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Violence and Reconciliation

# The Gendered Nature of Xenophobia in South Africa

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## Abbreviations

|       |                                       |
|-------|---------------------------------------|
| CBO   | community-based organisation          |
| DRC   | Democratic Republic of Congo          |
| FBO   | faith-based organisation              |
| NGO   | non-governmental organisation         |
| SAHRC | South African Human Rights Commission |

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## Introduction

After the democratisation of South Africa in 1994, the influx of migrants from other African countries increased dramatically. Despite reconciliation initiatives, old patterns of racism (deeply rooted in the country's apartheid past) combined with new forms of discrimination, such as xenophobia, have played out through the country's period of political transition. Migrants and refugees are, by their very status as foreigners, vulnerable to xenophobia, which can be defined as *'the attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity'*.<sup>1</sup>

Violence against foreigners and violence against women are two forms of violence that are internationally condemned but are normalised ways in which South African society interacts with minority and vulnerable groups. Foreign women<sup>2</sup> in South Africa therefore face a double jeopardy: they are at the intersection of these two groups that are so vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and violence. Although the term 'xenophobia' may conjure up images of the violent attacks against foreigners in May 2008, migrant women in South Africa have been experiencing more subtle and insidious forms of xenophobia on a daily basis for as long as they have been in the country. These forms include not only physical violence, but verbal and psychological abuse, structural and institutional violence, as well as cultural and ethnic discrimination.

## Study Rationale and Context

This study was conceptualised, designed and implemented *before* the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 in recognition of the fact that xenophobia was a particular form of gender-based violence which was ongoing and pernicious but had been afforded scant attention in the past. That the May 2008 attacks happened during the fieldwork phase of the project added another dimension to the data we collected,<sup>3</sup> but did not alter the fact that the women we interviewed spoke mostly of the

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1. UNHCR, International Labour Organization, & International Organization for Migration. (2001). *International Migration, Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia*. Geneva, Switzerland.

2. We use the words 'foreign women' and 'migrant women' interchangeably in this report to denote non-national women who have migrated (forcibly or voluntarily) to South Africa from the rest of Africa.

3. The initial workshops were held before and during the May 2008 attacks, while the interviews and quantitative survey were conducted after the attacks.

xenophobic attitudes and behaviours that affected their daily lives both before and after the May 2008 attacks. In many ways, the foreign women in our study saw the May 2008 attacks as an extreme example of what they experience as an unavoidable aspect of their lives and which merely highlighted their plight to the rest of South Africa and outside world.

## Study Objective and Methodology

The main objective of this study was to explore the gendered nature of xenophobia in South Africa and the impact of such xenophobia on migrant women.

### Methodology of the Qualitative Study

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted with migrant women in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. A snowballing technique was used and the sample yielded participants from Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Somalia, Uganda and Nigeria.

Access to the research communities was gained through organisations that have previously worked with migrant women.

Initial workshops with potential participants were held to discuss issues relating to gender and xenophobia. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants during these meetings. Permission was sought from the migrant women when they were recruited for the interviews during the initial workshops and an informed consent form was designed and explained to them before they signed it prior to the interviews.

Once the interviews had been transcribed and analysed, feedback sessions were held with the group of participants in each city to discuss the findings and note their recommendations for lessening xenophobia in South Africa.

### Methodology of the Quantitative Study

Data was collected in three of South Africa's major cities with migrant populations: Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. Two suburbs in each city were purposively selected from these cities: Maitland and Khayelitsha in Cape Town; Umbilo and Durban central in Durban; and Berea and Yeoville in Johannesburg. The suburbs were expected to have a fair distribution of the study population (migrant women between 18-60 years). The total sample size in all the cities was 155 female respondents (40 in Cape Town, 40 in Durban, and 75 in Johannesburg).

Questionnaires were entered using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) for secondary editing and analysis.

## Limitations

### Qualitative Study

- A lot of attention has been paid to the migrant population in South Africa by researchers, which may have resulted in this particularly population being over-researched. As such, migrant communities may be wary of engaging with more researchers and/or they may tell the researchers what they think the researchers want to hear. However, we attempted to negate this effect by holding the reference group meetings and also accessing the participants through people who have worked with them in the past and people that they trust.



- The discourse around xenophobia that was pervasive during the May 2008 xenophobic attacks may have influenced the responses given to us by the in-depth interview participants.
- Language issues: most of the participants spoke to us in English even though it was not their first language. This may have implications for the accuracy of their turn of phrase. We did use interpreters where the participants were more comfortable speaking French – but here again, there is no absolute guarantee that the participants' meaning was accurately reflected by the interpreters.

### Quantitative Study

- Survey data was collected in English, but the fieldworkers conducting the survey were foreigners who, for the most part, spoke to the respondents in their home language.
- Missing control groups: the study did not include a control group (e.g. interviewing male migrants or South African women to ascertain whether what is happening with migrant women is a general trend or specific to migrant women). The study therefore simply describes how foreign women are living and not why they are living that kind of life in South Africa.
- Problem of representativeness: even though this survey has very rich information, it is not representative of the target population owing to the small size of the sample. However, the quantitative survey data was not designed to be generalisable, but to serve as a supplementary source of information to the in-depth interviews.
- A sample of 155 did not allow us to analyse or compare groups of data because statistical conditions may not have been met.

### Demographic Data of the Qualitative Study Respondents

In terms of their country of origin, eight respondents came from Zimbabwe, seven from the DRC, five from Burundi, five from Rwanda, three from Somalia and one each from Uganda and Nigeria. Seven respondents spoke Kirundi as their first language, five spoke Shona, four spoke Swahili, three each spoke Kinyarwanda and Somali, two spoke Lingala, and one each spoke Achoni, French, Ibibio, Sheba, Kandembo and Chewa. Eighteen of the respondents had left their country of origin because of ethnic violence or war. Ten had left as a result of political violence, one as a result of severe economic conditions, and one to join her husband in South Africa.

The age of the respondents ranged from 18 years to 58 years, with an average of 36 years. Nineteen of the respondents had been educated up to secondary school level, nine had tertiary education (where known: 1 teaching course; 1 Masters; 2 degrees; 2 diplomas), and two were unknown. However, of this group of women, only 12 are employed (as, variously, a hawker, teacher, translator, car-guard, peer educator, book-keeper, and sewing machinist; while 15 are un-employed and three are students. Fifteen of the respondents are married; four are separated; six are single (although one is living with her boyfriend); and five are widows. Twenty-six of the women have children, ranging in number from one to six children: at least four of the women were separated from some or all of their children at the time of the interviews.

Fifteen respondents had refugee status; eight were asylum seekers; four held temporary residency permits; and in the case of three respondents, their status was unknown. The duration of the participants' stay in South Africa ranged from 1 to 13 years.



### Demographic Data of the Quantitative Study Respondents

Table 1: **Country of Birth of Respondents**

COUNTRY OF BIRTH / FREQUENCY / PERCENT

|              |    |        |
|--------------|----|--------|
| Angola       | 1  | 0.60%  |
| Botswana     | 9  | 5.80%  |
| Cameroon     | 1  | 0.60%  |
| DRC          | 53 | 34.20% |
| Ethiopia     | 1  | 0.60%  |
| Ghana        | 3  | 1.90%  |
| Malawi       | 2  | 1.30%  |
| Mozambique   | 1  | 0.60%  |
| Nigeria      | 1  | 0.60%  |
| Rep of Congo | 4  | 2.60%  |
| Uganda       | 2  | 1.30%  |
| Zambia       | 5  | 3.20%  |
| Zimbabwe     | 72 | 46.50% |

Table 2: **Age of Respondents**

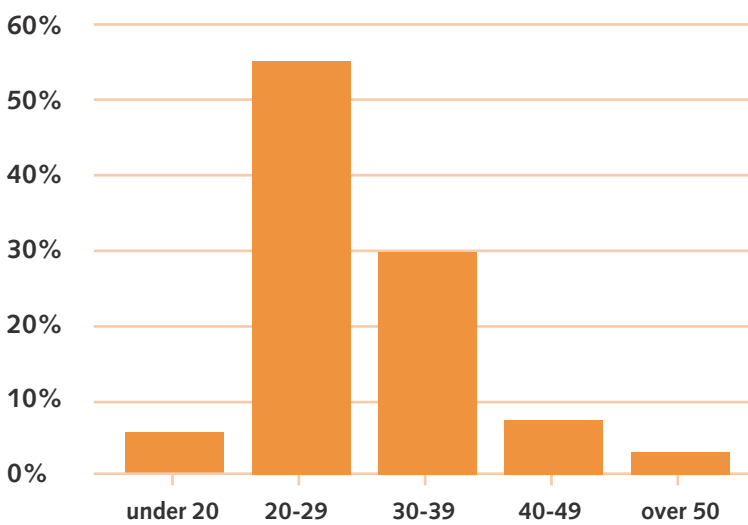


Table 3: **Marital Status of Respondents**

MARITAL STATUS / FREQUENCY / PERCENT

|                                  |    |        |
|----------------------------------|----|--------|
| Single (never married)           | 64 | 41.30% |
| Living with Partner (cohabiting) | 4  | 2.60%  |
| Married                          | 81 | 52.06% |
| Married but separated            | 2  | 1.30%  |
| Divorced or separated            | 2  | 1.30%  |
| Widowed                          | 2  | 1.30%  |

