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# Xenophobic Attacks Against Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrant Entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville, South Africa: A Social Identity Perspective

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## Abstract

Refugees are forced to flee their countries of origin due to factors beyond their control, and expect to find safety, peace, freedom, and have their basic needs met. Most engage in entrepreneurial activities to make a living. However, some refugees experience xenophobic attacks in host nations. Guided by the Social Identity Theory (SIT) to explore the phenomenon of xenophobic attacks against refugees in Atteridgeville, South Africa, this paper describes the factors contributing to xenophobic attacks against them. Participants were selected using the snowball sampling technique. Data were collected from 10 refugee entrepreneurs using one-on-one interviews guided by a semi-structured interview schedule. Data were analysed using thematic data analysis. The findings revealed the political and socio-economic factors behind the refugees' exodus from their country of origin. In trying to better their lives, refugees encounter several bureaucratic challenges when formalising their asylum and refugee status in South Africa. The study established that xenophobic attacks on refugee entrepreneurs were influenced by numerous factors, including jealousy, hatred of foreigners, unemployment, and lack of job opportunities for young black South Africans. In addition, poverty and crime were identified as factors responsible for exacerbating xenophobic attacks. Based on the findings of this study, the social work profession has a pellucid and pivotal role to play in addressing the individual, group, community, systemic, institutional, and structural level factors responsible for xenophobic attacks on refugee entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville. The study recommends that further studies focus on designing multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral measures for addressing xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** forced migration; refugee entrepreneurs; social identity perspective; South Africa; xenophobia



Academic Editors: William Haller, Carlos Teixeira, Hadijah Mwenyango, Sonja Novak-Zezula and Ursula Trummer

Received: 1 July 2025

Revised: 8 September 2025

Accepted: 17 September 2025

Published: 19 September 2025

**Citation:** Masinga, Poppy, Sipho Sibanda, and Lekopo Alinah Lelohe. 2025. Xenophobic Attacks Against Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrant Entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville, South Africa: A Social Identity Perspective. *Social Sciences* 14: 561. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci14090561>

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## 1. Introduction

There are many reasons why people around the globe seek to rebuild their lives in a different country. Some people leave home to get a job or an education. Others are forced to flee persecution or human rights violations (UNHCR 2025). The terms “refugee”, “asylum seeker”, and “migrant” are used to describe people who are on the move, who

have left their countries and have crossed borders ([Amnesty International 2025](#)). These terms are often used interchangeably; however, they are different in terms of legal status and standing. According to [Amnesty International \(2025\)](#),

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot or will not protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection.

On the other hand, an asylum seeker is a person who is yet to be formally recognised as a refugee. According to [Amnesty International \(2025\)](#),

An asylum seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn't yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

Additionally, a migrant is a person staying outside their country of origin who is not an asylum seeker or refugee. According to [Amnesty International \(2025\)](#),

Some migrants leave their country because they want to work, study, or join their family, for example. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances that exist there. Lots of people don't fit the legal definition of a refugee, but could nevertheless be in danger if they went home.

Although migrants do not flee persecution, they are still entitled to have all their human rights protected and respected, regardless of the status they have in the country they moved to ([Amnesty International 2025](#)). Governments must protect all migrants from racist and xenophobic violence. The prime motif of refugee protection is finding durable solutions that will help refugees rebuild their lives and live in safety, and these are voluntary repatriation to the country of origin when the threat to safety and well-being no longer exists, local integration, and resettlement to a third country ([Refugee Council of Australia 2019](#)). Refugees are usually hosted by a foreign country for a certain period, with the expectation that they will eventually return to their country of origin when the reasons that led to their fleeing the country have been addressed or minimised ([Onoma 2013](#)). In South Africa, however, refugees are subjected to secondary victimisation, persecution, and are frequently used as scapegoats for everything that goes wrong in South Africa ([Murenje 2020a, 2020b](#)).

Migration to South Africa by Africans is varied and often invokes a multiplicity of responses. While many migrate in search of political stability, peace, and economic opportunities, some are viewed as an 'out-group' that is unwelcome within the 'in-group' ([Adam and Moodley 2013](#), p. 21). The xenophobic attacks that took place in South Africa between 2008 and 2015 sent shockwaves across the country and the world at large ([Mafukata 2015](#)). South Africa had not experienced anything similar before, even during the apartheid era. During the apartheid-era, people migrated from their countries of birth to work in the mining and agricultural sectors and coexisted peacefully with local South Africans ([Gordon 2015](#)). This trend continued even after apartheid had formally ended, and many people still flock to South Africa looking for economic freedom and political stability. The perceived threat of foreigners in South Africa is frequently cited in several reported incidents of xenophobic violence ([Murenje 2020a, 2020b](#)).

The xenophobic attacks in South Africa can be traced back to 1998 when some foreign nationals were reportedly killed in a train travelling from Johannesburg to Pretoria

(Mutanda 2017). The incidence of such attacks increased, and the trend escalated to the point where more refugees were displaced, assaulted, and killed (Dessah 2015). The 2008 attacks were by far the most severe and resulted in 1000 displaced refugees and 60 murder cases (Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa 2013, p. 1). These ongoing attacks not only threaten the lives of foreign victims but also impede the attainment of objectives set out in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015). Sustainable Development Goals 8 and 16 seek to promote just, peaceful, and inclusive societies regardless of nationality, and sustainable economic growth, respectively (United Nations 2015). It is obvious that an attack on any person motivated by the victim's nationality represents backward momentum in the quest to establish peaceful and inclusive societies; it promotes fear, hatred, and violence. Moreover, the displacement and looting experienced by refugees derailed their participation in economic activities, thereby hampering South Africa's economic growth and sustainable development. Fatoki (2016) noted that the looting and vandalism of the informal shops owned by refugees during the xenophobic attacks negatively impacted those seeking economic freedom through entrepreneurship. The xenophobic attacks violated the Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) (Republic of South Africa 1996).

