



CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE  
Informing South African Policy

# IMMIGRANTS IN JOHANNESBURG

Estimating numbers and  
assessing impacts







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CDE In Depth provides South African decision-makers with detailed analyses, based on original research, of key national policy issues.

Series editor: Ann Bernstein

This is an edited and abridged version of a comprehensive report based on survey research on immigrants in Johannesburg. The full-length report, which is available from CDE, was written by Professor Lawrence Schlemmer, who also designed and carried out the surveys. This version was written by Dr Sandy Johnston.

The Johannesburg Survey is part of a larger CDE project on immigration, skills, and xenophobia, which aims to provide a research base for effective policies to manage immigration. The project is led by CDE's executive director, Ann Bernstein, and managed by Dr Sandy Johnston. This project was funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies. The funders do not necessarily agree with the views expressed in this publication.

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Most immigrants, at all levels – from the street trader to the boardroom – make a contribution to South Africa's economy, sometimes against daunting odds. We need to understand, manage and capitalise on that contribution much better. But we will only be able to do this if we are able to manage flows of people across our borders more rationally and efficiently

# Executive summary

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THIS REPORT PRESENTS the key findings of a CDE survey of cross-border immigrants living in Johannesburg.

It is being released in the aftermath of a wave of murderous xenophobic attacks on foreigners in the city and surrounding areas that has brought migration issues into shocking focus, and moved the need for more effective migration management far higher up the policy agenda.

South Africa has attracted large numbers of immigrants, particularly from poorer neighbouring countries, because of superior economic opportunities and services. Concerns about migration and immigration must seek to strike a balance between humanitarian concerns and international obligations; the need to control borders; citizenship and social integration; and skills needs and the economy. However, the country lacks the information needed to achieve such a balance.

This is one of the largest and most sophisticated studies on immigration to South Africa undertaken thus far. Besides establishing a far more accurate profile of immigrants in Johannesburg, it examines how immigration issues intersect with public policy challenges.

## The study

CDE's research was devised in conjunction with leading demographers to reach a population that wishes to avoid being identified and enumerated. Building on lessons learnt from an earlier pilot study of Witbank, the research was aimed at estimating the number of foreigners in Johannesburg, finding out more about them, and investigating the attitudes of South African city dwellers towards them.

The core element was a household survey aimed at assessing the number of immigrants in the sample, and obtaining estimates of the numbers of immigrants in neighbouring households. This was followed by interviews with immigrants themselves. Interviews were also conducted with 45 representatives of business organisations and 32 police, local government, immigration, and welfare officials. The field work was conducted in the second half of 2006.

CDE's survey was designed to be broadly representative of all areas and types of residence in Johannesburg. The attacks on foreigners in May 2008 were largely confined to informal settlements bordering on major urban areas, which represent only one area of immigrant concentration. As a result, public awareness of immigration issues – and such research as has been conducted since the violence – have tended to focus on these areas. This report offers a broader view of the numbers and impact of immigrants, and attitudes towards them, in Johannesburg as a whole.

It is also important to bear in mind – again in the aftermath of the xenophobic attacks – that the survey does not distinguish between irregular and legal immigrants. The violence has tended to focus attention on 'illegal' immigration,

This is one of the largest and most sophisticated studies on immigration to South Africa undertaken thus far

CDE's survey suggests that the number of foreigners in Johannesburg in 2006 was around 550 000

although much of the media and many members of the public have a poor understanding of the categories of legality involved in migration. This has encouraged popular assumptions that most foreigners are criminals merely by being here. In our survey, the views of and about those immigrants who are here legally are also reflected in the findings.

### How many foreigners in Johannesburg?

Johannesburg is South Africa's largest metropolitan area, and its biggest focal point for cross-border migrants. This is because, first, it is the economic centre of Gauteng, which is the motor of the national economy; second, it is in close interaction with two other metropolitan complexes, Tshwane and Ekurhuleni; and third, it is within easy reach of neighbouring countries Botswana, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Estimates of the foreign-born population in Johannesburg and in the country as a whole have fluctuated widely for several reasons: the main one is the need of unauthorised migrants to avoid being identified. Then there is the difficulty of distinguishing between migrants who have settled here and those who regularly return home; the ability of migrants to illegally obtain documentation from corrupt officials; and the expense of large-scale population research. Official figures on foreign residents are captured in national censuses. This means that the most recent official source dates from 2001, when Statistics South Africa estimated the number of foreigners in the country as a whole at 2,3 per cent of the population (or 1,1 million people).