Table 4: **Education Level of Respondents**

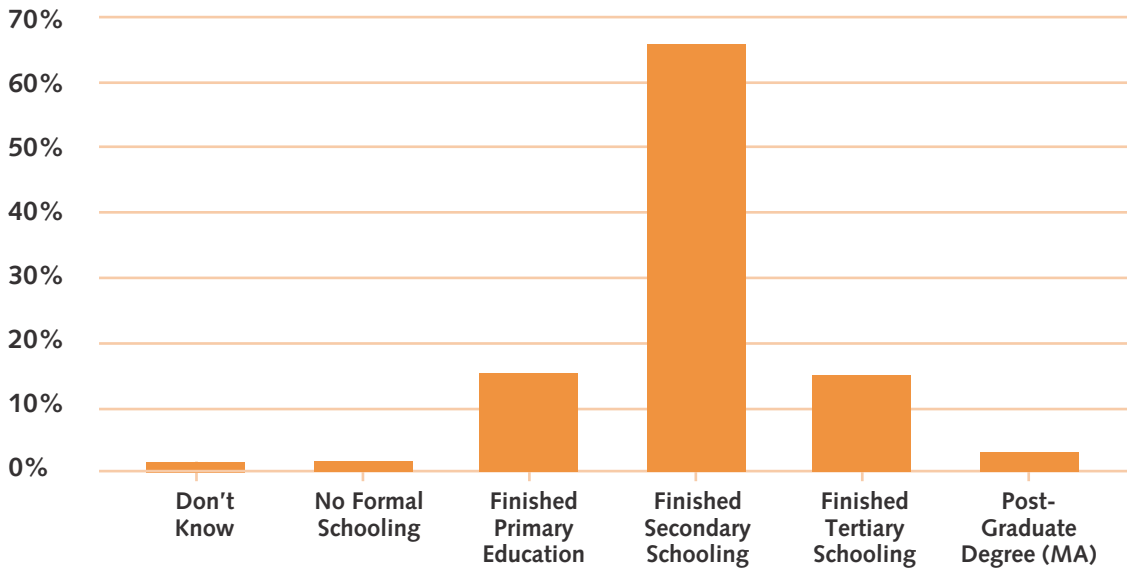


Table 5: **Employment Status of Respondents**

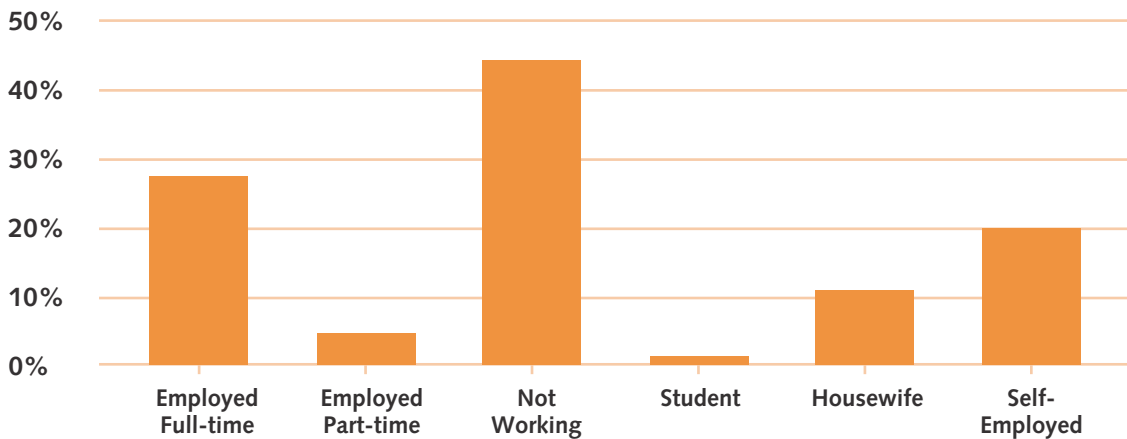


Table 6: **Legal Status of Respondents**

## STATUS IN SOUTH AFRICA / FREQUENCY / PERCENT

|                            |    |        |
|----------------------------|----|--------|
| Undocumented               | 26 | 16.90% |
| Asylum Seeker (Section 22) | 73 | 47.40% |
| Refugee (Section 24)       | 38 | 24.70% |
| Other Temporary Resident*  | 6  | 3.90%  |
| Permanent Resident         | 3  | 1.90%  |
| Citizen                    | 5  | 3.20%  |
| Other                      | 3  | 1.90%  |

\*student, work permit, etc.

Table 7: **Respondents' Ability to Speak and Understand any South African Vernacular Languages**

## LANGUAGE / PERCENT

|            |        |
|------------|--------|
| Zulu       | 36.30% |
| None       | 33.30% |
| Xhosa      | 20.10% |
| Ndebele    | 2.90%  |
| Other      | 1.50%  |
| Swati      | 1.50%  |
| Tswana     | 1.50%  |
| Afrikaans  | 1.00%  |
| English    | 1.00%  |
| Venda      | 0.50%  |
| Sotho      | 0.50%  |
| Not stated | 0.50%  |

When asked about their first language, Ndebele (26%) and Shona (16%) appeared to be the most popular first languages of the study population.

Table 8: **Length of Stay in South Africa**

## LENGTH OF STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA / FREQUENCY / PERCENT

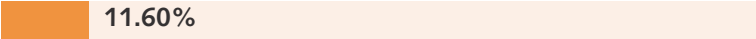


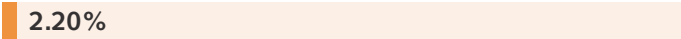




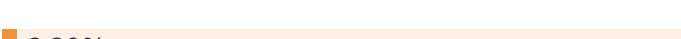

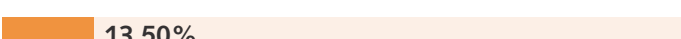

|                     |    |                                                                                    |        |
|---------------------|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Less than 1 year    | 18 |  | 11.60% |
| Between 1 - 2 years | 64 |  | 41.30% |
| More than 2 years   | 73 |  | 47.10% |

Table 9: **Legal Status of Respondents**

## WHY DID YOU COME TO SOUTH AFRICA? / FREQUENCY / PERCENT

|                                                    |    |                                                                                      |        |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Unknown/refused to answer                          | 4  |    | 2.20%  |
| For economic reasons                               | 80 |    | 44.90% |
| To escape war, conflict                            | 41 |   | 23.00% |
| To escape ethnic/tribal persecution/discrimination | 3  |  | 1.70%  |
| To escape gender/sexual discrimination             | 4  |  | 2.20%  |
| Political reasons                                  | 24 |  | 13.50% |
| Migrated as a child                                | 2  |  | 1.10%  |
| Family Reunion (join spouse, sibling etc)          | 13 |  | 7.30%  |
| Other                                              | 7  |  | 3.90%  |

## The Personal Lives of Migrants

### The Meaning of Xenophobia to Migrant Women

*'... when someone else hates you for who you are. It's like they want you to be someone else that you can't be'* (R26)

The migrant women we engaged with had many different interpretations for the meaning of the word 'xenophobia'. There was a general consensus, however, that xenophobia had been *'burning in the hearts of South Africans from all spheres of life'* for a long time before the xenophobic attacks of May 2008 erupted. Some saw xenophobia solely as an act of aggression, involving conflict and violent attack: *'... it just means people attacking people that don't belong in their country for a different reason, whatever the reason might be, but I just believe it's when a fight breaks up that involves certain people from a certain nation versus the people from outside'* (R12). Many of the migrant women had appropriated the official discourse around xenophobia, naming it as *'a hatred of foreigners, fear of foreigners'* (R11), but in this case foreigners are specifically black migrants from within the rest of Africa. One woman explained xenophobia as follows: *'I don't know whether I can call it fear because it's not really fear, but there is some hatred as well of someone you don't know and you are not even interested in getting to know that person. So, whatever maybe you have heard about that nationality or tribe or whatever. Anything bad, I mean you just associate that person with bad things, there's nothing good you see in someone you don't know. You only look at the negatives, you don't even try to find out more about those people'* (R24). Other understandings included xenophobia as:

- **Rejection:** *'That foreigners or refugees are rejected in South Africa'* (R10);
- **Discrimination:** *'Xenophobia, I think it's when people tend to discriminate'* (R19);
- **Attributing blame:** *'... some South Africans are accusing foreigners for taking their jobs in South Africa. And they are even complaining, if life is becoming expensive and difficult for South Africans because of foreigners. If things are going up; the price of food is going up is because of the foreigners. In other words if there were no foreigners in South Africa, maybe the South Africans' life would be better'* (R21);
- **A political tool:** *'I think maybe it's political, it was a political driven thing. So, I cannot blame them because you know sometimes, politics it's a dirty game'* (R13); and
- **A matter of disrespect:** *'She is saying foreigners are disrespected in many ways in South Africa. When you look at the way Home Affairs staff are working you will see that they do not respect foreigners. And their attitudes; the way they are working, the words that they are using, you can see that they do not like foreigners'* (R21).

The following tables indicate the percentage of survey respondents who have ever been a victim of xenophobia in South Africa as compared with those who were affected by the xenophobic attacks in May 2008:

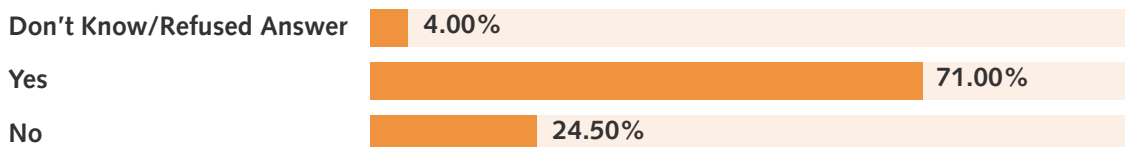
**Table 10: Respondents who have ever been a Victim of Xenophobia in South Africa**

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN A VICTIM OF XENOPHOBIA?