This article explores the reasons for xenophobic attacks against asylees, refugees, and migrant entrepreneurs in South Africa and asks the following research question: What were the reasons for the xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville, South Africa? The paper begins by unpacking migration as a precursor to xenophobic attacks, and the dynamics surrounding migration across the African continent into South Africa, by those seeking political stability and economic opportunity. Secondly, the paper discusses the prevalence of global and national xenophobic attacks, including the contributory factors and associated effects. This is followed by a presentation of research methods, findings, and discussion. Finally, the paper addresses its conclusions and recommendations. Although different, for this paper, the terms "refugee", "asylum seeker", and "migrant" will be used interchangeably to refer to both documented and undocumented foreign nationals in South Africa.

### *1.1. Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrants*

Migration describes the movement of a person, or a group of persons, either across an international border or within a state, which includes migration of asylum seekers, displaced persons, economic migrants, and persons moving for other purposes, including other factors such as family reunification (International Organisation for Migration 2011). It is a very dynamic and constantly changing process. Charman and Piper (2012) posited that several social challenges in Africa led to people migrating away from their country of origin, including religious and cultural extremism perpetrated by groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria; ethnic and civil wars in the Great Lakes Region of Africa; devastating famines that endangered food security; and endemic political bureaucratic corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa.

As mentioned earlier, people migrate not only for purposes of peace and political stability, but also in search of economic opportunities. Hovhannisyan et al. (2018) defined economic migration as the movement of persons from one country to another, for employment and/or economic growth. Further, economic migrants included those who escaped environmental degradation, natural disasters, and poverty in their country of origin (Kavuro 2015). Economically, South Africa is regarded as middle to upper-income and as a popular economic migration destination in Africa (Sibanda et al. 2025). Hovhannisyan et al. (2018) opined that during apartheid, South Africa adopted highly restrictive laws and border control measures to control the movement of migrants into its borders.

At the same time, migrant workers—mostly male—were recruited from various parts of Southern Africa, including Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe, while all other forms of migration were prohibited. Nonetheless, the situation changed with the advent of democracy in 1994. South Africa experienced an influx of migrants from Africa, predominantly. Approximately 75.3 percent of migrants in South Africa originated from African Countries ([Hovhannisyan et al. 2018](#), p. 17). Most migrants were young African males between the ages of 25–39 years, while the number of immigrants increased from an estimated 400,000 in 1990 to over 1.1 million in 2017 and to approximately 2,173,409 (about 4.2 percent of the country's total population) in 2018 ([Hovhannisyan et al. 2018](#), p. 2). The latest situation regarding the situation of asylum seekers and refugees in South Africa is painted by [World Data \(2025\)](#), as follows:

7072 asylum applications by refugees were received in 2024 in South Africa, according to UNHCR. Most of them came from Ethiopia, Congo (Democratic Republic of Congo), and Somalia. A total of 13,139 decisions have been made on initial applications. Around 12% of them were answered positively. 88 percent of asylum applications have been rejected in the first instance. The most successful have been the applications of refugees from Cambodia and Palestine. ([World Data 2025](#))

In 2024, a total of 2,631,100 migrants lived in South Africa, representing about 4.1 percent of the total population. These are all residents who live permanently in the country but were born in another country. The numbers include granted refugees but no asylum seekers. ([World Data 2025](#))

Many of those who migrated for political and economic reasons find it difficult to venture into gainful employment in South Africa. Subsequently, many migrants ventured into business as 'spaza-shop' owners. [Charman et al. \(2012\)](#) defined spaza shops as micro-convenience stores that trade in a clandestine manner and provide township residents with local access to everyday goods, otherwise only available at supermarkets situated far from the townships. Spaza shops were often cited as an example of successful micro-entrepreneurial endeavours within the informal economy of South African townships ([Tshishonga 2015](#)). The word 'spaza' is taken from isiZulu and means 'hidden'. These shops arose during the apartheid era, when business opportunities were not available to black entrepreneurs ([Charman et al. 2012](#)). Refugees were attracted to spaza-shops because the majority were unregistered businesses, run informally and could therefore avoid the municipal rules applicable to businesses conducted in residential areas ([Liederman et al. 2013](#)).

### 1.2. Social Identity Perspective

Xenophobia as a social phenomenon has attracted interest from various academic disciplines. Resultantly, several theories have emerged to explain it. These theories vary from economic, political, and social to psychological theories. In this article, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is incorporated to explain the reasons behind xenophobic attacks against refugees and to inform the intervention strategies for minimising or curbing them. SIT was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979 to explain inter-group conflict. The theory posited that individuals defined their identities concerning social groups. These identities helped foster and build self-identity ([Islam 2014](#)). According to [Tajfel \(2012\)](#), individuals found significance in the knowledge, value, and emotional attachment they had to their social group and therein formulated group identity. The formulation of group identity involved categorisation into membership of the 'in-group', or, for those who do not possess the same value and knowledge, the 'out-group'. [Islam \(2014\)](#) suggested that 'in-groups' would do anything, including engaging in physical conflict, to protect their identity. [Trepte](#)

(2006, p. 257) went further and averred that 'in-group' solidarity permitted discrimination against the 'out-group', to achieve and enhance self-esteem.

SIT offered important insight into the social identity bases of discrimination, prejudice, and inter-group conflict, by postulating these phenomena as resulting from group-based categorisation and self-enhancement motives (Islam 2014). SIT was relevant to understanding xenophobic attacks because they were perpetuated by prejudice and involved different groups. Some South Africans classified themselves as a homogeneous group (in-group) based on their national identity and citizenship, and foreign nationals as the heterogeneous group (out-group). Charman and Piper (2012) suggested that residents organised into groups (in-group) against refugees and foreigners (out-group), to claim the authority and power necessary to further their political and economic interests. Therefore, SIT provided meaningful insight into the reasons for xenophobic attacks against refugees or outsiders.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Xenophobia: International Trends

Xenophobia is a global phenomenon occurring worldwide, in democratic and totalitarian states alike; in violent and non-violent forms, and may be government-sanctioned or carried out by groups or a collection of individuals. A report by the UNHCR (2015) mentioned that the influx of foreigners into European countries was due to globalisation, the promise of economic liberation, the decline of most sovereign nations, and the disintegration of traditional values. The steady rise in migration, however, led to a situation where host countries struggled to accommodate foreigners due to competition for scarce jobs and resources (Hickel 2014).

