them, Cape Town was their first experience of a multicultural and multiracial society, as they come from societies that are almost entirely ethnically homogenous.

The primary challenges faced by these first-generation immigrant children include being economically disadvantaged, facing hostile host communities, and language barriers: those from DR Congo and Congo Brazzaville (part of Francophone Africa) speak French, and the ones from Mozambique and Angola (Lusophone Africa) speak Portuguese. Additionally, first-generation immigrant children have difficulties obtaining the permits and paperwork to enroll and stay in schools. Further, their schoolmates are prejudiced against them.

The sociological literature recognizes schools as the secondary agent of socialization, after the family. Many immigrant students experience disruption of the curriculum as the South African system of education is different from that in other former English and French colonies in Africa. As such, the school both teachers and fellow students—has a crucial role to play in the integration of young immigrants, enabling them to become proud members of the school, with equal access to opportunities and resources.

## Education and the Law

---

The Western Cape Education Department's (WCED) “Admissions Policy for Ordinary Public Schools,” under the subtitle “Admission of

non-citizens” clearly states what is required of non-South African students to study in South African schools (Western Cape Government, 2017). However, some officials interpret these laws differently in practice. An example is when students whose parents have asylum permits are asked to produce study permits because the school authorities misinterpret the law. Karabo Ozah, an attorney and Deputy Director of the Centre for Child Law, states that this “is not the correct interpretation of the law,” (Gwala, 2017).

I got interesting responses from students and school authorities when I asked them about the application of these laws. At one high school, the school does not ask for an asylum document or study permit when students enroll. The issue only arises when they write matric exams (final

high school exams required for graduation and university entry), for which they need these documents. According to the school principal: “We allow them to learn, but they cannot sit for an exam as they will not be able to get their certificates.” At another high school, the administrative secretary said they admit students as “they have a right to learn,” but the school goes a step further in assisting with a letter to the University of Cape Town Law Clinic or Scalabrini Centre. The law clinic and school assist the students and their parents in applying for documents at the Department of Home Affairs. One school secretary said the WCED fines them R3,000 (approximately USD 250) for every undocumented student they admit, a claim that was strongly refuted by the WCED officials.

# The Refugee Experience

## Language

At the four schools selected for this case study, English is the primary mode of instruction and compulsory for all students. In addition, students are required to learn a second language, either Afrikaans or IsiXhosa. Mastering a local language enables foreign students to communicate at all levels of the society and promotes easier integration into the local community.

More than half of the students I interviewed were comfortable saying a few words in these languages even when their colleagues interjected and laughed, and at times corrected them. It appears they are taking to these languages well. However, the other half were not so keen to demonstrate or “show off.” Some said they are just taking these classes for exam purposes. These students are not so keen on learning a language they will never utilize when they return to their home countries. My own view is that South Africa

is a powerful nation with multinational corporations throughout Africa, and making it compulsory for foreign students to learn a local language appears like an attempt at assimilation akin to the French colonial model.

All four schools have a high number of students who speak French, mostly from DRC. Some schools offer no French classes, and those that do, such as Rhodes High, charge extra for French



A group of students from Maitland High School.

class. Parents appear to be comfortable with that arrangement because they think their children will not stay in South Africa forever and they want to equip them with the language that would make it easier for them back in their home countries.

Although they do not offer French classes, Maitland and Blouberg High Schools recommend pupils to established French teachers and tutors outside the school. For this outside instruction, parents foot the bill as agreed with educators. The Principal of Vista High said that the school had no such arrangement for its students or a plan to do so despite having many students who studied in French at the primary level in their home country. The deputy principal of Blouberg said it would be good if the schools could let the students drop either IsiXhosa or Afrikaans for French, but the problem lies with enrolment at South African universities, where students are required to have a local language on matriculating from the South African school system.