**Table 11: Respondents who were Affected by the May 2008 Xenophobic Violence**

WERE YOU AFFECTED BY THE XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE?



## Compounded Trauma

*'She was very, very scared. She had this remembrance of what happened in her country ...'* (R9)

The xenophobic attitudes and behaviour experienced by foreign women in South Africa and during the violent xenophobic attacks of May 2008 compounds the trauma that many of the respondents had experienced in their country of origin, which was often the motivating factor in their decision to leave their home country in the first place.

Many of the migrant women we interviewed had fled their country of origin as a result of ethnic violence, illustrated by this woman's account: *'There was fighting; they killed my mother, they killed my father, they killed my sister and brothers, and burning the house'* (R1). Others experienced violence at the hands of their families, usually as a result of ethnic tensions and/or intermarrying. Many women from the DRC and Zimbabwe, or their families, had experienced political violence or oppression: *'In Zimbabwe, if you are not working for a government paper, you are the enemy for government. So, I was doing the story so, they came they started beating people. I was one of those people who were beaten. We were taken to a police station from there we were detained. I was detained for 6 months so, that's the reason why I came here'* (R13). Some of the respondents had experienced sexual violence as part of political and ethnic violence or in the

midst of a conflict setting: *'... her son, because he saw the way [the militia] killed the cousin, did not have any choice. So she was raped by her own son. So she was very traumatised by that event'* (R10).

As a consequence of the suffering and trauma they have experienced both at home and in South Africa, many of the women spoke of themselves as being 'old' despite having an average age of only 36 years: *'I was born in 1973, I am old, I am not young'* (R2). These layers of trauma experienced by the respondents was articulated through expressions of hopelessness, such as *'Sometimes you want to die, but you cannot die'*, but also through expressions of resilience, such as *'It's like I just took a part of me, a part of what had just happened and I buried it somewhere because it's something I didn't even want to deal with or think about at that particular time. It was not time for that, it was time for survival'* (R24). It is important to note that compounded and /or buried trauma does not disappear, and can dramatically affect the functioning of an individual, causing dissociative episodes, uncontrollable emotions, self destructive behaviour and an altered view of the world, among other symptoms. As such, the experience of trauma is an everyday reality for these migrant women because it not only exists in the past, but old and new forms of trauma persist as a part of their lives in South Africa: *'... that's when I realized this thing is like genocide because it reminds me a lot of things in my mind. How can I run away from this life and find another one like this ... the time I saw those things I was thinking maybe this country is going to be like our country also'* (R25).

## Identity and Security

***'I can't plan a life [back home], I can't plan a life in South Africa'* (R24)**

As women are the traditional bearers of culture, the issue of identity and belonging becomes a distinctly gendered problem for women migrants. The women we interviewed expressed a great need to preserve their identity after losing so much through becoming migrants in a foreign country. Their sense of identity in the context of a new country needs to be restored through their cultural dress, food, music and rituals: losing these elements could mean the loss of one's self, one's history, and one's culture. However, holding onto these aspects of one's identity also impedes integration into a new community because it distinguishes migrants from the rest of the population thereby rendering them more vulnerable to xenophobic abuse.

To feel a sense of belonging in a context like this becomes increasingly elusive: *'I've always felt like [pauses and sighs] like you don't belong. I mean you don't belong, you already know that, but now they are even rubbing it in'* (R24). Our respondents also discussed their feelings of homelessness and rootlessness in relation to their home country as a result of having been forced (directly or indirectly) to leave, and in relation to their host country as a result of the problems facing them, mostly due to xenophobic attitudes and behaviour. In addition to this was a sense of loss - not only for material belongings such as property, clothes and furniture, but also for intangible possessions such as lifestyles, communities and homes. In many cases, the inability to return home (because of ongoing conflict, violence or political oppression) coupled with the inability to fully and successfully integrate into South African communities meant that the migrant women felt caught in between two systems and unable to fully belong to or identify with either of them. This has culminated in a continual sense of impermanence, even for women who had lived in South Africa for many years: *'... I do not know where my life is going, and where it is*



*going to end, and what is going to happen. I do not know'* (R16). A sense of security or insecurity often follows one's sense of identity and belonging in a group, community or country. Many of the migrant women we interviewed came to South Africa because they perceived it to be a safe haven – from conflict, political oppression, ethnic violence or economic hardship. However, their experience of South Africa, having been anything but peaceful, has led to feelings of powerlessness and insecurity. What they crave is security, as this woman articulates: *'Wherever there is security, even in my country, or it is here, what I need is security'* (R15). The women told us about their continual fear, and consequent loss of freedom, in South Africa: *'As a woman it affects me because we feel fear, we feel scared, we feel that we are being targeted, we lose freedom, we can't go out, we can't do the way that we should survive'* (R18). Some respondents told us that the only way for them to allay their fears and keep safe was to stay at home, thereby avoiding any interaction with South Africans. Particularly fresh in the minds of the respondents were the xenophobic attacks in May 2008: *'When it started I did not go anywhere, I was sitting home, I closed the door. I know maybe these people they are gonna to kill me. I did not go anywhere. Even now if I am not coming, I am sitting at home. I am not working'* (R4).

### Integration versus Assimilation

***'They make you feel like you're an outsider ... Why does she have a scarf on, where does she comes from, she must go back to where she comes from ... it makes you feel you are not a human being to hang with them or to greet them or to be surrounded by them'*** (R26)

Although integration (the inclusion of individuals in a society, the result of a conscious and motivated interaction and co-operation of individuals and groups<sup>4</sup>) is considered the ideal for migrants in a host country, assimilation (a one-sided process, in which immigrants and their descendants give up their culture and adapt completely to the society they have migrated to<sup>5</sup>) is often more likely to happen. This is especially the case in South Africa, where to exhibit cultural, language and ethnic differences can render a migrant vulnerable to xenophobic attitudes and behaviour. Again, as bearers of culture, women migrants often face the dilemma of retaining their cultural markers, thereby exposing themselves to various forms of xenophobic violence, or blending in with the South African population, thereby losing their identity.

Foreign migrant women are often made more visible, and therefore more vulnerable to exploitation and xenophobia, through various 'markers of difference' that set them apart from the indigenous South African population. These markers of difference include the languages that the migrant women speak, their accents, their traditional clothing, and their cultural practices. The women we spoke to explained that while they initially tried to preserve their identity and culture in order to maintain a psychological and spiritual link with their countries of origin, many now make an effort to become invisible and blend in with the general population in order not to make themselves targets of verbal and/or physical abuse.

Language was found to be a major marker of difference: knowing or not-knowing a language was a crucial element in shaping migrants' experiences of South Africa. Language is used by foreigners to impose silence on themselves as a measure of safety; it is also used by South

4. Bosswick, W. & Heckmann, F. (2006). *Integration of migrants: Contribution of local and regional authorities*. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, p. 2.

5. *Ibid*, p. 4.

Africans to impose silence on foreigners as a measure of power and containment: *'I remember one day I was in the taxi ... and the driver said you must be quiet. I said why must I be quiet I have a right to talk. Quiet! If you are not quiet, you are two foreigners, we are six South Africans, we are gonna beat you; now now'* (R1). South African citizens also use language to mark the 'unbelonging' of the foreigner by deliberately excluding them. One respondent commented that, *'When you are somewhere, when people are talking, they are speaking the language that you do not understand. You will really feel excluded'*; while another spoke of becoming *'an object of disdain'* when South Africans speak in their language *'about you as if you are somewhere [else]'*. Learning to speak certain indigenous languages (other than English) can be used as a survival strategy for some migrants. For instance, one respondent related a story of another woman migrant who is *'... forcing her children - she is trying to tell the children try to speak English and Zulu only'*, but felt that this would mean that the children will *'end up losing their identity ... even if they are coming up with the language, no one would accept them because they are discriminated from even documents'* (R7).

Dress as an identification of foreignness is a particularly gendered problem as women often have a particular style or way of dressing that is culturally important to them. Changing one's dress code is also used as a survival strategy among some migrant women, as this woman explains: *'So we change our behaviour just to be like the people we live together with here. Because we thought if we continue to dress the same way we did in our country, the people will segregate us'* (R22). Over time, some women migrants have learned that to be identified as foreign in certain contexts (such as in taxis) is to be discriminated against: as such, they have developed mechanisms to render themselves invisible and therefore safe: *'Now as time went on we got ourselves better clothes seeing which clothes people wear, how they behave, we would meet them in church and try to be like them'* (R22).

However, many of the foreign women we spoke to expressed unhappiness with changing their language or dress in order to survive in South Africa. They felt that changing one's culture should be a choice and not a necessity, and that all women, irrespective of nationality, deserved the right to enjoy their own culture, even if in a foreign country.

### **Familial Relationships: at Home and in South Africa**

*'... because as a mother when your child experiences a problem, you feel more badly than your husband'* (R22)

A woman migrant's relationship with her family renders her experience of displacement very different to a man's experience: *'As a woman I am a mother, I've got a family'* (R14).

Familial problems in their countries of origin had followed some of the women we interviewed to South Africa. For some there was an issue of unsupportive families back home, for others it was being blamed by relatives or in-laws for not sending resources home, and for yet others it was the problem of ethnic violence that haunted them and their families in South Africa.