Claassen (2017) professed that developed countries began experiencing an influx of migrants who adhered to diverse cultural and religious traditions, when compared to most of the residents. This sparked resistance and xenophobic sentiments in local citizens. The UNHCR (2015) reported that political instability in countries such as Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan, and Mali contributed to the high number of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe and the Middle East. Approximately 4.9 million Syrians sought refuge in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Greece, while an estimated one million refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria entered Europe (UNHCR 2015, p. 82). It was reported that some European countries were unable to cope with the influx of refugees, and the situation had resulted in harassment and xenophobic attacks (Vrsanska et al. 2017).

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2016) reported that asylum seekers and refugees faced various forms of violence and harassment across the European Union (EU). Some of the xenophobic attacks and harassment incidents reported in EU member states were as follows: 75 cases of racism and xenophobic attacks against migrants and refugees in Greece; 53 in the Netherlands; 735 cases in Germany; and 47 cases reported in Finland (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016, p. 2). Sweden reported 50 attacks that took place during 14 days in October 2015 and involved the use of hand grenades to start arson attacks on various accommodation centres reportedly catering for refugees, which resulted in many buildings being torched (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016, p. 1). The recorded attacks were violent, resulting in physical harm and displacement, and in extreme cases, death. Globally, foreigners and refugees experienced discrimination, intolerance, and harassment based mainly on race and religious background (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016). In France and Italy, right-wing groups attacked Asians and Africans and destroyed numerous asylum centres and blocked the rendering of refugee assistance programmes (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016).



In the United States of America (USA), xenophobic assaults manifested in the form of anti-Hispanic hate crimes against refugees from countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and the Northern Triangle of Central America (Zong and Batalova 2017). Additionally, the USA recorded several anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Han et al. (2023, p. 3518), nearly 1900 hate crimes against Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic were reported by victims, and around 69% of cases were related to verbal harassment, including being called the “Chinese Coronavirus”. Historically, in the USA, xenophobic attacks started in the 19th century and saw white Americans attacking Chinese farm workers (Wose-Kinge 2015). Later, white Americans began displaying negative attitudes towards Africans, Mexicans, Italians, and Asians, while white foreign nationals from Germany, England, France, Canada, and other developed states were welcome. In the aftermath of the 9/11 incident, during which buildings were bombed in the USA, anti-Muslim sentiments and xenophobic aggression increased considerably, with over 700 reported incidents of xenophobic attacks, including murder, aimed at Americans who originated from predominantly Muslim countries such as Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, and other Arab countries (Schuller 2013, p. 4).

At the same time, researchers also presented evidence that refugees are likely to have higher net return to criminal activity than economic migrants (Bell et al. 2013), and resettlement of refugees from richer Western democracies to poorer countries was suggested as a possible solution (Azarnert 2018).

## 2.2. Xenophobia: National Trends

After the collapse of apartheid in 1994, South Africa became a peaceful and democratic country, resulting in an influx of refugees and foreigners from other African states, often fleeing political instability and economic hardships in their countries of origin (Mabera 2017). Improved economic prospects and the promise of a peaceful living environment caused an influx of refugees from neighbouring countries, such as Lesotho, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, as well as others from further afield African countries, including Nigeria and Ghana. Among the different nationalities that migrated to South Africa, Zimbabweans constituted the largest number, with an estimated one million Zimbabweans living in South Africa; Somalians formed the largest number of refugee entrepreneurs (Mutanda 2017, p. 279). As Tshishonga (2015) observed, South Africa accommodated the highest number of asylum seekers worldwide. The influx of asylum seekers and refugees places a strain on already scarce resources such as employment, health, housing, and municipal services. This, in turn, fuels tension between local and non-local residents, contributing to incidents of xenophobic clashes, often with devastating consequences such as physical harm and death (Murenje 2020a, 2020b). Post-apartheid, South Africa witnessed violent attacks by black South Africans against non-South African, mostly black people from other African countries. Murenje (2020a) reported that since the country’s liberation from apartheid in 1994, hundreds of people have been attacked or killed because of their status as outsiders or non-citizens. Although some of the attacks were directed at migrant entrepreneurs—dubbed ‘violent entrepreneurship’—there were instances of attacks on black foreign nationals who were uninvolved in any business activity (Charman and Piper 2012). Misago et al. (2015, p. 13) provided a general statistical report of xenophobic incidents: in 2011, there were 154 reported cases with 99 deaths, 100 serious injuries, and 1000 displaced people. In 2012, there were 238 reported cases with 120 deaths, 154 serious injuries, and 7500 displaced people; while in 2013, there were 250 reported cases with 88 deaths, 170 serious injuries, and 7000 displaced people (Misago et al. 2015, p. 14). Since the outbreak of xenophobic attacks in 2008, it is estimated that 200 foreign-owned shops were looted and some permanently closed as a result (Misago et al. 2015, p. 21). Xenowatch (2025) notes the following.

Xenophobic attacks resulted in 694 deaths, 5648 looted shops, and 128,849 displacements between 1994 and August 2025. In May 2008, attacks took place in at least 135 locations across the country. The perpetrators of such attacks did not target white people but rather migrants from other African countries and, to a lesser degree, from South Asian countries, whom they blamed for increased crime and the high unemployment rate in South Africa.

In present-day South Africa, xenophobia still raises its ugly head. The attacks on foreign nationals have heightened. There has been a rise of anti-immigrant online movements, such as the “Put South Africans First Movement”, and the radical, vigilante, violent groups such as the “Operation Dudula” (Dudula is a Zulu word which means violently chase away everything). The movements have normalised the hatred for foreigners. In September 2020, the “Put South Africa First” hashtag was used over 16,000 times in a day; other popular hashtags included “23SeptemberCleanSA” and “ForeignersMustGo” (Dratwa 2024). On 16 June 2021, Operation Dudula launched a campaign called “Let’s Clean Soweto” to rid the township of “illegal migrants” and foreign business owners, targeting and evicting migrants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Dratwa 2024). The Anti-immigrant movements plant a seed of hatred against foreigners in South Africa and call for the mass deportation of foreigners. Dratwa (2024) notes that leading May 2024 elections in South Africa, xenophobic sentiments were rife, with several political parties using foreigners as scapegoats for the declining socio-economic conditions in South Africa. Operation Dudula registered as a political party and campaigned alongside the Patriotic Alliance, another political party with an anti-foreigner manifesto. According to Dratwa (2024),

In early January 2024, members of Operation Dudula and the Patriotic Alliance party went to the Beitbridge border post with Zimbabwe, some armed with guns, to prevent Zimbabweans without valid documents from entering the country.