## Xenophobia & Integration

---

One of my most interesting discussions was with four students from Zimbabwe. I wanted to find out who their friends at school were, if they ever faced discrimination and if they were ever called derogatory names by their South African schoolmates and teachers. These questions induced heated debate. Three of them agreed they had no South African friends, and preferred to hang around on their own. One who spoke IsiXhosa and Afrikaans accused the other three of isolating themselves, and even lying when they claimed they are often called by strange and uncomfortable names. In another interview with students who are prefects, they told me that students respected each other all the time, and would not say anything negative about their colleagues. It seemed like the prefects felt they had a duty to defend the image of the institution. However, a third of the students I interviewed made it clear they were more comfortable in the company of other foreigners than with South African nationals. A small group of Zimbabweans and Congolese students from Vista High included

a friend from Saudi Arabia. None said they had experienced being called names.

The Principal of Vista High said cases of xenophobic name-calling do happen, and the school takes such incidents seriously. Students are cautioned and counseled on this type of behavior because sometimes they say these things without attaching meaning to the names. A teacher from Zimbabwe said students at Bloubergstrant respect foreign students because they like and respect the foreign teachers serving in the school, seeing them as role models. The staff at Blouberg High School is diverse: 13 are white, and 15 are black, among them are 3 Zimbabweans. One deputy principal said some of the most hardworking and best students and teachers at the school are foreign. Each of the four schools has at least two expatriates among the teaching staff.

## Somalis in Cape Town

---

Whether one is in the center of Cape Town or in the townships, there is bound to be a *spaza* shop (convenience store) nearby, with a good chance that the shop operator is a Somali. However, while Somalis work in a range of neighborhoods, Somali children are conspicuously absent in all four schools in this study. It could be, as one researcher says, that “Many Somali parents are not sending their children to South Africa’s public schools because they are intimidated by the official processes required to get their children into school and because of the discrimination foreign pupils frequently experienced there,” (Nkosi, 2011).

To counter the problem, the Somalis founded a school called Bellville Education Centre in the area where the Somali community lives. It was founded by the Somali Association of South Africa, with the help of the Scalabrini Centre (Washinyira, 2014). The school’s webpage says: “Although the BEC is open to refugees and immigrants from any origin, our current enrollment is comprised entirely of adult Somali refugees,” (Bellville Education Centre, 2017). However, news reports suggest that the school is open to students of all ages. It is possible that stating that the institution is entirely for the

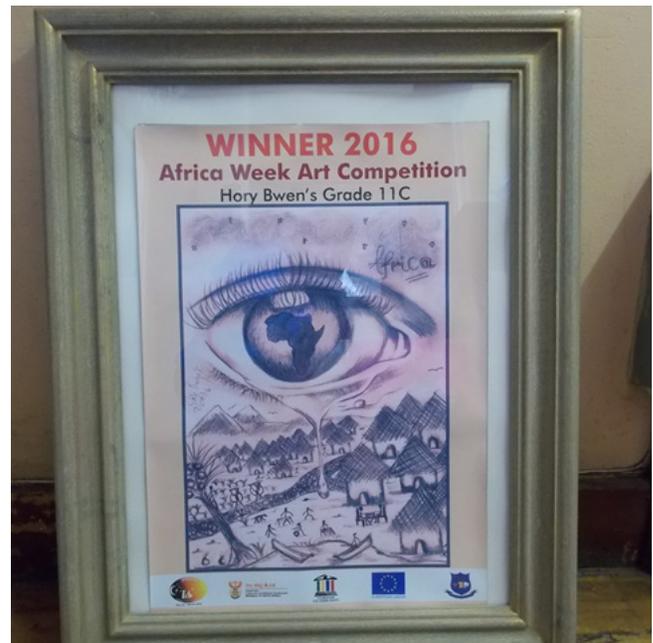
adult Somali refugees enables them to “safely” operate without any legal challenges related to the exclusion of other communities, as they would be seen to be operating within the laws of the country. My attempts to explore whether the school was started as a “safe zone” for Somali children were not successful, however. When I visited the Scalabrini Centre, I was told to put my request in email, which did not get a response. When I phoned Abdikadir Mohamed of the Somali Association of South Africa, he said he was too busy to make an appointment, and that he “would not be able to answer a question about [his] community over the phone.”