Women migrants also often face long periods of separation from loved ones, resulting in a keen sense of loss. Women leave their children behind for reasons of family support, security, practicality and even education, as this woman explains: *'They are still there in Congo, my twins. They are studying there. Because my sister is a nun, so she is the one looking after them'* (R11). However, some women do not even know where their families are, after being separated from them during periods of conflict, ethnic violence and political oppression.

One of the main areas of concern for migrant women who have brought their children to South Africa is the impact of xenophobia on those children. Many of the women we spoke to cited examples of their children being threatened or attacked because they were foreigners: *'My son; one day they hit him with a stone the first time he went to school in Ixopo. One South African child they hit him with a stone'* (R4); *'They beat up the refugee children in the township close by where they were living'* (R10); *'I heard my son, my son talk about it, he says they are calling him xenophobia at school ... That's the nickname that they've given him'* (R12); *'Because if you go to schools they are learning together with the South Africans...I can say they are abusing the other children...They used to say go away you Zimbabweans, why did you come to South Africa? That is why we are hitting you because you come from Zimbabwe'* (R14). Mothers often feel unable to protect their children from the fear and trauma of these xenophobic attacks, which makes them feel derelict in their duties as a mother and powerless to save their children from harm. Moreover, children pick up on the attitudes and attacks directed at their parents and families, and feel the weight and threat of this discrimination. One respondent told us of coming home during the xenophobic attacks in May to be greeted by her son with the words, *'mummy you are not dead'* (R3).

In the quantitative survey, 54% of the respondents reported that they had school going children in their houses. Of these, the majority of the respondents (87%) indicated that their children had not been treated any differently by their teachers at school; and a similar number (78.7%) indicated that their children had not been treated differently by their fellow students. However, it was clear that when it came to interaction outside of the classroom, foreign children were more likely to remain segregated from South African children: while 60% of respondents said that their children did interact with other South African students at and after school, only 28% of respondents' children had been invited to the homes of South African schoolmates.

Women migrants also tend to carry the burden of caring for their families which, as illustrated above, entails not only economic support but also psychological and emotional support for those who have experienced xenophobia. In terms of economic support, the weight of this responsibility is immense, especially in a context permeated with xenophobia, where migrant women struggle to find work amidst widespread discriminatory attitudes and practices. Many migrant women stress about the consequences of not having enough money to shoulder the family's responsibilities: *'She feels really uncomfortable in the situation in which she is, not being capable to feed the children properly, to schooling them, responding to the responsibility'* (R7).

Common complaints among the women we interviewed was that migrating to South Africa often led to the break up of families – not only because families are split between two countries, but also because the financial, emotional and physical stressors of living as migrants in South Africa take their toll on familial relationships – and that migrant men tend to shirk their domestic responsibilities.

Of the 28% of survey respondents who had South African relatives, we found that the vast majority (87%) had not been helped by these local relatives regarding childcare, immigration problems, work, money or housing.

## Gendered Relationships: Being Foreign and Female in South Africa

*'... she is finding in South Africa where men are expecting women to say yes; whilst he demands sex or he demands marriage a woman must say yes. But that is not the case in [my home country]'* (R10)

The power imbalances inherent in any male-female relationship are exaggerated in situations where women are more vulnerable – in this case, migrant women are particularly vulnerable as foreign females in an unfamiliar country known for its xenophobic attitudes and behaviours. This results in them being vulnerable not only to abuse from South African men, but also from their own husbands.

The migrant women we spoke to explained to us that, on the one hand, men are bestowed with 'natural' authority in their countries of origin – women have little or no rights. On the other hand, in their country of origin women are protected by cultural laws – men can't have openly adulterous relationships because the family or community will punish him. The converse is true of both these situations in South Africa, impacting negatively on migrant women. Migrant women often start working and have their own money for the first time when they migrate to South Africa: this results in them beginning to exercise their rights, which their husbands often find unfamiliar and threatening, thereby resulting in domestic violence and/or separation. In addition, there is no community or family protection for migrant women in South Africa and, because of the inaccessibility of the police (as a result of xenophobic attitudes and practices by the police), there is no system to report violence against them by their husbands, making them vulnerable to ongoing intimate partner violence. In addition, some women are abandoned by their husbands and partners once they have arrived in South Africa: this means that they are left to shoulder the economic burden of familial responsibility by themselves.

Migrant women seemed to have some difficulty accepting what they see as a permissive and promiscuous sexual culture among both men and women in South Africa. The migrant women we spoke to explained that, in their view, South African women would be willing to have sex in exchange for a can of coke, whereas foreign women would demand a lot more than that if they had to have transactional sex. One woman related a story about how her husband's female clients would ask for sex in return for helping him: *'So a woman said I know how to lead you to get that loan, but first you have to be my boyfriend'* (R3). Many migrant women saw South African men as sexual predators, explaining that they force themselves onto women sexually, that they feel entitled to sex, and that they freely sexually harass women: *'... they would [rub] you in public and they would laugh, even if you do not like it. But they would consider it as a joke; to grab you and to want to touch you'* (R5); *'Like me when I was working there, they liked saying, when would you come to my place? And I say for what? You would be my wife. And I say I am married already. No you must leave that man because he does not have any farm, I have a farm. You must come! I say no. He says ey; if you continue to say no I will kill your husband'* (R22). This woman explained that foreign women are often not in a position to say 'no' to these sexually forceful men: *'A foreign woman, and you think you have to get everything from a man just because you do not have a choice while you are in a foreign land. So they treat you as a... you have to accept it because you do not know – you can't go anywhere, you are stuck here. So you have to accept everything. It is demeaning'* (R5).

Many South African women are also the victims of sexual harassment and worse by their male counterparts, which begs the question: is the sexual harassment of foreign women by South African men xenophobic? The fact that migrant women are not expecting these kinds of violent sexual advances from unknown men and that they have less recourse and protection than South African women make them especially vulnerable, and their vulnerability makes them easy prey for South African men: this aggressive sexual behaviour towards one who is both female and foreign can, therefore, be called xenophobic.

Of the 41% of respondents who thought that there was a difference in the way South African men treat foreign women, the majority of respondents (40.6%) thought this was because South African men specifically discriminate against or are otherwise xenophobic towards foreign women, while a quarter (25%) felt that South African men use and abuse foreign women. Another 3% felt, respectively, that South African men accuse foreign women of using muti, South African men accuse foreign women of prostitution, and South African men are violent towards foreign women.

This can be contrasted with the 56% of respondents who reported that there was a difference in the way South African men treat foreign men. This difference was explained by the following factors: 54% felt that South African men are discriminatory and xenophobic or jealous of migrant men; 31% thought that it was because South African men accuse foreign men of stealing South African women and children; 7% felt South African men are violent towards foreign men; and 5% felt that South African men accuse foreign men of crime.

Of the 60% that indicated that there was a difference in the way South African women treat foreign women, the following explanations were given:

Table 12: **Reasons why South African Women Treat Foreign Women Differently**

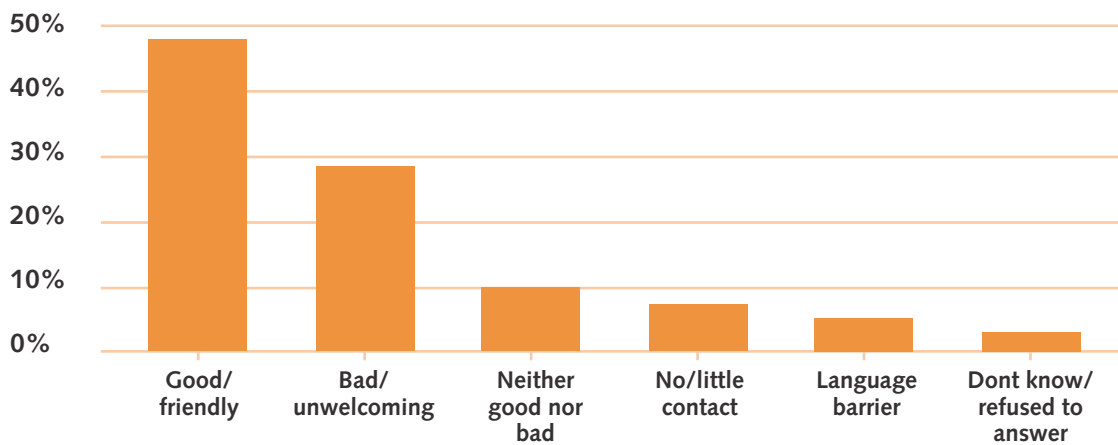
|                                                         |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Unknown/refused to answer                               | 5.40%  |
| Accuse foreign women of taking men and jobs             | 14.00% |
| Violent towards foreign women                           | 1.10%  |
| Discriminatory/xenophobic/jealous towards foreign women | 79.60% |