In the face of the difficulties involved in counting immigrants – especially irregular ones – wildly varying estimates are the norm. For instance, in 2006 a Johannesburg-based economic consulting firm estimated that there were 9,84 million irregular immigrants in South Africa at the time (an unlikely 20 per cent of South Africa's total population).

Analysis of CDE's Survey data suggests that the number of foreigners in Johannesburg in 2006 was around 500 000 to 550 000. Johannesburg's population was estimated by Statistics South Africa's 2007 Community Survey to be almost 3,9 million. Estimating a percentage for these figures depends on the degree of visibility of (especially irregular) foreigners to the Community Survey. The upper limit of CDE's estimate of foreigners (550 000) would give the following range of percentages for foreign residents in Johannesburg: if all foreigners are visible (and hence the Community Survey total of 3,9 million is accurate) about 14,5 per cent of the population of the Johannesburg metropolitan area is foreign. Depending on how invisible foreigners are, the true population of the city could be as high as 4,45 million, and the percentage of foreigners as low as 12,35 per cent. Neither extreme (complete visibility and complete invisibility) seems likely, so the figure is probably somewhere between the two percentages.



## Immigration as seen by Johannesburg residents

Zimbabweans and Mozambicans are perceived to be the largest groups, followed by Nigerians, Chinese, and Malawians; at a lower level are Indians, Pakistanis and Europeans. Immigrants from other countries in Africa have low visibility because of their small numbers, although Somalis have low numbers but high visibility. Those from BLNS probably exceed Nigerians but have low visibility.

The dominant foreign groups (Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and Nigerians) are seen to cluster in inner city and associated areas, although they also have a strong presence in outlying areas. The composition of immigrants diversifies with movement into the fringe areas, while the former white suburbs have a more selective immigrant presence.

Foreigners are perceived to work as hawkers, artisans, miners, domestics and gardeners, shopkeepers and stallholders, in professional and technical activities, personal services, other services, security, and small manufacturing and crafts.

Negative perceptions of foreigners outweigh positive ones among black South Africans, less so among minorities, although levels of intolerance appear to be no worse than in other countries.

Xenophobia appears to be inconsistently related to economic threat, education and level of contact. However, one pervasive factor is the myth that a foreign presence is tantamount to a criminal presence. The stress induced by high crime levels creates a perpetual need for scapegoats.

Nonetheless, there is agreement among both blacks and minorities that certain categories of immigrant are beneficial. BLNS citizens, Westerners and Indians are highly approved; Chinese, Zimbabweans and Mozambicans approved; and Malawians and Pakistanis approved with qualifications. Nigerians, Somalis and people from non-English-speaking African countries (except Mozambique) do not gain approval.

## Characteristics of immigrants

The results of the follow-up survey among 302 foreigners cannot give a complete picture of the foreign residents of Johannesburg because the results probably under-estimate the number of foreigners who live and work on suburban and peri-urban properties, as well as former residents of the BLNS countries and immigrants who live in non-residential circumstances (sleeping rough, places of refuge, workplaces). Nevertheless, the results are representative of those in the residential fabric of the city, who are less reclusive.

The foreigners in our sample are concentrated in informal housing areas (41 per cent) followed by formal townships (23 per cent), with the remainder evenly divided between the inner city and suburbs.

Xenophobia appears to be inconsistently related to economic threat, education and level of contact

The principal factor determining perceived levels of hostility is the ability to blend into local communities

Only some 20 per cent of the foreigners were unemployed. Forty-four per cent were self-employed, and 12 per cent employed other people: the average number of employees was four, half of whom were South African.

Their occupations were much the same as they were perceived by other residents, covering a wide range of small trading and independent service provider occupations, as well as employment ranging from technical and artisan to professional.