In August 2025, the Operation Dudula movement began blocking asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants from accessing healthcare services in South African public hospitals, accusing them of overburdening the healthcare system (Democratic Alliance 2025). As if that was not enough, they are planning to visit schools and block all children of migrants from attending public schools. According to The Star (2025), Operation Dudula has stated that their members will be stationed in the schools to prevent the children of migrants from entering the school gates. According to The Star (2025), Operation Dudula issued the following statements.

No foreign child will be attending school in a public school; they can rather take them to private schools, we don’t care, but public schools are going to be reserved for South African children only.

These actions of blocking migrants from public healthcare facilities and public schools have faced huge condemnations from the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa (2025), which issued a media statement on 12 August 2025. Some sentiments shared in the press release are as follows:

Operation Dudula’s actions have the potential to misrepresent our country and our democracy. South Africa is a country of law and order, and these should be strictly adhered to.

The actions of Operation Dudula are objectionable and are an unnecessary distraction to the work the government is doing around immigration challenges. People do not just come to South Africa out of free will but for refuge and from hunger.

We cannot all adopt vigilante tactics when dealing with a challenge everyone accepts as massive and worthy of resolution. Legislative amendments and means are being proposed to resolve this challenge.

### 2.3. *Effects of Xenophobic Attacks*

Xenophobic attacks affected the victims, their families, the community, and the country at large. They often resulted in physical, psychological, social, economic, and political consequences. [Vromans et al. \(2011\)](#) suggested that xenophobic attacks went hand in hand with physical harm and, in extreme cases, loss of life. Refugee entrepreneurs were beaten up, and their shops were looted and burned, causing them to flee to places of safety, back to their countries of origin, or alternative places of safety ([Mensah and Benedict 2016](#)). A quintessence of this is the well-documented attack of Ernesto Nhamuave, a refugee entrepreneur who was set alight by a petrol-filled tyre called the 'necklace' during xenophobic attacks, resulting in his gruesome death ([Pineteh 2017](#), p. 11).

The physical impact of xenophobic attacks usually resulted in psychological effects, which were difficult to deal with. Refugees and foreigners affected by xenophobic attacks often felt lonely and hopeless in the sense that they longed for a place that they could identify with and call 'home'. Feelings of belonging were important to foreigners because the same could not be achieved in their countries of origin ([Vromans et al. 2011](#)). The authors further stated that those affected by xenophobic attacks often felt depressed, numb, fearful, distressed, and humiliated, and some suffered chronic anxiety resulting from their inability to live and do what they wanted freely ([Vromans et al. 2011](#)). [Hölscher \(2014\)](#) concurred that those affected by xenophobic attacks felt powerless and unable to express their feelings on account of not being citizens. A study by the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(2016\)](#) found that those affected by xenophobic attacks were reluctant to report such incidents to authorities for prosecution based on their lack of confidence in protection by the state. In addition, those who experienced attacks lived in fear of deportation, arrest, and the potential negative effects of xenophobia, which complicated their asylum status, application, and/or renewal ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2016](#)).

Further study by [Gopal \(2013\)](#) found that foreign national students who witnessed and experienced xenophobic attacks displayed psychiatric problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. The exposure to violence also negatively affected their school performance. When xenophobic attacks occurred, children often bore the pain and suffering caused by emotional distress and psychological harm ([Rasila and Musitha 2016](#)). Xenophobic attacks were also linked to fear. Fear gripped refugees and foreigners affected by xenophobia. Resultantly, they fled their dwellings and sought shelter in police stations, churches, municipal halls, and sports facilities ([Hayem 2013](#)). Those affected by xenophobic attacks often found themselves fleeing violence while their families bore the brunt of the ensuing adverse effects ([Oyelana 2016](#)).

Xenophobic attacks made the countries less attractive to tourists and led to potential income loss ([Ferreira and Perks 2016](#)). The tourism industry was a major contributor to the South African economy and contributed about nine percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), including more than a million jobs ([South Africa Yearbook 2017](#), p. 1). [Mudzanani \(2016\)](#) suggested that xenophobic attacks harmed the repositioning of South Africa as a leading tourist destination in the post-apartheid era. The graphic images of gruesome attacks on foreigners and refugees in South Africa were published around the world and deterred potential tourists ([Mudzanani 2016](#)). Xenophobic attacks hampered the spirit of Ubuntu, which South Africans have come to be known for, it recognises people's common humanity ([Murenje 2020b; Sibanda 2025](#)).



South Africa relied on skilled African migrants to develop its academic, medical, legal, engineering, business, and scarce artisan skills (Adebisi 2017). The constant attacks against refugees and foreigners likely deterred skilled professionals from migrating to South Africa for employment and development. Thus, there were strong condemnations of xenophobic attacks from neighbouring African countries such as Mozambique, Malawi, and Zimbabwe. In Mozambique, Sasol (a South African petroleum company) suspended its operations due to protesters blocking roads and hurling stones at trucks transporting fuel; while in Zambia and Malawi, there were efforts to organise consumer boycotts against South African products (Mutanda 2017). Nigeria recalled its ambassador from South Africa as a protest condemning xenophobic attacks (Claassen 2017). Incessant xenophobic attacks on foreign nationals undermined the goals and objectives of the African Union, which sought to integrate African states and "...promote sustainable development at the economic, social and cultural levels as well as the integration of African economies, promotion of cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African people" (Adebisi 2017, p. 90). The xenophobic attacks not only affected refugee entrepreneurs but also harmed the South African economy. Mokoena (2015) states that most refugee entrepreneurs contribute to South Africa's value-added tax (VAT) through their bulk purchase of goods from major South African wholesalers. In addition, refugee entrepreneurs contribute positively to the local economy as they rent shops or trading spaces (Murenje 2020a).

### 3. Methodology

This qualitative study sought to explore the factors responsible for xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville, South Africa. Thus, its objectives included:

- Contextualising and conceptualising xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs.
- Exploring and describing the factors responsible for xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs.
- Making recommendations for addressing the causes of xenophobic attacks on refugee entrepreneurs.