### Daily Interactions with South Africans

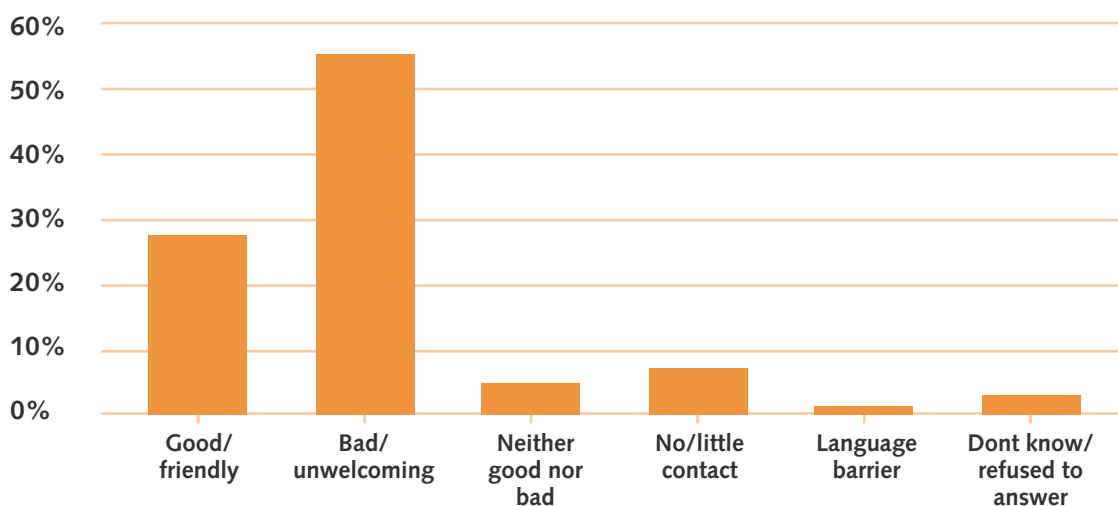
When asked how they would describe their relationship with South African nationals, 30% of the survey respondents said that they had a good relationship with South Africans; another 30% said they had a bad relationship; and 38% said it was neither good nor bad. This was in contrast with the 85% of respondents who described their relationship with other migrants as good.

The following tables compare women migrants' experience of South African nationals during their first three months in South Africa with women migrants' experience of South African nationals in the last six 6 months (i.e. the time period between April and November 2008, depending on when the interview occurred).

**Table 13: Respondents' Experiences of South Africans in the first three months of their stay in South Africa**



**Table 14: Respondents' Experiences of South Africans in the last six months of their stay in South Africa**



Outside of the workplace, one third of the respondents (36%) indicated that they associate or interact with South African nationals on a daily basis; however, a fairly high number indicated that they only interact with South Africans on a weekly (23%) or even monthly (11%) basis. As shown in the tables below, migrants are more likely to interact on a daily basis with other migrants than with South Africans:

Table 15: **Frequency of Association with Migrants from the Same Country of Origin**

HOW OFTEN DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH MIGRANTS FROM THE SAME COUNTRY OF ORIGIN?


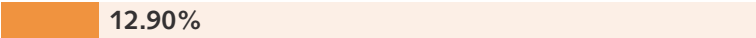
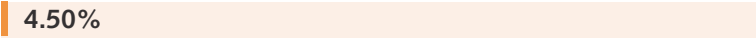

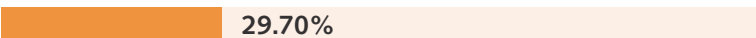
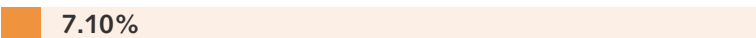
|         |     |                                                                                    |        |
|---------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Daily   | 118 |  | 76.10% |
| Weekly  | 20  |  | 12.90% |
| Monthly | 7   |  | 4.50%  |

Table 16: **Frequency of Association with Migrants from a Different Country of Origin**

HOW OFTEN DO YOU ASSOCIATE WITH MIGRANTS NOT FROM SAME COUNTRY OF ORIGIN?

|         |    |                                                                                     |        |
|---------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Daily   | 78 |   | 50.30% |
| Weekly  | 46 |   | 29.70% |
| Monthly | 11 |  | 7.10%  |

## Accommodation

*'I was moved from the house, I was driven out'* (R12)

Women migrants expressed high levels of frustration around finding and keeping suitable accommodation for themselves and their families. The main problems included: splitting families due to restrictions around the approved number of people per room (thereby increasing the number of rooms that had to be rented); and exploitation, including high rentals, which was magnified by a lack of documentation, the unhelpful attitude of the police and the collusion of the community.

Undocumented migrants are in a very precarious situation when it comes to accommodation because they can so easily be exploited. Taking advantage of the undocumented migrants' illegal status, landlords charge very high rentals while not always ensuring, or even deliberately sabotaging, access to basic amenities (such as electricity). One respondent reported that her landlord *'sometimes switch [off] the power, this and this. I went to him and said Mr...I want to cook, but there is no power - because they have got the main switch in the house. Switch on the lights please. And he said you people here, do you have papers'* (R3). Even migrants with valid papers and identification documents are discriminated against on the basis of being foreign: this respondent said that when she told a prospective landlord that she was from Nigeria he said to her, *'I am not letting my apartment to foreigners'* (R5).



## Employment and Livelihood

*'I need a lot of things in my life for me to survive. I need some money to send back for my kids at home. I need some money to pay my rent, I need some money to buy my own food. I don't have that money because I don't have a job'* (R13)

Many foreigners are more educated and better qualified than their black South African counterparts (due, mostly, to the quality and standard of education imposed on black South Africans through the apartheid system). However, migrants often struggle to get employment, not only because they do not possess the correct documentation but also because the approval of foreign qualifications is a long and expensive process. Difficulties in finding employment mean a struggle for economic survival, and as a result migrants often turn to informal or illegal work that they would not have contemplated doing in their countries of origin. The migrant women explained that some women turn to prostitution to make money, while others start dealing drugs for big cartels because *'you do bad things because you need money for you to survive'* (R13). Still others sell goods in the streets or become car-guards, positions that demand long hours and self-degradation, as this woman explains: *'Because when you a car guard on the street, you really have to understand you are going there - you need to put yourself down first. You know that you are under everybody else. So whatever happens to you it's your position, you are a car guard'* (R15). Migrants are also vulnerable to exploitation by their South African employers, especially if they are undocumented and can be threatened with deportation. However, the main issue among the migrant women that we spoke to was the xenophobic attitudes and behaviour expressed by South Africans in relation to migrants having work in South Africa, as illustrated by the following examples: *'People were telling her, why are you standing here, you should go back to Burundi so our people can come also work here. What you are expecting us to give to you we could give it to our people'* (R7); *'We see you everyday going to town, where are you working? You have come to take our job? I said which job? The job I am doing I am just getting a little money'* (R3); and *'So they try to make conflict. Some would take a cooldrink and say I will bring money this evening. Then when you ask them they say I paid you already. So now they tried to do many things, which you cannot control. This is very very difficult. They create conflict so that when you have a problem with someone that person never comes back'* (R22).

On the other hand, those migrant women who are unemployed, economically dependent on their male partners and shunned by host communities often become confined to their houses and increasingly more isolated.

In the quantitative survey, 65% of the respondents indicated that they have worked in South Africa for a South African company before. This can be compared with 35% who have never been employed in South Africa. Of those who had been employed by South Africans, 62% of the respondents indicated that their experience with their South African employers was good, 29% thought that it is bad, and 9% thought that their experience was neither bad nor good. However, the majority of respondents (51%) reported that their South African workmates had spoken or behaved in a manner that makes them feel excluded in the workplace; one third (34%) felt that their employers treated them differently from their South African colleagues; while 14% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment by South Africans in the workplace. In addition, there was very little interaction between migrants and their South African colleagues after work: 81% of respondents had never socialised informally with their colleagues; 84% had never gone out

with colleagues after work for birthday parties; 92% had never gone out with colleagues after work for family events; and 94% had never gone out with colleagues after work to a religious event.

## Public Transport and Public Spaces

*'... women, they do experience xenophobia or discrimination or bad attitude mostly in the public places like the taxi rank, or in a taxi or in a bus. Where locals they do look at them differently, they do swear at them, and they do speak badly to foreign women'* (R21)

Public spaces, particularly in connection with accessing public transport, were identified as one of the worst sites of xenophobic abuse towards women migrants. The women were threatened on all forms of public transport (buses, trains and taxis) and while walking on the streets, as well as being exposed to sexual harassment by both taxi drivers and men on the street. Taxis are particularly fraught places for foreign women – they can easily be identified as foreign, mostly through the markers of difference such as speech and dress as illustrated by these examples:

*When they go to a public taxis and they wanna jump off, sometimes something catches you – you see this long [dress]. And they will tell you, even sometimes from the public ... oh! These long clothes! Wear jeans then you won't have this difficulty.* (R18)

*The outfit they dressed you could see that these are from Congo. So there was one man [in the taxi] who was shouting to another lady saying that you guys, foreigners why don't you speak our language, which is Xhosa? Why don't you speak Xhosa. And also you are coming in our country to take our jobs; and you do not bring anything in this country, but you are coming to take the jobs and money in our country.* (R10)

Taxis are complex spaces where a multitude of gestures and behaviours are assumed to be 'known' to South African nationals. Not knowing these markers of 'belonging' can distinguish someone as foreign. In addition, taxi drivers have a reputation of being generally violent and abusive and often imbue their taxis with their prejudices and attitudes, contributing to an atmosphere of group xenophobia. Being identified as foreign then opens the woman up to both verbal and physical abuse from the taxi driver as well as the other passengers:

*Sometimes you go into a taxi, they can't take you where you want to go, they just take you and swear at you that you are kwerekwere.* (R4)

*... the public transport is another issue. It's really a big issue. You better go in and keep quiet. Sometime they would start you, they will say oh! They will start talking about you and when you keep quiet, they would say oh you do not want to – you just ignore us. They can start fighting you without you opening your mouth. They did that to me as well. They were asking me questions and then fortunately I knew some Zulu to tell them that I do not want to talk. Then they told me who you are? Who do you think you are? They start pulling my shirt. Who do you think you are? You do not want to talk to us? Do you think we are rubbish? I didn't say anything, I just didn't want to talk.* (R15)

## Interactions with the Public Sector and Government

Despite the fact that South Africa is considered a developing country, it is still in many ways more advanced than most of the other African countries in the region. As such, South Africa has an obligation to maintain certain standards when it comes to the delivery of services in the public sector. While some migrant women in this study believed that public services were adequate, it must be noted that their expectations of service quality would, in many cases, be significantly lower than the average South African. Especially with migrants coming from war-torn or economically crippled countries, the relativity of their experiences of public services in their countries of origin in comparison with their experiences of public services in South Africa must be kept in mind.