Sixty per cent of foreigners experience negative treatment in Johannesburg. In line with the various approval ratings, those from BLNS, Europeans and East Africans experience less hostility than those from West Africa and Mozambique.

The principal factor determining perceived levels of hostility is the ability to blend into local communities through cultural compatibility, closeness to one of South Africa's ethnic groups, and the ability to speak a South African language. Those who bear the brunt of xenophobia are those who dress, look and speak differently, notably Nigerians and other West Africans, Somalis, and – to a lesser extent – Mozambicans. When the fieldwork was carried out in 2006, the level of xenophobia was tolerable for most immigrants, but some immigrant communities have for years been targeted for harsher treatment and sporadic violent attacks.

Although 75 per cent of foreigners say that they intend to return to their countries to retire, in reality far fewer actually do so.

Feedback from our survey interviewers indicated that they frequently suspected that respondents were neither 'illegal' nor fully and legitimately legalised in terms of formal entry requirements, but had acquired 'genuine' (in the sense of not being forged) documents illegally through corrupt officials. Of course this could not be openly said, but it is worth noting that experienced interviewers were strongly and frequently given this impression.

## Perceptions of local officials

CDE interviewed 32 high-level officials in national and metropolitan police services, planning divisions of local government, welfare administration, and regional immigration offices throughout the Johannesburg region.

Key points in officials' responses were:

- In-migration to Johannesburg is seen as out of control. Their (over)-estimates of the number of foreigners in the city average out at 2,5 million (in a population officially estimated at 3,9 million in total), of which 86 per cent are believed to be non-legal. This perception produces feelings of helplessness and desperation among officials.
- Only 12 per cent of them see immigrants as an advantage for Johannesburg, while 55 per cent see them as a liability.
- Many officials concede that immigrants make a significant contribution to small business activities, with 71 per cent observing that foreigners mainly

do jobs that locals do not. Two-thirds admit that foreigners are hardworking, determined, and productive.

- Most officials in the 'frontline' of immigration issues believe that Johannesburg's services and facilities are seriously oversubscribed and that foreign migration is adding to the stress.
- Some 50 per cent believe that foreigners are more involved in crime than locals; 43 per cent believe them to be equally involved.
- There was a broad consensus about the need for skilled immigrants in fields such as engineering, the professions, teaching, entrepreneurship, the construction industry, artisan and technical trades, manufacturing, and IT.

## Perceptions of business people

Senior officials of all 45 significant business organisations operating in Gauteng, including foreign chambers of commerce, were interviewed:

- Some 49 per cent saw the large number of undocumented foreigners as a very serious problem, 27 per cent as fairly serious, 16 per cent as both a problem and a benefit, and 9 per cent as a benefit rather than a problem.
- On average, they perceived the number of immigrants in Johannesburg to be more than 2,7 million.
- Twenty per cent felt that the contribution of immigrants to small businesses was considerable, and 44 per cent that it was helpful to some extent. Only 24 per cent felt that foreigners reduce business opportunities for locals, and 76 per cent felt that they add value.
- Given skills shortages, some 30 per cent of the business organisations observed a great need to recruit foreigners, and 36 per cent a moderate need.
- Many felt that South African unskilled labour has priced itself out of the market.
- High crime levels were mentioned as the factor that most hindered the recruitment of skilled foreigners.

## Summary of results

The number of foreigners in Johannesburg at the time of the study (2006) is estimated to have been more than 500 000. Depending on their degree of visibility in Statistics South Africa's population estimates, this means between 12 and 14,5 per cent of Johannesburg's population. In mid-2008 the figure could be higher, perhaps 600 000 or 700 000. A combination of factors could be the cause of this increase: the probable under-representation of specific types of foreigners in our survey, the escalating crisis in Zimbabwe, and the pull factor of sustained economic growth above five per cent in 2006 and 2007. This is not a firm finding, however, and we should adhere to our estimate of 500 000 to 550 000 in 2006.

The foreigners in Johannesburg have significant skills to offer, although these are more often than not experience-based rather than certificated skills.