## Reflections on Collective Identity

In South Africa, Africa Day is not marked by an official public holiday, as it is in most African countries, and schools do little to acknowledge the day. South Africa is widely viewed by its neighbors as behaving like a nation detached. “South Africa is largely insulated from the rest of the continent. The rest of Africa, however, is very aware of what’s going on here,” (Louw-Vaudran, 2016). On Africa Day 2001, former president Thabo Mbeki, “blamed the levels of xenophobia on the lack of knowledge about the African continent,” (Mshubeki, 2016). These sentiments were widely shared after the xenophobic outbreaks in 2008 and 2015, when the rest of Africa reflected on the sacrifices they made in the fight against the apartheid regime. It was argued that South Africa should not tolerate the killing of fellow Africans (Heleta, 2015). Yet the most that is done in all four schools is the celebration of Africa Week at Maitland High School when students showcase arts from their diverse backgrounds. The other three schools just encourage students to wear their national colors on the 25th of May.

The schools generally seem to be helping first-generation immigrants to fit in, and some schools go the extra mile. For example, there was a case of two brothers whose parents were deported for lack of proper documents, and the school negotiated with their landlord to allow them to

stay to the end of the year. Another encouraging gesture is that the schools are proud of their alumni that have made it to the top universities in the country. They sometimes bring them back to say a few encouraging words to matriculants and attend award ceremonies. Among them are foreigners.



Maitland High School celebrates Africa Week.

# Conclusion

---

## Obstacles and Lessons

---

Here are a few suggestions on how to promote refugee and other migrant integration in Cape Town.

First, French should be offered in all schools. South Africa has eleven official languages, and one school cannot offer them all—let alone the language of the Khoisan who are the aboriginal communities of this land. But French comes with its own advantages over the local languages in a cosmopolitan metropolitan space like Cape Town. While some argue that the language is “colonial,” and teaching it flies in the face of the decolonization process and agenda, it would be beneficial for South African students as it fosters better understanding and appreciation of other foreign cultures, particularly Francophone Africa, a region providing a huge number of immigrants to South Africa. Such a move would minimize the disruption in the learning process caused by changing countries. Like English, these languages build effective linkages between communities and nations in an age of globalization.

Second, the education department should develop a toolkit to help educators deal with immigrant students. Teachers should have regular workshops where migration issues are discussed. This would help them prepare for the increasing numbers of immigrants in the schools. The teaching and learning processes within these multicultural environments can be very complicated, and a program could help both educators and students understand each other’s experiences and dilemmas. Teachers should also have help from experts working in NGOs. Professional psychologists could be brought in to assist, as some immigrant students come from traumatic environments. The schools should consider employing at least one social worker, who could help counsel students. There are many skilled immigrants who can help as volunteers in these capacities.

A helpful model comes from Maitland High School, which has information sheets of all the organizations that help foreign students in need of assistance. The secretary informed me that they make this information available to all the immigrants in the school. This saves time and helps students and parents make informed decisions in difficult times. All schools should emulate this example.

Third, although all the students I interviewed claimed that they had study permits, refugee statuses and asylum permits, it is not encouraging to hear that the Department of Home Affairs usually issues the asylum documents for a period of either three or six months only. That means at some point in the year, the students have to stay away from school and join the long queues at Home Affairs to renew their documents. At times, the process takes days significantly disrupting the students who must stand in queues instead of focusing on study, work, or fulfilling activities. It would not be surprising if some students never renew permits in time, or give up on the process. These permits should be offered for at least a full calendar year.

Fourth, it is well reported in the local and national press that South Africa has a chronic shortage of qualified teachers (Phakathi, 2017; Savides, 2017), yet there are many qualified teachers from the region and Africa who have received quality training in their home countries, but work menial jobs in South Africa as they cannot secure the permits that would allow them to teach within the South African education system. Again, the problem lies with the Department of Home Affairs. These teachers are well equipped to help both immigrants and South African students. Providing them with permits and regularizing their stay can only be of mutual benefit.