### Hospitals

*'In the hospital it's worse, worse. There are so many experiences. You are telling them it's time, they will say; no, no, no, you foreigner don't keep making noise'* (R15)

Both interview and survey respondents attested to a wide range of service levels among the hospitals that they had attended.

Table 17: **Respondent's Experiences at Public Hospitals and Clinics**

|                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
| Good                 | 56.00% |
| Bad                  | 32.00% |
| Neither Good nor Bad | 12.00% |

As can be seen in Table 17 above, 56% of respondents had a good experience at public hospitals, 32% had a bad experience, and 12% felt their experience was neither good nor bad. Table 18 expands on the responses given above.

During feedback sessions with interview respondents, the migrant women indicated that South Africans also receive poor treatment from public healthcare workers and providers, thereby undermining their own bad experiences at public hospitals. However, it became apparent during the in-depth interviews that the bad treatment of foreign women by the public health sector was very much xenophobic in nature.

Some women were simply ignored at hospitals because they are foreign. This usually took the form of women waiting very long periods before being attended to: *'Ya, in the hospital, I remember when my daughter was poisoned, I was crying because I got there at six o'clock in the evening. I waited until 2 o'clock the next day. No one helped me. I was crying there, my child was going to die'* (R4). Other migrant women were specifically and directly targeted by healthcare workers: for the most part, this involved some form of verbal abuse that left the women feeling like second class citizens and humiliated: *'I've got cancer so, when I started I went to Thembisa Hospital. The*

Table 18: **Explanation for Respondents' Experiences at Public Hospitals or Clinics**

**Good:**

|                                                   |        |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Did not face any challenges and medically treated | 54.20% |
| Treated with respect                              | 0.80%  |

**Bad:**

|                                                                     |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Long queues and difficulties being processed by healthcare provider | 3.40%  |
| Treated badly                                                       | 27.10% |
| Denied treatment                                                    | 6.80%  |
| Language problems                                                   | 3.40%  |

**Neither Good nor Bad:**

|                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Unknown / refused to answer | 4.20% |
|-----------------------------|-------|

way, how they treated me I could feel that maybe, I'm not a person. I thought maybe I was a tissue, I could feel that I don't belong in this society. You know, they will degrade you in front of everybody and you will feel this discomfort even moving and you are afraid that everybody is watching me, everybody is seeing me' (R13). For many women, the abuse was as a result of them being mothers and needing help with childbirth or other gynaecological problems: 'They say excuse me, why you people are coming here to give us problems. You come here to give birth, each time you are going to deliver and now you want to be a problem to us here, mhh' (R12). In this example, the cultural practice of female circumcision triggered insensitive and xenophobic reactions during one migrant woman's childbirth:

*So also there is one thing else, we are circumcising as a woman. So this circumcision is some thing that is traditional, it is not religion beliefs, it is not scientific beliefs, it is a tradition. And again when a girl is circumcised it is not her own wish. The ladies are getting circumcised whilst they are child. They do not have a choice. So what is happening, when we go to hospitals now ... They see us as different and they get shocked. And sometimes somebody is on labour and she is feeling pain and sometimes they get shocked and they call each other. Come and have a look what is happening here. What happened to you? If she can't talk sometimes she doesn't know the language or she is in pain. So they will ask you what is wrong with this lady. What happened to her? But this thing is not important at that moment, you can ask this thing later. You can ask us explanation or what is happening to her. But they will start asking questions, whilst she is in labour and she is in pain. (R18)*

In this situation, the migrant woman had become a spectacle: it is not her welfare but the display of her anatomical differences that has the attention of the nurses, who exacerbate the migrant woman's discomfit and humiliation by calling their colleagues and friends to view the phenomenon. In another case, a woman had been raped in her country of origin shortly before she came to South Africa. She had a number of health problems as a result of the rape and so went to see a doctor in South Africa. The trauma of the rape was badly compounded by her experience in the healthcare system in South Africa, so much so that she has never been back to a hospital in South Africa, only making her more vulnerable to the negative health effects of rape: *'And when she went to Somerset hospital, the medical doctor who received her did some examinations in the private parts and was shouting to her; only because of that that you left your country? That is not enough reason for you to leave your country only because of that. So she was again traumatised. Since that time she had never gone to the hospital because she is getting the same thing that has happened'* (R10).

Despite government policies and memorandum to the hospitals to the contrary, some migrant women are told that they do not have a right to access healthcare at public hospitals or healthcare workers demand to see documentation and papers before providing treatment to foreign women.

As a survival strategy, some migrant women save their money in order to attend private clinics and hospitals, as they feel that paying for healthcare entitles them to the respect and attention that they cannot get from public healthcare providers: *'Whenever she makes money it is when she goes to the private where they receive you because they need money'* (R7).

## Home Affairs

*'And they would harass you ...I remember one day I went to Home Affairs and I started crying. I told myself I will never go back there'* (R5)

It was clear that possessing the right documentation, and specifically a green South African identity document, is crucial for migrants in South Africa. The red ID document of refugees went some way towards securing access to services, but was not sufficient to protect refugees from discrimination: *'He was giving me small money [less pay] than South African citizens. And then I asked him why are you giving me this small money? He said because you do not have a green ID'* (R2).

It is of great concern, therefore, that the Department of Home Affairs, from whence all documentation is applied for, processed, approved or denied, and issued, is probably the worst site of xenophobic attitudes and behaviour towards women migrants among public service providers. What appears to be general disorganisation at most branches of Home Affairs is compounded by the fact that Home Affairs officials deliberately leave foreigners waiting, either because they attend to South African citizens first and/or as a signal of their inherent authority and power over foreigners, resulting in foreigners spending very long periods waiting to be served at Home Affairs: *'To get the paper you can even wait, or even to get a stamp; you can wait for a long time. They walk around, they do not want to serve, they are only swearing at us'* (R2). Some women even have to sleep at Home Affairs to increase their chances of being seen: *'You can go and sleep there maybe four days, you don't get a paper. That one is the most terrible thing in South Africa. Like me, I am an old lady, I suffer from high blood. Sometimes the line is so big, I try and tell them that I am a sick person and I am old, they do not even listen to that. I must sleep there.'*

*So it is not good'* (R16). In addition, Home Affairs officials are often deliberately obtuse and extend an extremely bad service to foreign women when they are eventually dealt with, for example, harassing them for not bringing the right documentation, despite not ever being told precisely what they needed to bring with them or as a result of the rules changing between their visits to Home Affairs: *'I think I would always come out crying - because they would say why didn't you bring this? Why didn't you do that?'* (R5). It was not uncommon for foreigners' files to be missing or contain erroneous information, with serious implications for the women with defective files. Home Affairs is also a site of blatant disrespect and verbal abuse towards foreigners. It was clear that bribery is widespread within Home Affairs, despite the fact that many migrants are simply too poor to pay for their documentation: *'If it is like that ... me I was going to get status, it takes three months or one month because you pay money. But me it takes so long because I did not pay money for him'* (R1). It became evident that because it is so difficult, time-consuming and often humiliating to access documentation through the proper and legal channels, migrants are often forced to circumvent the law out of desperation.

Surprisingly, considering the nature of their experiences with Home Affairs, outlined above, most of the respondents (47%) in the survey revealed that their experience at the Department of Home Affairs or any immigration office was good. This is compared with 38% who thought that it was bad, and 13% who thought it was neither bad nor good. The reasons behind these responses are summarised in the following table.

Table 19: **Explanation for Respondents' Experiences at Home Affairs**

**Good:**

|                                                                |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Did not face any challenges / helped by Home Affairs officials | 38.30% |
| Treated with respect                                           | 6.80%  |

**Bad:**

|                                                          |        |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| Long queues / difficulties being processed / long delays | 23.30% |
| Treated badly                                            | 18%    |
| Corruption                                               | 1.50%  |
| Rejected /renewal problems                               | 4.50%  |
| Language problems                                        | 0.80%  |

**Neither Good nor Bad:**

|                             |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|
| Unknown / refused to answer | 6.80% |
|-----------------------------|-------|

A third of respondents (32%) said that their experiences at the Department of Home Affairs had changed over time: of these, 86% reported that their experiences at Home Affairs had worsened over time.