Atteridgeville, founded in 1939, is a black, urbanised township within the Greater Tshwane Metropolitan of South Africa. It was established to accommodate black people who were forcefully removed from areas earmarked for occupation by white people under the previous apartheid system (Tlhabye 2016). The area is situated about twelve kilometres west of Pretoria and covers 28.739 hectares (Statistics South Africa 2025). It has a population of approximately 64,425 people, and an unemployment rate of 11.9% (Statistics South Africa 2025). The area faces similar challenges experienced in many townships in South Africa, such as high unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse, high crime rate, and poor service delivery. Atteridgeville has been a hotspot of xenophobic attacks, which manifested as attacks and looting targeting foreign-owned shops and businesses, with reports of violence against foreign nationals (Chikohomero 2023). These incidents are often fueled by perceptions that immigrants are responsible for unemployment and other socioeconomic problems. Community members have voiced sentiments that foreigners should leave Atteridgeville (Chikohomero 2023).

In view of the study's qualitative nature, it employed a phenomenological research design to decipher refugee entrepreneurs' perspectives on the factors contributing to xenophobic attacks (Fouché and Schurink 2011). The population of the study consisted of refugee entrepreneurs in Atteridgeville, South Africa. Given the impossibility of studying entire populations, non-probability sampling was used as the exact size of the population was unknown to the principal investigator (PI) (Murenje 2020a; Strydom and Delpont 2011). The sample consisted of refugee entrepreneurs who experienced xenophobic attacks in Atteridgeville. The emphasis was on participants who had experienced xenophobic attacks

and who could explain and give an account of their lived experiences. The PI selected 10 participants using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was used because the PI had limited knowledge of and access to refugee entrepreneurs.

Data were collected from October 2018 to January 2019 through semi-structured one-on-one interviews using a set of predetermined questions. Since the participants were entrepreneurs, the PI conducted the interviews in a considerate manner that did not disturb the daily operation of their businesses (Strydom 2011). The PI single-handedly analysed the data consistent with the steps described by Creswell (2014) as follows: 1. Data organisation—this step involved typing field notes, transcribing interviews, sorting, and arranging data into different marked files. 2. Reading and writing memos—this entailed reviewing the collected data and familiarising with it through composing short phrases and forming key concept ideas. 3. Describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes—this step entailed grouping significant statements into units of information and themes, which involved reducing the data into a small, manageable sets of themes and sub-themes for the final report. 4. Interpreting the data—this entailed the development of codes, formation of themes from the codes, and the organisation of themes into larger units or abstracts that helped the PI to make sense of the data. 5. Representing visual data—In this step, the lived experiences of the refugee entrepreneurs were demonstrated in the research report through a table that displayed biological information about the participants, narrative passages, and discussions to document the empirical findings.

The study received ethical clearance (Reference number: 15263691) from the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. The quality of gathered data was guaranteed by enacting measures that ensured transferability, dependability, and confirmability. While conducting the study, the PI adhered to all ethical considerations as prescribed by Strydom (2011): avoidance of harm, voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and debriefing of participants.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Biographical Information of Participants

Table 1 below presents demographic information obtained from the male participants in this study. It addresses their age, nationality, country of origin, number of years living in Atteridgeville, and the type of business they ran.

**Table 1.** Biographical profile of participants.

Participant	Age	Nationality	Number of Years in Atteridgeville	Type of Business
1	38	Ethiopian	7	Spaza shop
2	40	Nigerian	5	Spaza shop
3	35	Burundian	7	Spaza shop
4	38	Ethiopian	7	Spaza shop
5	36	Nigerian	7	Spaza shop
6	35	Ethiopian	10	Spaza shop
7	40	Congolese	9	Spaza shop
8	45	Ethiopian	8	Spaza shop
9	38	Congolese	8	Spaza shop
10	35	Ethiopian	6	Spaza shop

As indicated in Table 1, the average age of the participants was 38 years. The average number of years the participants had been in South Africa was seven, thereby indicating that they migrated to South Africa when they were in their late twenties and early thirties, in line with [Hovhannisyan et al.'s \(2018\)](#) observation that most migrants from African countries were primarily young African males between the ages of 25–39 years. Ethiopian refugees were the majority, comprising five participants, followed by Nigerians and Congolese, with two participants, respectively. One participant was from Burundi. The demographic background of the participants was confirmed in the literature by [Long and Crisp \(2011\)](#), who report that most refugees and foreigners in South Africa were from the Horn of Africa, which included countries such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia. [Hovhannisyan et al. \(2018\)](#) noted that other refugees and migrants in South Africa originated from the Great Lakes Region, consisting of Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. This is due to its proximity to South Africa and the manifold sociopolitical and economic distress the population was experiencing ([Murenje 2020a](#)).

#### *4.2. Socio-Economic Factors Contributing to Xenophobic Attacks Against Asylum Seekers, Refugees, and Migrant Entrepreneurs*

The participants revealed that they left their countries of origin due to political and economic instability. The challenges they faced in South Africa included barriers in formalising their refugee status and obtaining documentation to legalise their stay; others lacked access to services and were separated from their families. Participants reported that xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs were caused by jealousy, hatred, unemployment, lack of job opportunities, poverty, and crime.

##### *4.2.1. Factors Contributing to Migration and Refugee Movements*

Participants reported that they understood and accepted their status in South Africa as refugees. All the participants reported that they were not originally from South Africa and that they all possessed asylum seeker permits for identification purposes. They reported civil wars, famine, poor political leadership, and security issues as the main drivers behind leaving their countries of origin for South Africa, a country they perceived as peaceful.

##### *Political Instability*

Political instability was identified as one of the main causes of migration. Participants stated that they fled their countries of origin because of civil wars. As one participant stated:

You understand that I can't go back [to the DRC]. I can see there is no future here, but at least there is some small peace that pushes me to stay. Because back there, there is fire. (Participant 7)

Thus, political instability forced participants to leave their countries of origin for one they perceived to be peaceful. This correlates with prior studies ([Mabera 2017](#); [Murenje 2020b](#); [Tshishonga 2015](#)), which found that migrants fled their countries of origin due to political instability. Political instability aside, other people migrated to countries they perceived to be economically buoyant, expecting to acquire economic opportunities to improve their well-being.