Most officials in the 'frontline' of immigration issues believe that Johannesburg's services and facilities are seriously oversubscribed

Foreigners are more than twice as likely to be self-employed and self-sufficient as local adult residents

On average, the foreigners are not highly educated, although the average level of education (incomplete high school) is often of a higher standard than equivalent South African schooling.

The foreigners are more than twice as likely to be self-employed and self-sufficient as local adult residents. Their level of unemployment, which occurs mainly among very recent immigrants, is also significantly lower than the local South African equivalent level.

The immigrants employ almost half their total numbers (12 per cent of them are employers, employing an average of almost four people each); close to half again are South African employees.

Up to one third of the immigrants take paid employment that unemployed South Africans say they would like to have, but the immigrants are grateful for the opportunity, while the jobs concerned are regarded as inferior or underpaid by local standards. In practice, there is much less direct job competition between foreigners and locals than the estimate of up to one-third would suggest.

Most immigrants integrate well into the South African community, with many South African friends, and nearly 60 per cent feel accepted as part of the local community. Most of them are happy with life in Johannesburg, rather more so than local people.

Xenophobia is pervasive in a broad sense and is related to an accumulation of many different negative attitudes rather than a consolidated mindset. It is caused less by competition for jobs and resources than we expected, and at least as much by personality attributes and ethnic loyalties among local people. However, it is not the result of colour-based racism on the part of black or white South Africans.

The accumulated specific hostilities that make up the overall picture of xenophobia do cause unhappiness among foreigners, in particular the reactions of officials and police.

The key potential effects of hostility are muted, however, by the fact that a majority of the foreigners interviewed feel accepted in the local community.

The national origins of immigrants are an important intervening variable, however, and people from more distant countries in Africa, excluding English-speaking East Africa, are exposed to considerable hostility and stereotyping. The reasons are mostly cultural, although they are sometimes expressed as an assumed proclivity for criminal behaviour.

The hostility to foreigners does not extend to a reluctance to employ or trade with foreigners. In fact their usefulness as employees and business people is generously recognised by South Africans, people in business, and many key officials.

## Conclusion

In undertaking this research, CDE took on a deceptively simple but extremely difficult task of penetrating the myths and misinformation surrounding immigrant numbers in South Africa. It is essential that policy makers have access to baseline figures on immigrant numbers which are grounded in field research, rather than relying on extrapolations or politically malleable guesses.

In trying to come up with such numbers CDE was all too aware that when a population does not want to be counted (and has good reasons for this preference) then indirect methods have to be employed, with all the potential for error that this implies. It was against this background that we came up with a baseline estimated figure of more than 500 000, which is substantially greater than the figure recorded in the 2001 census, but considerably smaller than popular estimates. This would give a percentage of foreigners in the city's population of 12–14 per cent, depending on the accuracy of official estimates of the total Johannesburg population.

We have expressed several reservations about the findings in our analysis of the data and review of the methodology, the most important one being that this figure could be an underestimate.

What should we make of this estimate? It is well below the figures that have generated a kind of popular panic combined with official resignation and passivity. It was this toxic chain reaction that contributed to the attacks on foreigners in May this year.

However, CDE's estimate places immigrant numbers well above any level that could be an excuse for complacency, and our analysis clearly points to the need for a comprehensive and effective strategy to deal with immigration issues. This needs to be coupled with clear and bold leadership to build public confidence in the government and the city's ability to deal with the realities of migration.

What are those realities? As the country – particularly Johannesburg – counts the cost of the May 2008 violence, we see three realities that will shape the future challenges of immigration policy.

The first is that continuing and probably increased immigration is inevitable. South Africa – Africa's richest economy – has long and porous borders at the bottom of a poor and conflict-prone continent. Increased migration pressures, including climate change, improved transportation and political conflict will push out-migration from sending countries while the performance of South Africa's economy will act as a magnet for those with the initiative to leave their own countries and try for a better life elsewhere.

The second is that at all levels, from the street trader to the boardroom, most immigrants make a contribution to South Africa's economy, sometimes against daunting odds. We need to understand and manage that contribution much better, and capitalise on it. But we will only be able to do this if we can manage flows of people across our borders more rationally and efficiently, that is, in ways that give South

The hostility to foreigners does not extend to a reluctance to employ or trade with foreigners

Popular fears and misconceptions about immigration must be taken seriously

Africans confidence that these flows of people make a positive contribution to the common good and that the country is controlling its own borders.