Students would also benefit from a better appreciation of African geopolitics, and schools’ curriculums need to focus more on the role played by South Africa and other countries in Africa. That



### **Who is a Refugee?**

A refugee is any person who is forced to leave their country and seek the protection of another country. The main reason for leaving their country relate to persecution because of one's, race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. The other reason relates to events seriously disturbing peace or public order such as internal conflicts, wars or serious violations of one's human rights.

A refugee is only able to go back to their country when the conditions which led to such person leaving it to begin with, no longer exist.

### **Is South Africa responsible to assist refugees?**

Yes. The South African Government has agreed to international agreements relating to the status of refugees including the *1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, the *1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*. South Africa also has a national law, the *Refugees Act 1998*, which deals with refugees in the country.

The South African Government has committed itself and its people to protecting and assisting refugees as required by its international and national obligations under the law.

Information given to students at Maitland High School to educate of them of their rights.



### **Rights of Refugees**

Refugees enjoy basic human rights under South Africa's Constitution, including the right:

- Not to be forcibly deported from the country except as provided for under its international and national obligations;
- To be part of non political and non profit making associations and trade unions;
- To acquire movable and immovable property;
- To work;
- To attend primary, secondary and tertiary education;
- To access primary and emergency health care.
- To be referred for further medical treatment;
- To an identity and travel document;
- To pursue the unity of the family.

### **Refugees' Responsibilities**

Refugees must respect and obey the laws and regulations of South Africa, including steps taken for the maintenance of public order.

Like everyone living in South Africa refugees are not above the law of the country. If they engage in illegal activities or violate any law, they may be charged in accordance with the relevant laws of the country.

Information given to immigrants at Maitland High School to educate them of their rights.

**EDUCATION & SKILLS TRAINING**

**ARESTA** (Agency for Refugee Education, Skills Training & Advoc.)  
 Address: Foundation for Community Work, 22 Springbok Street/Protea Street (between Joseph Stone Auditorium), Kewtown Athlone 7764 [www.aresta.org.za](http://www.aresta.org.za)  
 Hours: Monday to Thursday 9:00-16:30; Friday 9:00-15:30  
 Tel: 265; Free English literacy classes: Beginner, Intermediate & Advanced Levels (each Class twice a week in Athlone and Retreat), sewing project, beading class, Vocational Skills Trainings (hospitality services, business, Computer Course), Refugee Rights Education & Awareness Programme.

**Cape Town Refugee Centre** (see Welfare and Accommodation Help)  
 Services: facilitates translation, evaluation of tertiary diplomas from countries of origin & facilitates registration of professionals with Councils of their respective professions (on Wednesdays); contributes with minimal finance in the outsourcing of vocational skills for refugee/asylum seeker prospective trainees; technical and practical courses such as plumbing, welding, refrigeration, plastering, filing, motor mechanic, home basic care, catering (take contact for the exhaustive list).

**St. Joseph's Adult Education Programme** ☎ (021) 685 1257 / Fax: 021 686 9295  
 Address: 21 Belmont Road, Rondebosch 7700 [www.stjosephsrep.co.za](http://www.stjosephsrep.co.za)  
 Services: Free literacy classes in English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa (on Saturday); For learning students only: free childcare facilities and free trainings in sewing, photography, business skills, computer skills, vegetarian cooking and alternative health skills.

**Shane Global Language Centres** ☎ (021) 419 8524 / [www.shaneglobal.co.za](http://www.shaneglobal.co.za)  
 Address: 5 Moorings, Portwood Business Park, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town 8002  
 Hours: Monday to Friday 08:00 - 17:00  
 Services: Free basic English Classes (full weeks during one month ½).

**Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town** (see Welfare and Accommodation Help)  
 Services: Free basic English lessons, life skills, computer course (450 rands), visual arts and sewing project; assistance to highly skilled refugees in attaining South African accreditation for their qualifications. Computers are available for use.