##### *Lack of Economic Opportunities*

As indicated earlier, the study revealed that some participants left their countries of origin in search of economic opportunities and prosperity in South Africa, as they viewed it as a well-developed country on the African continent. The following sentiments from some participants attest to this:

We came here from our country to start businesses. We are not the owners of the money; we had to borrow it to come here to start the business. (Participant 5)

When we left our country, we knew that here (in South Africa) we would do business. We know something that can bring money, and we know that when we are independent, we can buy a flat, we can raise children, we can send children to school, and we can send money back home with this business that we are doing. (Participant 8)

The findings that most refugees saw better economic opportunities in South Africa were confirmed in the literature by scholars like [Murenje \(2020b\)](#) and [Tewari \(2015\)](#), who observed that democratic South Africa became attractive to foreigners and refugees due to its political freedom and high standards of living. Further, [Oluwu \(2008\)](#) observed that refugees and foreigners saw South Africa as a destination of choice where they could add value to their lives and re-establish and expand their businesses. In addition, [Choane et al. \(2011\)](#) confirmed that South Africa was the most industrialised country in Africa with a leading economy, thus making it a sought-after destination for many refugees looking for economic opportunities.

#### 4.2.2. Challenges Faced by Refugees

The participants revealed two major challenges they faced in South Africa. These included formalising their refugee status and obtaining official documents to legalise their stay in the country, and separation from their families.

##### Barriers to Formalising Refugee Status and Obtaining Official Documentation

The study revealed that obtaining refugee status in South Africa was difficult, as asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants were required to constantly update their status at the Department of Home Affairs. In some cases, the offices for renewal were inaccessible and placed an added financial burden, in addition to their basic survival needs. As one participant reported:

The big problem is with the documents that we are not getting. Some people are now thinking of not staying here but of moving to other countries, because they cannot stay for long without the right documents. (Participant 4)

The challenges the participants in this study faced were consistent with observations by [Hovhannisyan et al. \(2018\)](#), who reported that asylum permits were valid for six months and subject to renewal. The authors further noted that the application and renewal processes were both burdensome and complicated and often left applicants with the prospect of travelling long distances at cost, to queue for prolonged periods of time to obtain permit renewals ([Hovhannisyan et al. 2018](#)).

##### Separation from Family

The study revealed that most refugees left their countries of origin without their families, and this led to loneliness, and they feared they might lose their loved ones. As one participant stated:

We try to talk to each other about everyday life, and I tell her that one day things are going to be well, when I have all my papers, she can come visit, because she can't visit when I don't have proper papers. I fear for us, I can't stay far away, for 7 years, 10 years, without the family. Sometimes I fear that maybe she might try to do something there with another man. You might break up when you spend most of your time outside the country. (Participant 10)

Similar findings were made by [Vrsanska et al. \(2017\)](#), who observed that foreigners and refugees in European countries usually experienced isolation and loneliness. In addition to being away from their families, refugees also experienced a lack of access to services in the host country.

#### 4.2.3. Factors Contributing to Xenophobic Attacks

Participants revealed several factors contributing to xenophobic attacks, including jealousy, hatred, lack of jobs and unemployment, poverty, and crime. These factors are discussed in turn.

##### Jealousy

The participants stated that jealousy was one of the main factors behind xenophobic attacks, looting, and the destruction of the shops owned by refugee entrepreneurs. Some participants stated that locals were jealous of their ability to run successful businesses in the townships. This was reflected in the narratives below:

You know what I meant by jealousy is that they say: you foreigner, you come from another country, you start a small business, the business is growing. So, when they come to your shop, they say Brother, can you sell this thing to me on credit. When you say no, they use their language to curse you. They say: 'You, you voetsek!! [informal Afrikaans offensive word meaning go away], go back to your country, you foreigner, go back to your country. That is the reason for their hatred of foreigners. (Participant 5)

It must be jealousy, because they (South Africans) see you take R2, R5, R10 in front of them. They know you are not making a lot, but the small amount you are making makes them jealous. They are the ones who come and break into our shops. I think I make them jealous; I don't know why. (Participant 3)

These findings were like those by [Chinomona and Mazariri \(2015\)](#), who found that jealousy was behind the xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs that took place in Port Elizabeth in 2014. Furthermore, [Misago et al. \(2015\)](#) noted that the success of foreign and refugee entrepreneurs, compared to that of local entrepreneurs, created feelings of jealousy, which often gave rise to political and economic confrontation. In addition, [Charman and Piper \(2012\)](#) believed that foreign entrepreneurs were blamed for taking over small businesses in the townships, leaving local entrepreneurs unable to compete. As foreign nationals outperformed and outshone their South African counterparts in running successful and profitable businesses, not only did jealousy prevail, but hatred for foreign nationals was identified as another factor that contributed to the xenophobic attacks that plagued the country.

##### Hatred

Participants in this study revealed that even though most of them looked like black South Africans in terms of skin colour, they perceived South African citizens as hateful. The participants believed locals hated them because they owned and ran successful small businesses, were wealthy, and lived well. One participant stated thus:

What I mean by hatred is that they can come and say Why, you foreigner, you come here and do nice and start the business for two years, and you started buying cars? They hate that because we know how to do business, they can't do business. We know something that can bring money. (Participant 2)

The hatred experienced by refugee entrepreneurs was ascribed to their ability to run successful businesses in comparison to their local counterparts. [Mothibi et al. \(2015\)](#) wrote



that refugees often experienced xenophobic attacks due to resentful feelings by locals towards their successful businesses. Similar observations were made by [Mafukata \(2015\)](#), who found that most attacks in the townships emanated from the hatred of local South Africans towards black African nationals, whose marginal and vulnerable status made them easy targets when compared to their European counterparts, who were usually welcomed and credited for contributing to the economic development of the country.

### Unemployment and Lack of Job Opportunities

The study revealed that the high rates of unemployed youth and lack of job opportunities created a fertile ground for community members to mobilise and initiate xenophobic attacks. Some participants made the following remarks:

You see, like those nyaope [a highly addictive, dangerous street drug, unique to South Africa] boys, who are not working, they say: you foreigner, you take my job, you take my job. (Participant 9)

Mostly, what I see in this xenophobia is that the people who do not work are the ones rubbishing the country. Unlike the unemployed, those who are employed and educated don't have time to engage in xenophobia; they think about their future and their families. (Participant 8)

Competition for limited job opportunities and high unemployment rates fuel xenophobia in South Africa. In support of the findings, [Shai and Mothibi \(2015\)](#) observed that South Africans were of the view that foreigners and refugees were taking their long-awaited jobs and economic opportunities, which they were deprived of during the apartheid era. In addition, [Mafukata \(2015\)](#) suggested that the socio-economic challenges facing many South African youths, such as high unemployment, often led them to resort to criminal activities such as xenophobic attacks for survival. In addition, residents who possessed post-matric qualifications were credited as less prone to xenophobic activities, as education improved their likelihood of employment ([Claassen 2017](#)). Other factors linked to unemployment and a lack of job opportunities included poverty, as discussed below.