Thirdly, this means that popular fears and misconceptions about immigration must be taken seriously. All over the world migration issues are disputed between elite concerns for skilled labour needs and human rights on the one hand, and on the other, popular concerns about preferential treatment over locals, unfair competition in the labour market, border control, and bogus claims to asylum. When they show themselves here, these concerns are not the products of blind prejudice or some national predisposition to xenophobia, but local versions of universal and understandable fears. None of them is as simple as it looks and all may be fanned by misinformation. But if immigration is to make the contribution it can to our economic growth, then they have to be taken seriously.

Neither this report, nor the research on which it is based, was intended to produce a strategy for addressing these realities. This aim belongs to a larger and more ambitious CDE study, which covers all aspects of immigration policy but with a particular focus on skills needs and the economy. The forthcoming final report on this project will provide a comprehensive overview of the migration policy issues facing South Africa, and will include research-based recommendations for more effective policy making in the country's approach to managing migration.

Main report

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'It is time to accept that migrants have been the  
lifeblood of the city since it was founded.'

*Mayor of Johannesburg, Amos Masondo, 2007*



# Introduction

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**T**HIS REPORT PRESENTS the key findings of a CDE research survey of cross-border immigrants living in Johannesburg, undertaken in 2006 and analysed in 2007.

It is being released in the aftermath of a wave of murderous attacks on foreigners in Johannesburg and elsewhere in South Africa that has brought migration issues into shocking focus, and moved migration management issues far higher up the policy agenda.

The basic facts about the attacks are well known. The violence broke out on 10-11 May in Alexandra township in northern Johannesburg, an area of high unemployment and social deprivation. It spread quickly to other Johannesburg townships, and then to Cape Town, Durban, and Port Elizabeth.

By Sunday 1 June 62 people had been killed, 670 injured, and thousands displaced from their homes. The violence subsided thereafter, but there is every reason to fear further outbreaks.

This apprehension is based on the fact that (comparatively) low-level and localised outbreaks of violence against foreigners have been endemic to urban areas in South Africa for a decade. One source lists 11 such attacks on foreign nationals in the seven months prior to the May attacks. Five of the incidents led to deaths (11 in total).<sup>1</sup> The risk of further outbreaks is intensified by worsening economic pressures on poor communities in urban informal settlements, where the May outbreaks largely took place.

Aside from human and material costs in death, injury, displacement, and destruction to property, there has been political fall-out from negative global reaction to images of mob violence. This has fed into already worsening perceptions of South Africa which are attributable to – among numerous other factors – political and economic uncertainty over leadership in the ruling party, and threats to growth from energy shortages.

The government responded – too slowly for some critics – with emergency relief and security measures, but the reactions of leaders and spokesmen as to the causes and significance of the outbreaks were confused and sometimes contradictory. In the aftermath, some consistency has emerged from ministerial statements. These have to some extent acknowledged policy shortcomings and made promises of better diagnosis and prescriptions for improving aspects of policy and performance in migration management.

Regrettably, none of this is new. Strains and tensions have surrounded immigration policy for more than a decade. Law-making in this area was unduly prolonged and lacked transparency in a process that at crucial points was unpredictable and even capricious. The Department of Home Affairs (DHA), which has primary responsibility for managing immigration, has been plagued by capacity problems and is in a semi-permanent state of ‘turnaround’.

As a result, lack of confidence in both policy and implementation stretches from the street to the boardroom, encompassing stakeholders and experts alike.

In the aftermath of the attacks there have been calls for change across a range of government responsibilities, from foreign policy to service delivery. Many of the criticisms and recommendations have been well founded. Whatever else needs to be done, however, it

Low-level and localised outbreaks of violence against foreigners have been endemic to urban areas in South Africa for a decade

South Africa is a typical 'destination country' for cross-border migration

will be essential to focus on the creation of public confidence in immigration policy and the people responsible for implementing it.

