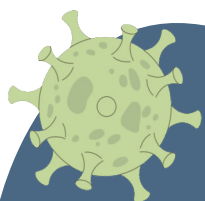


REFUGEE PROTECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA DURING COVID-19



The COVID pandemic has exposed the fault lines of deep inequalities in South African society.

– Person with a refugee background, South Africa



2.9 million infected
87,525 people died

(September 2021, WHO)

In South Africa refugees have the right to work, study and live where they choose to, though this strong protection regime has been progressively dismantled through legislative amendments and in practice.



Unemployment figures are now amongst the highest in the world



173,502 asylum seekers
76,754 refugees

(2020, UNHCR)

From our research findings:

- Refugees and asylum seekers have been stigmatized as carriers of the virus and (temporarily) excluded from state support (poverty aid, food, medical supplies, documentation).
- The regional organisation SADC has played a limited – near non-existent – role in safeguarding regional refugee protection during the pandemic.
- Budget cuts have meant that humanitarian actors are in a worse position to provide much needed humanitarian relief especially as the pandemic entered its second year.
- Tensions between refugees and the host community have continued during the pandemic, as both have suffered greatly from pandemic lockdown measures, with many having lost their jobs. Responses include acts of violent xenophobia against refugee communities. Consequently, refugees find it difficult to be self-reliant.

Read more about our research [here](#).