### Poverty

The study revealed that poverty was at the heart of xenophobic attacks. As locals struggled to make ends meet due to high rates of unemployment, they compensated by taking advantage of the vulnerability of refugee entrepreneurs whose businesses became easy targets for looting. This was reflected in the following remarks by the participants:

I think those people were hungry; that is why they came to take my stuff. They started to take everything inside the shop. I found that those people were hungry and coming to steal my stuff only. (Participant 4)

The xenophobia is coming to steal from me. I see the people, they are hungry. They are talking too much about foreigners because they want to come and take stuff from the shop. (Participant 10)

I think the people are hungry, the people are suffering, they are not working. (Participant 7)

These findings were consistent with the findings by [Manyaka and Madzivhandila \(2015\)](#), who found that refugees often preferred to do business and seek shelter in the informal settlements, which were already overpopulated with poor and marginalised people, who would not hesitate to engage in conflict over unmet basic needs such as food, housing, health care, water, and sanitation. In addition, [Patel and Essa \(2015\)](#) revealed that South African residents acknowledged that hunger was a contributory factor towards

their looting foreign-owned shops. In addition to poverty and hunger, crime was also a contributory factor towards xenophobic attacks.

### Crime

This study found crime to be an engine that ignited, propelled, and drove xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs. The findings further revealed that crime was also a motive, an act, and a consequence of the attacks. The following narratives captured this viewpoint:

They came as if they were coming to buy something. They showed me the gun, you see, they said if I scream, they will kill me. They then took away everything from the shop. (Participant 4)

When they come, they don't tell you. You will see two, three people coming, and after that, you will see the shop full of people who then start throwing rocks, breaking the shop, breaking everything, and you then run away. After that, you see that they take everything from the shop. (Participant 3)

Well, those people came, and they said they were looking for people who were selling drugs, and I didn't understand anything about drugs. And I told them I don't know anything about the drugs, and they started to break my shop and took away everything. (Participant 8)

The findings were confirmed in the literature by [Rasila and Musitha \(2016\)](#), who linked xenophobic acts in South Africa to acts of criminality. Similarly, the findings of this study resonated with those by [Crush \(2012\)](#), who reiterated that the looting of foreign-owned shops and murder of foreign nationals should not only be viewed as xenophobic attacks, but opportunistic criminal acts.

## 5. Discussion

The findings revealed that the refugees left their countries of origin due to political and economic instability. Once in South Africa, refugees faced several socio-legal challenges that included barriers in obtaining jobs and documents to formalise and legalise their refugee status in South Africa, and being separated from their families. Due to a lack of jobs in South Africa, refugees had to rely on their entrepreneurial abilities and establish microscale enterprises such as “spaza-shops” in a quest to earn a livelihood. The findings regarding venturing into entrepreneurship by refugees in South Africa are similar to the experiences of refugees in other parts of the world, such as Turkey and Australia. [Gürsel \(2017, p. 134\)](#) notes, “One in every 40 enterprises established in Turkey is now Syrian”, while [Heilbrunn and Lannone \(2020\)](#) note that more than a fifth (21 percent) of refugees in Australia received their main income from their own businesses. Findings also revealed multiple factors responsible for xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs, such as jealousy, hatred, unemployment, lack of job opportunities, poverty, and crime.

[Tshishonga \(2015\)](#) confirmed that most African migrants were from countries where democracy had failed and had been replaced by greed and autocracy, particularly after the collapse of colonisation. The outcome of many failed African democracies resulted in political instability, civil wars, and political chastisement, which led to many people fleeing their countries to other neighbouring countries in Africa. According to [Hovhannisyan et al. \(2018\)](#), poverty and political instability in Zimbabwe, protracted conflict, repression, and economic insecurity in the Great Lakes Regions and in the Horn of Africa, increased the movement of people into South Africa. Similarly, [Congress \(2016\)](#) concurred that freedom, food, and safer lodging could be viewed as the main reasons for the movement of people from one country to another.

The study found that refugees migrated to South Africa due to political instability and a lack of business and economic opportunities in their countries of origin. The narrative of South Africa as a progressive country where entrepreneurs could build and expand their businesses was confirmed by various authors who observed that the economic opportunities that existed in South Africa led to an increase in economic migrants from West, East, and Central Africa who were mainly involved in small business activities (Misago et al. 2015; Munzhedzi 2015; Tewari 2015). A democratic South Africa became attractive to migrants and refugees due to its political freedom and perceived high standards of living (Tewari 2015). In addition, South Africa was regarded as the most industrialised country in Africa, thus attracting thousands of foreign nationals to it annually (Mutanda 2017). This made it a sought-after destination for many migrants and refugees from all over the world, and from African countries that experienced economic, social, and political distress (Choane et al. 2011). Instead of the above, the research findings revealed that while political instability and fear of violence led to foreigners seeking asylum in South Africa, the country's economic viability and standing made it even more attractive to asylum seekers and economic migrants. Results further showed that although most people migrated for peace, stability, and better opportunities, their route to a country perceived to be a better possibility was fraught with several challenges.

The findings indicated the difficulties experienced by refugee entrepreneurs in obtaining valid documents to support their refugee status; similar sentiments were made by Madue (2015), who argues that the missteps of South Africa's migration policies regarding access to documents contribute to fueling xenophobic attacks on migrants and asylum seekers. The author further states, "The slow pace with which the Department of Home Affairs processes the applications of asylum seekers [...] as well as the inhumane way by which detained undocumented migrants are treated, seems to be fuelling myths and misconceptions about foreign nationals" (Madue 2015, p. 63). Similarly, Kavuro (2015) revealed that refugees were faced with long turnaround times to have their documents processed by the Department of Home Affairs, which rendered them vulnerable, unable to seek work, obtain work permits, or participate actively in the economy. The findings indicated that refugee entrepreneurs were attacked by their South African counterparts due to jealousy and hatred because of misperceptions of being wealthy and living a better life. Additionally, high rates of unemployment in South Africa and competition for limited job opportunities were identified as factors contributing to xenophobic attacks.