To achieve this, clear, reasonable, and realistic goals for migration management will have to be developed, as well as, feasible policies to achieve them. An obstacle here has been the absence of credible information on many aspects of cross-border movement of people – from the number of foreigners in South Africa to the number of permits issued by the DHA to legal immigrants.

This dearth of well-grounded information, and the resulting prevalence of unsupported and highly exaggerated misinformation, has probably contributed greatly to an atmosphere of anxiety and tension about the presence of foreigners in South Africa. Without this, the May xenophobic attacks might not have happened.

As the attacks escalated, CDE was preparing for publication this report of a survey of local residents and immigrants in Johannesburg. The main purpose of the survey was to try to estimate the foreign-born population of Johannesburg through innovative methodology, and therefore on a sounder basis than has hitherto been the case. Other aims were to investigate the attitudes of local residents, businesspeople and state officials to foreigners, and to profile the immigrants themselves.

## South Africa as a destination

South Africa, despite being a developing country, is in some respects a typical 'destination country' for cross-border migration. The differences between South Africa and its regional neighbours, in economic opportunity, service provision, and even social welfare, resemble the powerful factors of attraction that draw migrants in large numbers to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries from poorer neighbours, or even further afield.

The distances over which these differentials are felt have stretched rapidly and extensively as globalisation has advanced. While neighbouring Mexico is still the largest source of migrants to the USA, the whole of Latin America is its neighbourhood. The EU must come to terms with the fact that the countries of West Africa – which include some of the poorest, and those with the highest birth rates in the world – are in terms of migration its close neighbours. Neither the Atlantic nor the Sahara guarantee firm borders.

The migration of people that results is difficult to manage. Among the factors which put pressure on policy making and implementation in all destination countries, including South Africa, are the following:

It is very hard to estimate the numbers of 'irregular' or 'illegal' or 'undocumented' immigrants (See box: **Illegal, undocumented or irregular?**, facing page) even in developed societies with sophisticated resources of administration and extensive social research capacities.

- Whatever their status – legal or irregular – migrants differ widely in their motives for leaving, how long they stay, what they bring to the new country and what they hope to achieve. All of these might change in the course of their sojourn.
- Public attitudes to migration in the destination countries are invariably divided; humanitarian concerns and acceptance of diversity and skilled additions to the workforce clash with suspicion and resentment at what is perceived to be unfair economic competition and fears for the cultural composition of nations.

- Official responses to public divisions of this sort are often uncertainly poised between tougher control measures and a more flexible recognition that migration can't be stopped and must be accommodated in some way. Both approaches carry costs.

### Illegal, undocumented or irregular?

The use of different labels for what are essentially the same people generally reflects differing attitudes about what sort of challenges are posed by the movements of such people, and how they should be dealt with. 'Illegal' has connotations of criminalisation and hopes of controlling migration through strict law enforcement measures. 'Undocumented' generally goes with conceiving migration issues in human rights terms, and managing migration through granting status to what others call 'illegals' through amnesties, temporary permits, and so on. Since this report does not make comprehensive policy recommendations one way or the other, we would wish to avoid either extreme, at least for the moment. In the interests of consistency and neutrality, we have opted for the label 'irregular' throughout the document.

CDE 2008

Immigration policy must perform difficult balancing acts between factors that interact in complex ways

## Key questions

It is important to place South Africa's concerns about migration and immigration policy in this wider context. It is important to know that immigration policy must perform difficult balancing acts between factors that interact in complex ways; humanitarian concerns and international obligations; the need to control borders; citizenship and social integration; and skills needs and the economy.

The sound policy and effective administration that are needed to perform these balancing acts are impossible without facts and information that are as authoritative as we can make them. In South Africa we have serious gaps in sound information in the most critical areas of immigration, and we will find it hard to plot a strategic course through the highly complex challenges of immigration management that are already upon us and set to become even more pressing.