**Maryland Centre**  
 Address: Summit Road, Hamover Park 7780  
 Services: Free basic English lessons (twice a week).  
 ☎ 021 692 1355  
 Email: [info@cauliff.co.za](mailto:info@cauliff.co.za)

**AFRISA [Alliance for Refugees in South Africa]** ☎ (021) 421 2348/Fax: (021) 421 2358  
 Address: 9<sup>th</sup> Floor, Thibault House, Thibault Square, Cape Town 8001  
 Services: Free basic English lessons, free computer classes (3 months); Financial studies; Sewing training & production; arts & crafts' income generation project; Job placements; African culture, sport & art events.

**Whole World Women Association** [coordinatorwholeworldwomen@yahoo.com](mailto:coordinatorwholeworldwomen@yahoo.com)  
 Address: Community House, 41 Salt River Road, Salt River  
 Services: Poetry, Theatre, Writing Projects for refugee women; life skills workshops.  
 ☎ 0837 237 809

4

• Distribution: ARESTA — Printing: MAGI -

**CAPE TOWN REFUGEE & ASYLUM SEEKER SERVICE PROVIDERS**

February 2009

**WELFARE & ACCOMMODATION HELP**

**Cape Town Refugee Centre**  
 Address: F12 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Wynberg Centre (in front of the Post Office), 123 Main Road, Wynberg 7800.  
 ☎ (021) 762 9670

Hours: Monday and Tuesday 9:00 to 12:00 without appointments  
 Thursday 9:00-12:00 with appointment; no clients on Wednesday and Friday  
 Services: Assistance to vulnerable refugees/asylum seekers with food stamps and facilitation of access to shelters. Assistance with minor medical costs, contribution towards the payment of school fees, uniforms and stationery.

**Bonne Esperance Shelter for Women and Children (a project from the Catholic Welfare and Development -CWD-)**  
 ☎ (021) 691 8664

Address: 4 Lower Ottery Road (opposite Philippi new police station), Philippi 7750  
 Services: Shelter for vulnerable refugee/asylum seeker women & children that are new in South Africa (first 6 months); food, toiletries and clothing; schooling (crèche); trainings and workshops; women empowerment programme (parenting, hygiene, reproductive health, healing of memories); orientation & integration.  
 Referral from Cape Town Refugee Centre required.

**Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town**  
 ☎ (021) 465 6433  
 Address: 47 Commercial Street, Cape Town 8001 [www.development.scalabrini.net](http://www.development.scalabrini.net)  
 Services: Wednesday 08:30-12:00 → limited assistance with basic food and clothing needs for newly arrived asylum seekers (first 6 months in Cape Town); assistance to disabled refugees (basic needs, transport, access to Home Affairs, hospitals and disability grants); Children's Home for unaccompanied minors (girls or boys aged 5 - 13); spiritual counseling (Saint Agnes catholic Church, Dublin Street, Woodstock); Saturday 15:00 prayer meeting; Sunday 11:30 Holy Mass (in French).

**The Ark Shelter**  
 ☎ (021) 843 3927 / Email: [jackark@mweb.co.za](mailto:jackark@mweb.co.za)  
 Address: 5 Old Fourie Road, opposite Section 3, Mileni 7131, New Way off Ramp N2  
 Services: Provision of shelter and food for refugees/asylum seekers (men, women, children and families). Referral from Cape Town Refugee Centre required.

**African Disabled Refugee Organization** ☎ 073 195 0594 / Fax: (021) 421 7105  
 Address: 22 Alfred Street, Cape Town 8001  
 Email: [adro@webmail.co.za](mailto:adro@webmail.co.za)  
 Serv.: Advocacy, material & moral assistance to disabled refugees/asylum seekers.