Xenophobic attacks on refugee entrepreneurs in South Africa and other parts of the world, especially Europe, share some similarities but also exhibit some key differences. While distinct in their specific contexts, some common underlying causes of xenophobic attacks in South Africa and the rest of the world are driven by economic anxieties, social identity concerns, and political manipulation. According to Crush and McCordic (2017), both refugee entrepreneurs in South Africa and Europe demonstrate strong motivation and resilience, stemming from their pre-migration experiences, including conflict and displacement. However, South Africa's xenophobia is heavily influenced by its unique apartheid history and the influx of migrants from other African countries, while European xenophobia is often linked to the recent migrant and refugee crises and broader anxieties about national identity and cultural change (Gürsel 2017; Murenje 2020a). While both groups face challenges related to access to finance and navigating unfamiliar business environments, refugees in South Africa often operate in the informal sector, whereas those in Europe may be more integrated into formal markets (Crush and McCordic 2017).

## 6. Conclusions

Most victims of xenophobic attacks were black African, male, asylum seekers, refugees, and migrant entrepreneurs. Xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs happened because of competition for customers between them and local shop owners. Refugees left their countries of origin due to political and economic instability and migrated to South Africa with the hope of finding safety, peace, freedom, human rights, social justice, and prosperity. After failing to find jobs in the host nation, refugees embarked on entrepreneurial activities. However, they experienced xenophobic attacks, which thwarted their attempts to realise sustainable livelihoods. The challenges faced by refugee entrepreneurs in South Africa included barriers in formalising their refugee status and obtaining documentation to legalise their stay; others experienced a lack of access to services and separation from their families. The xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs resulted from jealousy, hatred, unemployment, lack of job opportunities, poverty, and crime. Since xenophobic attacks were influenced by multifarious factors, social workers can play a pivotal role in addressing the individual, group, community, systemic, institutional, and structural level factors that were responsible for the xenophobic attacks against refugee entrepreneurs.

### 6.1. Significance and Implications of the Study to Policy and Practice

Professionals working in the field of refugees have a pivotal role to play in fostering the integration of refugee entrepreneurs in South Africa. This can be realised by running awareness campaigns to sensitise South Africans about the reasons why refugees left their countries and to dispel the myths that socio-economic challenges that befall South African communities were caused by refugees. In addition, formal history lessons at the school level should be introduced to focus more on African migration to create awareness of the phenomenon of refugees and to reduce the likelihood of future xenophobic attacks. Professionals and service providers can initiate community dialogues and forums to facilitate cooperation between refugees and community members, especially in communities where xenophobic attacks are prone to happen. Moreover, a sufficient budget should be allocated to enhance service delivery. In addressing the issues raised by participants in this study, [Mwenyango \(2022\)](#) postulates that interventions should be held at the micro, meso, and macro levels by making use of the opportunities provided by the rights-based approach, trauma-informed practice, and strengths-based approaches, which allow the rendering of holistic and appropriate services to refugees.

The implications for working with refugees, as identified by [Mwenyango \(2022\)](#), are relevant to this study; they entail rendering services at an individual and family (micro) level, such services include counselling refugees, case management, linking them to resources, and empowering them to address the challenges that they face. At an interpersonal (meso) level, group work sessions can be facilitated to provide affected refugees with an opportunity to network, discuss challenges, share experiences, resources, and coping strategies ([Mwenyango 2022](#)). At a community and institutional (macro) level, awareness campaigns and advocacy measures should be embarked on to raise the plight of affected refugee entrepreneurs to communities, policymakers, politicians, and other stakeholders pivotal in supporting refugee entrepreneurs ([Mwenyango 2022](#); [Sambo and Sibanda 2025](#)). At a structural and systemic (chrono) level, service providers could hold governments and other duty bearers accountable for providing resources and services to refugees and other forced migrants, who are rights holders ([Trummer et al. 2023](#)).

### 6.2. Limitations of the Study

Qualitative studies are dependent on the goodwill of the participants and how much information they are prepared to share. Due to the sensitive nature of the research subject,

some participants found it difficult to openly and honestly share their experiences and challenges. The location of the interviews posed a challenge to the PI. The interviews took place in the areas where participants operated their businesses. The PI opted to interview the participants in a familiar and comfortable environment, which unexpectedly caused constant interruptions during the interview process. Moreover, some interviews were conducted with refugees through locked security gates at their business premises, and some were conducted outside, where there was noise and constant interruptions from the customers and community members passing by. The study only covered a small geographical area of South Africa; as such, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire South Africa. Participants in the study were only male refugee entrepreneurs; as such, the voice of female refugee entrepreneurs is lacking in the study.

### 6.3. Recommendations

Future studies on refugee entrepreneurs in South Africa should be conducted from a mixed-methods approach and cover a wider geographic area of South Africa. Moreover, such studies should make a deliberate effort to include female refugee entrepreneurs. Further studies can focus on exploring the challenges faced by refugees in formalising their asylum status in South Africa. Other studies could focus on developing a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral framework aimed at addressing the different factors responsible for xenophobic attacks against refugee and migrant entrepreneurs. Such a framework could stipulate the roles and responsibilities of different government departments, for example, the South African Police Service, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Health, and Department of Social Development, in providing services to refugee entrepreneurs and in putting measures in place to minimise the likelihood of future xenophobic attacks.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualisation, P.M., S.S. and L.A.L.; Methodology, P.M., S.S. and L.A.L.; Software, L.A.L.; Validation, P.M., S.S. and L.A.L.; Formal analysis, P.M., S.S. and L.A.L.; Investigation, L.A.L.; Resources, S.S. and L.A.L.; Data curation, L.A.L.; Writing—review and editing, P.M.; Visualisation, S.S.; Supervision, P.M. and S.S.; Project administration, S.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The study was conducted per the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (protocol code 15263691(GW20171122HS), 5 October 2018).

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because of ethical restrictions.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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