The list of things about which we need to know more is formidable. Among them are:

- How many immigrants are in the country? We suspect that the numbers are large and have increased dramatically in the wake of the economic and political crisis in neighbouring Zimbabwe, but no-one seems willing to take responsibility for the most widely quoted figures, which are apparently without solid foundation. The government is steadily attempting to improve its socioeconomic information on the local population, but so far seems at a loss as to how to estimate the numbers of unrecorded immigrants. As we shall see, this is a familiar problem in other societies as well. Do methods in fact exist to fill this crucial gap in our information?
- What is the impact of cross-border migration on our economy? What skills and experience do immigrants bring into the country? Are they a drain on resources or do they become economically self-sufficient? Are they temporary sojourners or do they intend to build a future in South Africa?
- Will the diversity that immigrants bring lead to social tensions and clash of cultures or is it enriching, strengthening historically eroded ties with our wider continent?

- How well-deserved is South Africa's reputation for being hostile to foreign immigrants? Do sporadic outbreaks of murderous violence against particular immigrant groups confirm this? Or is there evidence from the street and the workplace that indicates a more complex and possibly even hopeful reality? What role does harassment by bureaucrats, local officials and law enforcement agents play by comparison with the reception foreigners receive from the general population?

Progress towards answering these and other questions is essential in view of the bigger policy questions that challenge South Africa.

South Africa has to confront closely interlinked policy challenges, including a skills shortage that is aggravated by a brain drain

These answers could help our authorities to decide how urgent the issue of immigration really is. The high profile accorded to unrecorded immigration may be because immigration is a convenient scapegoat for domestic problems we have not yet solved – high levels of crime, joblessness, housing backlogs and service constraints all lend themselves to scapegoat interpretations.

More seriously, however, South Africa has to confront closely interlinked policy challenges, including a skills shortage that is aggravated by a brain drain. Do concerns over irregular immigration and confusions about refugees and asylum discredit and obstruct implementation of sound policies for skilled immigration? How can sound immigration policy become part of a winning mix of strategies?

The study reported on here (see box: **CDE's research on immigrants in Johannesburg**, facing page) is one of the largest pieces of empirical research on the issue of immigration yet undertaken in South Africa and is part of a wider ongoing investigation into immigration policy by CDE.

CDE has pursued this topic because immigration issues intersect with a number of other crucial public policy challenges facing the country. The management of cross-border migration is obviously highly relevant to how we deal with the issue of skills constraints on growth. There are also policy implications for other growth-related issues like labour market dynamics, small-scale entrepreneurial activity, and provision of social services. Underlying all these are questions of security and public confidence in the primary government responsibility for controlling borders.

It is important to recognise that immigration issues affect the whole country – our Witbank survey underlined this fact – and Johannesburg is not South Africa. However, the city is the country's most important centre of economic activity and is in some respects enough of a defining place to warrant special investigation.

## Objectives of the study

The key focus of this research was an attempt to estimate the size of the foreign population of Johannesburg and to expand and refine our knowledge of the socioeconomic characteristics and roles of this population. These are important but ambitious and complex aims, requiring innovative survey methodology. CDE's methodological approach was piloted in a smaller study in the town of Witbank<sup>2</sup> in 2005. (see box: **CDE's research on immigrants in Johannesburg**, facing page). The methodology is described more fully in an appendix to the main report of the survey<sup>3</sup> on which this abridged version is based.

## CDE's research on immigrants in Johannesburg

CDE's survey was developed in conjunction with an advisory team of leading South African demographers<sup>4</sup> for the very difficult task of reaching a population that wishes to avoid being identified and enumerated. The approach was tested in a pilot survey of the medium-sized industrial town of Witbank in Mpumalanga, and modified for the larger metropolitan area of Johannesburg. The Witbank findings were reported in *Immigrants in South Africa: perceptions and reality in Witbank*, CDE Focus Number 9 (May 2006). The core element of the Johannesburg study was a household survey based on an area-stratified systematic (interval) sample, with random starting points for intervals.

The sample was drawn within strata corresponding to the administrative districts of the metropolitan authority, ensuring a broadly representative spread across all areas and types of residence. It was not drawn on a racial basis but the proportions according to race emerged from the stratified coverage of areas in which different racial and ethnic groups live. Single households were selected on each residential stand, where necessary by sampling randomly from multiple households on the same stand.