**LEGAL ADVICE**

**University of Cape Town (UCT) Law Clinic**  
 ☎ (021) 650 3775  
 Address: 4<sup>th</sup> Level, Kramer Law School Building, 1 Stanley Road Middle Campus  
 University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7701  
 Email: [uctlawclinic@uct.ac.za](mailto:uctlawclinic@uct.ac.za)  
 Hours: Monday to Thursday 08:30-13:00 (No appointment necessary)  
 Services: All services for refugees/asylum seekers are free of charge. General legal advice to refugees/asylum seekers; representing refugee clients at appeal hearings; providing assistance with family reunification, voluntary repatriation and resettlement applications; liaising with Home Affairs on issues affecting refugees /

will go a long way in changing teacher and student attitudes towards immigrants. As Heleta (2015) sums up, “this kind of teaching and engagement can also happen in high schools. South Africa’s government has already suggested that making History a compulsory school subject could help to prevent xenophobia.”

## The Future of Integration in Cape Town

---

The inclusion of immigrants in the schools of Cape Town enables South African students to learn from foreigners as much as immigrants are learning from the locals. Students have an opportunity to teach and learn from each other. Two South African girls from Vista High School happily greeted me in Lingala when they saw me talking to students from the DRC (they assumed I was Congolese). This was quite an encouraging sign that students are learning something from each other.

Xenophobic attitudes are held by many frustrated older people who believe foreigners are taking their jobs and committing crimes, but young people at school learning alongside immigrants see that those from other African countries are not so different. They even see some of the immigrant students doing menial jobs in a bid to help their parents. That can only help instill in local children the idea of hard work.

“Research shows that despite barriers, immigrant students often hold high aspirations for themselves. These high aspirations make them more likely to put in greater effort to take advantage of educational opportunities and succeed academically. This is part of a phenomenon known as the immigrant paradox,” (McManus, 2016). My experiences and observations suggest that immigrants in South Africa compare their lives with those of citizens and aspire to do better. One deputy principal said clearly the immigrant students seem to work extra hard.

Foreign students face a range of challenges, from switching to a new curriculum, to differing language of instruction, to xenophobia, to the need to work to help their parents in low paying jobs. It is easy for them to lose interest in school or even lose hope in life. They need extra motivation to concentrate and do well. The schools in Cape Town provide a platform for them to learn, albeit with challenges. What I encountered in this study left me satisfied that the schools are doing a lot to help the students integrate.

However, there is room for improvement: instructor and migrant student workshops; changes to the learning permit length; more accessible options for strategic language instruction like French; and changes to curriculums to focus more on the region and world rather than exclusively South Africa. With increasing calls for decolonization and transformation within South African education institutions, there is a growing awareness of Africa and appreciation of African neighbors. It is evident that the schools are taking strides to help students integrate, making the future look brighter for immigrants in Cape Town.

# References

---

Ager A. and Strang, A. (2008). Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 21, Issue 2. June 2008: 166-191. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>

Crush, J. (2017). Op-Ed: Myths and misinformation obstruct path to a better migration environment. *Daily Maverick*. Available: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2017-08-31-op-ed-myths-and-misinformation-obstruct-path-to-a-better-migration-environment/#.WqAsLeexXIU>

Department of Home Affairs. (2017). WHITE PAPER ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION FOR SOUTH AFRICA. Available: <http://www.dha.gov.za/WhitePaperonInternationalMigration-20170602.pdf>

Gwala, X. (2017). What the Law Says about Admission of Immigrant Children in SA Schools. *WN News*. Available: <http://ewn.co.za/2017/03/03/listen-what-the-law-says-about-admission-of-immigrant-children-in-sa-schools>

Hanna, H. (2016). How teachers can help migrant students feel more included. *The Conversation*. Available: <https://theconversation.com/how-teachers-can-help-migrant-students-feel-more-included-56760>

Heleta, S. (2015). Teaching students about Africa may be one way to stem xenophobia. *The Conversation*. Available: <https://theconversation.com/teaching-students-about-africa-may-be-one-way-to-stem-xenophobia-50083>

IRIN. (1999). Deprivation breeds xenophobia. Available: <http://www.irinnews.org/news/1999/09/17-1>

Kanu, Y. (2008). Educational Needs and Barriers for African Refugee Students in Manitoba. University of Manitoba. *Canadian Journal of Education*; Toronto Vol.31, Iss. 4. Available: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/215372453/fulltextPDF/E4523EEB4123430CPQ/1?accountid=14500>

Lemanski, C. (2007). Global cities in the South: deepening social and spatial polarisation in Cape Town. *Cities*, 24(6), pp.448-461.