## The Police and the Criminal Justice System

*'You want them to write you an affidavit then someone will say, maybe you should just go back to your country hey, maybe you should just go back to your country, what you want our things for'* (R12)

Women migrants felt that they are not protected by the law for two main reasons: lack of knowledge on their own part for not knowing which laws can protect them and what their rights are; and the perception that the law does not recognise foreigners, a problem propagated by xenophobic attitudes among law enforcement officials and therefore widely thought to be the truth among migrants. Women migrants felt that they could not report violence against themselves by South African citizens, as well as by nationals from their country of origin, because of a lack of access to the police. Not only do the police threaten women migrants reporting a crime with deportation, but they also regularly refer migrants back to their community for a resolution to an internal problem – women therefore feel that they have no protection on either side (whether they are fighting with South Africans or people from their own country). In addition, migrant women described how they have experienced sexual harassment from police when they report crimes and they felt that the continued impunity towards police officers who are violent towards foreigners justifies and validates their violent behaviour. Migrant women also face a range of discriminatory practices at the hands of the police. Firstly, women often encounter sheer indifference (*'I can say the police, when you are a foreigner, they do not care about your case'* [R4]); secondly, police often unnecessarily harass migrants, particularly regarding the existence or validity of their documents (*'When they stopped that car they wanted every foreigner out. They even tell you any foreigner, especially Zimbabweans. They will tell you Zimbabweans out, if you are a Zimbabwean it doesn't matter what document you have just get out'* [R24]); and thirdly, women migrants are expected to pay bribes, both monetary and sexual, in order to be released after (often arbitrary and unfounded) arrest or in order not to be arrested in the first place (*'... the police have actually asked for sexual favours. If you can't pay in cash you might as well pay in kind'* [R24]).

One of the respondents had direct experience with the criminal justice system in South Africa. Hers is a particularly disturbing story because it illustrates that xenophobia spans many strata of society in South Africa, from the man on the street (who may indeed be ignorant about foreigners) to a judge within the criminal justice system (who should know better and, in fact, does nothing but endorse xenophobia by excusing such violence): *'South African people they hit me, until I get a miscarriage. I went to court, in the court the judge did not help me or anything. Because those people they were put in jail, and the same time after 30 minutes they take them out. So I lost a baby like that. And the judge said these people they are innocent. Why do you people like South Africa? How many countries are there in Africa; you only choose South Africa'* (R4).



## Meaning-Making Systems

*'I think maybe also the people from here they also need to be taught we are also human beings, and we also have the rights like them'* (R20)

The women we spoke to had various ways of making sense of their experiences as migrants in South Africa, particularly in relation to the xenophobic attitudes and behaviours that constantly surround them.

Some of the participants attributed xenophobia among black South Africans to the legacy of apartheid and saw it as another form of racism. One participant gave an insightful analysis into the roots of xenophobia among black South Africans: *'I always blame apartheid, but they must not use it as an excuse. Because it is true that apartheid was bad and it really destroyed them from the roots. It destroyed them completely. But if they are given a chance they have to try and change. So if you don't make any effort to change I won't change you. So I think these people they have been [treated] badly, and they have [hate] for themselves. So they cannot love others if they hate themselves. They took all the values from them, they discriminate them a lot, they took all their being, if I can use it that way. So it's from your background, they were offended for so long and when you teach somebody to hate - you teach somebody to hate ...'* (R15). Some women attributed the xenophobic attacks in May 2008 to an unknown 'third' force: one woman explained that the xenophobia had been latent in South Africans until an unknown power unleashed it in May 2008; while another woman saw xenophobia as a concept foreign to black Africans and explained that the xenophobic attacks in May 2008 were the result of rich/white people manipulating the poverty of black South Africans (i.e. paying them) to kill black foreigners. Some migrant women emphasised that black foreigners are the same as black South Africans in that they all come from the same roots and have the same black skin, making the attitudes and behaviours of the South Africans inexplicable: *'We love you, we are all Africans, we've got the same skin...why should I hate you for nothing? What did you do to me?'* (R11); while others stressed the difference between themselves and South Africans, emphasising that *'We are guests. They just have to know that we are guests'* (R18). Many of the migrant women laid the blame for xenophobia directly at the feet of South African citizens, characterising them as ignorant, narrow-minded and disinclined to try to understand what motivated the foreigners to leave their home countries and come to South Africa in the first place. For these migrant women, South Africans are unaware and uninformed about the rest of Africa and have physically and mentally restricted themselves to remaining within South Africa's borders: *'I mean even though we are coming from elsewhere there are things that we know better than they know. Because they've never left their country before. And we are more open minded than them. We've seen the world'* (R5); *'No matter who; Indian, or white they are too ignorant to us. It is how it is ... the ignorance is there'* (R7).

Many of the migrant women looked to the way people behave in their home countries as a template for how it should be done in South Africa: *'When she can [consider] the way foreigners have been treated back home, like in Congo, when someone introduces himself as a foreigner, the person is considered like a prince. Everyone would like to make friends with you because you are a foreigner. But coming to South Africa the situation is a reverse. Foreigners are like objects'* (R8).

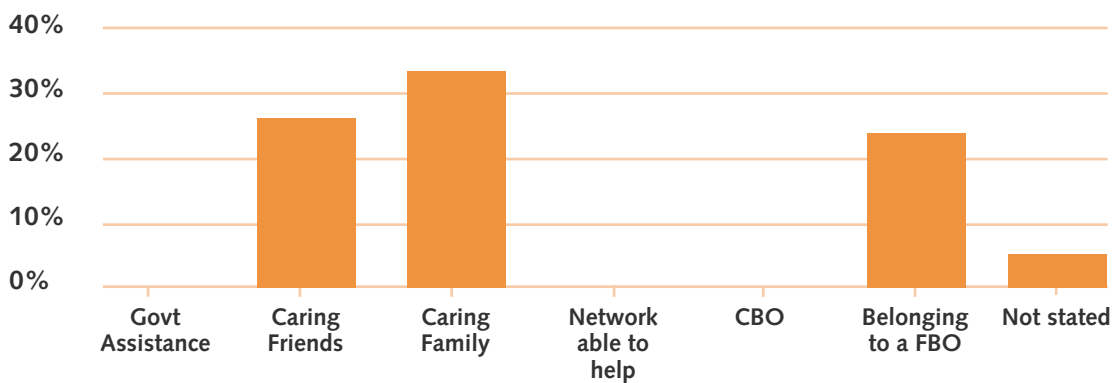
### Resilience and Agency

*‘I would depend on myself that I found my way. Like as we have been doing since we came’*  
(R15)

Many migrant women told us that they sought solace, support and solutions in religion and the church. For some, the church (symbolising both God and the people making up the congregation) provided an important support system made up of foreigners and South African citizens.

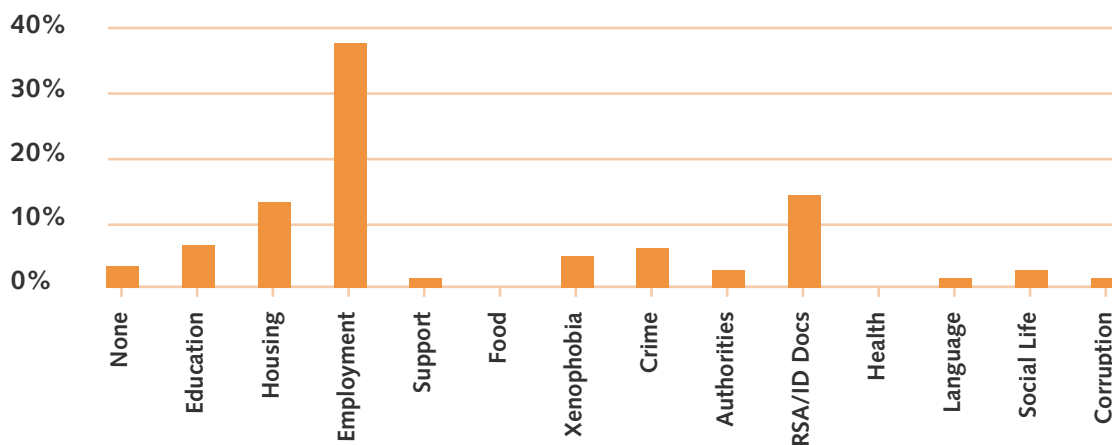
The table below indicates what coping strategies respondents in the quantitative survey employed in order to make their lives in South Africa more bearable.

Table 20: **Means of Coping with Life in South Africa**



The lack of or inadequate employment was the biggest challenge to migrant women living in South Africa - this was closely followed by lack of access to valid identity documents and lack of adequate accommodation. Violence-related challenges were the next most important cluster: crime, xenophobia and fear of the police/authorities.