Louw-Vaudran, L. (2016). "Is South Africa a continental superpower and/or neo-colonialist? 702. Available: <http://www.702.co.za>

McManus, M. (2016). Here's why immigrant students perform poorly. *The Conversation*. Available: <https://theconversation.com/heres-why-immigrant-students-perform-poorly-52568>

Mshubeki, X. (2016). Xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa: A Theological Reflection.

Mohamed, A. and Saltsman, A. (2017). Searching for "participation" in participatory research with forced migrants. In *Conducting Research with Refugees*. Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies. Available: [http://www.academia.edu/34118973/Conducting\\_Research\\_with\\_Refugees\\_Reference\\_Guide\\_and\\_Best\\_Practices\\_Methods\\_Handbook](http://www.academia.edu/34118973/Conducting_Research_with_Refugees_Reference_Guide_and_Best_Practices_Methods_Handbook)

Nicholson, Z. (2011). Bellville a "safe haven" for Somalis. *Cape Times*. <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/western-cape/bellville-a-safe-haven-for-somalis-1067257>

- PASSOP. (1998). Refugee Act. Available: <http://www.passop.co.za/wpcontent/uploads/2012/06/Summary-of-the-1998-Refugee-Act.pdf>
- Pernegger, L., Godehart, S. (2007). Townships in the South African Geographic Landscape: Physical and Social legacies and challenges. Pretoria.
- Phakathi, B. (2017). Lack of qualified teachers scuppers efforts to improve S.A.'s education. Business Live. Available: <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/education/2017-09-20-lack-of-qualified-teachers-scuppers-efforts-to-improve-quality-of-sas-education/>.
- Ramoroka, V. (2014). The Determination of Refugee Status in South Africa: A Human Rights Perspective. UNISA. Available: [http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/13850/dissertation\\_ramoroka\\_v.pdf?sequence=1](http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/13850/dissertation_ramoroka_v.pdf?sequence=1)
- Savides, M. (2017). SA schools have 5,139 teachers who are unqualified or under-qualified. Herald Live. Available: <http://www.heraldlive.co.za/news/2017/06/06/sa-schools-5139-teachers-unqualified-qualified/>
- Thompson, S. K. and L. M. Collins. (2002). "Adaptive sampling in research on risk-related behaviors." Drug and Alcohol Dependence 68(Supplement 1): 57-67.
- Trost, J. (1986). "Research Note: Statistically Non-Representative Stratified Sampling: A Sampling Technique for Qualitative Studies." Qualitative Sociology 9(1): 54-57.
- UNHCR. (2016). "Forced Displacement in 2016." *UNHCR official webpage* available at <http://www.unhcr.org/5943e8a34.pdf> Feb 27, 2017.
- Washinyira, T. (2014). "Somali community run school to learn English." *GroundUp News*. Available: [https://www.groundup.org.za/article/somali-community-run-school-learn-english\\_1492/](https://www.groundup.org.za/article/somali-community-run-school-learn-english_1492/)
- Western Cape Government. (2017). *Policies*. Available: <https://www.westerncape.gov.za/documents/policies/A>
- Whittles, G. (2017). Somali spaza shop owners take up arms. *Mail & Guardian*. Available: <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-09-01-00-somali-spaza-shop-owners-take-up-arms/>

## About the Author

**Barnabas Ticha Muvhuti** is a Zimbabwean who moved to Cape Town in November 2008, and has since studied, worked, and lived with fellow migrants from Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Somalia, and Rwanda, among other countries of origin. He is currently a Ph.D. student in Art History at Rhodes University.

Email: [tichmuvhuti@gmail.com](mailto:tichmuvhuti@gmail.com)

---

Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

Twitter: @FeinsteinIntCen

[fic.tufts.edu](http://fic.tufts.edu)