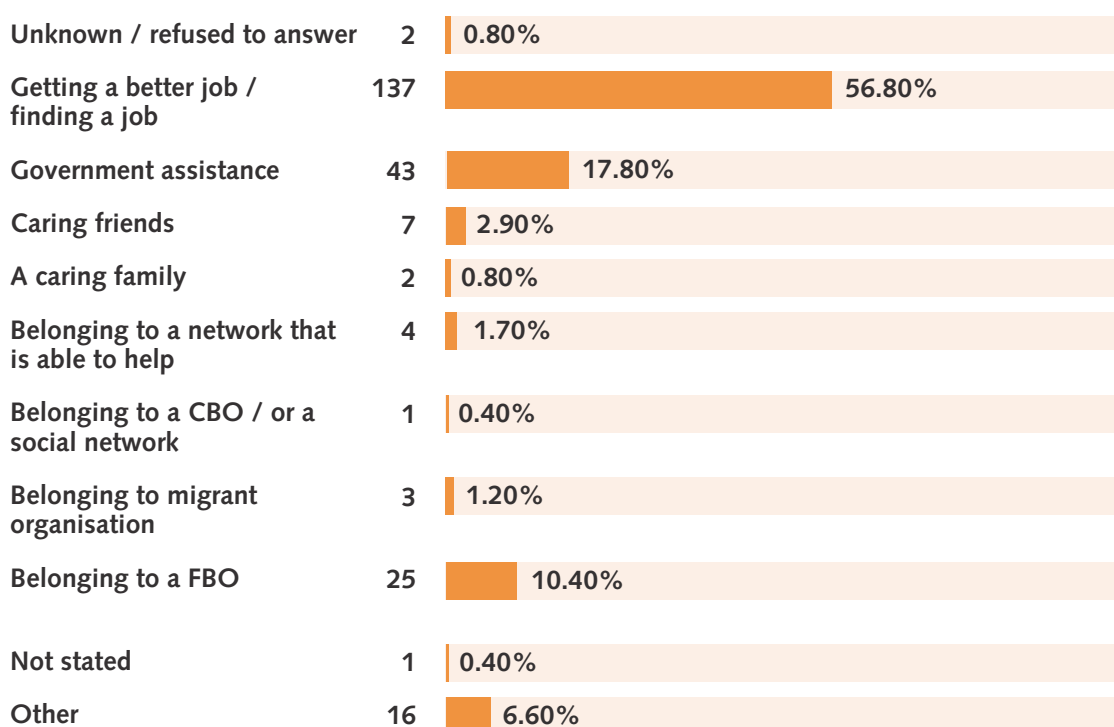
Table 21: **Biggest Challenges to a Migrant Woman in South Africa**



Once again, the vast majority of respondents felt that being employed or finding a better job would improve their lives in South Africa. This suggests two things: 1) a better job means more money and money ensures access to accommodation, healthcare, education, and even justice; and 2) many migrants just want to get on with the business of living and improving their lives, they do not necessarily want to be dependent on government assistance to enhance their quality of life in South Africa.

Table 22: **Factors that would affect Respondents' Lives in South Africa**

WHAT WOULD MAKE YOUR LIFE DIFFERENT FROM WHAT IT IS CURRENTLY IN SOUTH AFRICA?



### Words of Warning

*'... what goes around comes around'* (R13)

Many of the migrant women took the opportunity in the interviews to issue a warning to South Africans about how they should look to the future in case something horrific happened in South Africa that might require them to seek shelter and safety in other African countries: *'... but generally many countries they have seen their economy or political situation collapse by a small conflict. Because today South Africa wanted to chase away all black foreigners. Tomorrow it may be white foreigners, and after tomorrow it may be the conflict between different tribes in South Africa; then it will be a collapse of the economy. In such a way also trouble or crime has started like in Congo. When they chased away all foreigners and then afterwards it was conflict between different tribes until the economy of the country collapsed'* (R10).

## Conclusion

It became apparent over the course of this study that there are numerous causes, impacts and responses when it comes to xenophobia against foreign women in South Africa.

Since the widespread xenophobic attacks of May 2008, many researchers and analysts have pointed to the competition for resources between migrants and poor South Africans as one of the leading reasons for the violence. We found this to be true in relation to the general causes of xenophobia towards foreign women, with jealousy from South Africans over migrant women's accommodation and/or employment responsible for xenophobic attitudes and behaviour. However, our study found that this jealousy seems to extend beyond issues of poor service delivery and competition for resources, to the very nature of many migrant women. The private agency of many of the migrant women we interviewed (i.e. their entrepreneurial spirit, independence from government assistance and drive to improve their quality of life) not only resulted in envy and dislike from South African nationals, but also exposed them to xenophobia as they attempted to get on with finding employment or starting their own business, finding adequate and decent accommodation, educating themselves and their children, and making a life in South Africa. The legacy of apartheid was also evidently a cause of xenophobia towards the migrant women in our study: learned behaviours and attitudes of hatred and fear based on race, class and gender were apparent in the responses of South African nationals towards foreign women. Xenophobia could clearly be positioned on the same continuum as racism. While feelings of superiority based on skin colour, nationality and/or ethnicity were exhibited by South African nationals, so was a significant ignorance of the geographical and political situation of much of the rest of Africa that resulted in a lack of understanding about why migrants had come to South Africa in the first place.

The impact of xenophobia on migrant women in South Africa is far-reaching. Not only do these women have to face existential issues such as the loss of identity and lack of acceptance, but they also have to deal with the very real effects of long-term, recent and compounded trauma. It is obvious that, far from the ideal of integrating foreigners into South African communities, migrant women are being given a false 'choice' between assimilating (that is, making themselves culturally and linguistically invisible or becoming 'South African' by mimicking the local dress and language) or 'integrating' and bearing the xenophobic consequences. The xenophobic attitudes and behaviour displayed by many public sector officials, such as the police, health services, and the Department of Home Affairs, means not only a series of demeaning and frustrating experiences for migrant women, but also the very real problem of a lack of access to vital services.

Migrant women are, however, surprisingly resilient in a context that does not provide them with many opportunities. Their agency was evident in the efforts they make to earn an honest living, educate their children, and provide for their families. Many relatively well-educated migrant women were working as car-guards in order to make ends meet: some of them had used this opportunity to earn enough money for further education or to start their own business. In addition, the women we spoke to have a variety of coping mechanisms that they use to make life bearable in South Africa. These include religious groups, family and friends and support groups accessed through migrant organisations; very few of them relied on the South African government to make a difference in their lives.

In the light of our findings, there are many concrete and specific actions that can be taken to reduce the xenophobia experienced by women migrants (and, in fact, all migrants) in South Africa.

## Recommendations

### Community Interventions

#### Public Awareness

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Responsibility                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the impact of the 1998 'Roll Back Xenophobia' campaign run by the SAHRC in order to ascertain its limitations and challenges. By incorporating the resultant lessons learned, resuscitate the campaign as a national umbrella initiative with the focus, however, being on rolling out more <i>localised</i> community campaigns.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)</li> </ul>                                                                |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish local community and neighbourhood based education and awareness campaigns, workshops, forums and seminars with foreign and South African women, to explore the richness and diversity of Africa.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South African Local Government Association (SALGA)</li> </ul>                                                           |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roll out diversity education and awareness campaigns in schools.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Education</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create space for cultural exchange in schools.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Education</li> </ul>                                                                                      |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include a storyline in popular South African TV soaps, such as 'Generations', 'Isidingo', and 'Rhythm City', highlighting the challenges of being a migrant/refugee in South Africa.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)</li> <li>Etv</li> </ul>                                                   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create community radio stations that teach non-discrimination and/or include diversity education in the content of existing community radio stations.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Community Radio Forum</li> <li>Media Development and Diversity Agency</li> </ul>                               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locate anti-xenophobic posters in taxis, taxi ranks, bus depots, buses, train stations and trains.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Arts &amp; Culture</li> <li>Department of Transport and Public Works</li> <li>Local government</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Perform awareness-raising theatre in trains.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Migrant organisations</li> <li>NGOs</li> <li>Department of Arts &amp; Culture</li> </ul>                                |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sensitise the general public (i.e. banks, police stations, shop owners, superintendents) about what constitutes a valid ID document in South Africa, e.g. the red refugee ID document.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Home Affairs</li> <li>Local government</li> </ul> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Economic**

| Recommendation                                                                                                          | Responsibility                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create business partnerships between South African and foreign women.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local women’s groups</li> <li>Migrant organisations</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create income generation and skills development projects.</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local government</li> </ul>                                    |

**Support**

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                             | Responsibility                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Include foreign/migrant representatives on community structures to enable them to have access to decision-making bodies.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>South African Local Government Association (SALGA)</li> <li>Local government</li> </ul>                                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create support groups for foreign women to have a safe space to confidently talk about their issues together.</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Migrant organisations</li> <li>NGOs</li> </ul>                                                                                       |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inform migrant women on how to access public services.</li> </ul>                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Migrant organisations</li> <li>NGOs</li> <li>SAHRC</li> <li>Commission on Gender Equality (CGE)</li> <li>Local government</li> </ul> |

## Public Service Provision

### Public Service Providers

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Responsibility                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct capacity building and training with public service providers to educate them on working with women from different cultures.</li> </ul>                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NGOs in partnership with the relevant government departments</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote the use of English as the language to be spoken to migrants who cannot speak any indigenous languages in public services, so as to facilitate communication.</li> </ul>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments</li> </ul>                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish an intermediary between Home Affairs and the refugee, asylum seeker and migrant communities (such as UNHCR) to provide an oversight role for Home Affairs dealings with migrants and refugees.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Home Affairs</li> </ul>                                   |

### Public Transport

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Responsibility                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with the taxi associations to encourage them to be responsible for their drivers and to ensure that drivers are held accountable for violent incidents.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taxi associations in partnership with government</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a viable and safe transport alternative to taxis, such as a frequent and wide-reaching bus and train services.</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Transport and Public Works</li> </ul>         |

## Policy and Legislation

| Recommendation                                                                                                                                                                                | Responsibility                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a set of legal standards and guidelines for all public services so as to legally enforce equal treatment of foreigners and locals.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments</li> </ul>               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a transparent complaint process for the Department of Home Affairs and public hospitals.</li> </ul>                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments</li> </ul>               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure the implementation of existing policies and legislation.</li> </ul>                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant government departments</li> </ul>               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an ombudsman for migrants (housed within the SAHRC) to strengthen monitoring systems in relation to migrants.</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAHRC</li> </ul>                                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve the accreditation process for foreign qualifications and reduce the cost.</li> </ul>                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)</li> </ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relax employment equity provisions that exclude Africans from the continent from accessing jobs in South Africa.</li> </ul>                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Labour</li> </ul>                          |

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