On the basis of this sample, one respondent was interviewed (face-to-face) in each household in the language of his/her choice. This yielded 1002 interviews. Structured and open-ended questions were used, the latter to allow spontaneous replies. Both direct and indirect means were used to estimate the number of foreigners in the core sample itself, and respondents were asked about the numbers of foreigners in the dwellings immediately surrounding theirs. An attempt was then made to correct any invalid or exaggerated claims through a detailed probe for reasons. Finally the responses were extrapolated to cautiously estimate the overall numbers of foreigners, legal or otherwise.

Interviews were then conducted among foreigners whose locations were identified in the course of household interviews, and hence were very largely based on starting points linked to the random distribution of interviewing points in the core sample. This yielded 302 interviews with foreign-born residents of Johannesburg.

The final element in the survey consisted of interviews with 45 representatives of business organisations and 32 local officials. All of the officials held very senior posts in the national and metropolitan police services, and planning divisions of local government, regional immigration officials, and welfare.

CDE 2008

This report offers a broader view of the numbers and impact of immigrants and attitudes towards them

It is important to note that CDE's survey was constructed to be broadly representative of all areas and residence types in Johannesburg. The attacks on foreigners that took place in May 2008 were largely confined to informal settlements bordering on major urban areas, which represent only one area of immigrant presence. As a result, public consciousness of immigration issues – and such research as has been done since the violence – has tended to focus on these areas. This report offers a broader view of the numbers and impact of immigrants and attitudes towards them. Virtually all previous empirical research among immigrants has consisted of limited investigations of pre-selected and visible groups of foreign residents or foreign entrepreneurs in particular locations. These studies have produced valuable findings but have had limited general applicability.

Johannesburg is the centre of what is by far the largest urban-industrial complex in Africa

The objectives of this wider and more comprehensive study of migrants in the city as a whole were to investigate in more detail:

- The approximate size, scope and patterns of origin of formal and unrecorded immigration in Johannesburg;
- The validity of alternative methods of estimating broad numbers using indirect measures designed to circumvent understandable resistance to disclosing one's origins;
- The socioeconomic characteristics of the immigrant population: occupations, entrepreneurial activity, levels of economic self-sufficiency;
- The extent to which immigrants contribute to or subtract value from the economy and human resources;
- The residential intentions of immigrants and their likely permanency in South Africa; and
- The scope, nature and causes of xenophobia and other reasons for hostility towards foreigners.

It is important to emphasise that many of the results are based on indirect methods of enumeration, in which representative residents' perceptions of foreigners and identification of foreigners in the surrounding households have contributed greatly to the body of insights. Obviously caution has to be exercised in interpreting these results; the study was conducted in this spirit.

## Johannesburg: the cross-border magnet

In April 2007 the Johannesburg municipality opened a Foreign Nationals Helpdesk aimed at coordinating the city's support for migrants, providing advice on how to access appropriate government services, information on economic opportunities, and support for refugees and asylum seekers. Launching the helpdesk, Mayor Amos Masondo said that 'it is time to accept that migrants have been the lifeblood of the city since it was founded.' The city's policy innovation comes as escalating cross-border migration is fuelling public concern and policy debate about the movement of people into South Africa, irregular immigrants in particular.

The increase in numbers is being driven by the attraction of South Africa's relatively large economy, high per capita income, and steady growth. The push factors of political instability and precipitate economic decline are also influential, particularly in the case of Zimbabwe, but also in more distant parts of the region, including the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These migration pressures and the highly complex challenges of immigration management they bring, already confront policy makers in many destination countries and are set to intensify. Johannesburg, South Africa's economic heartland, is one focal point.

Johannesburg is a historic mining-industrial complex that has grown and diversified in recent decades to become South Africa's – and indeed Africa's – Chicago, New York and Silicon Valley, all rolled into one. As Table 1 makes clear, Johannesburg does not dwarf the other metropolitan areas in population or disposal of public resources. However it is, in socioeconomic terms, a 'first among equals.' Johannesburg has a twofold significance as a migration magnet: it is the economic centre of Gauteng province, which contributes 33 per cent to the national GDP, and, more importantly, it is in a geographic continuum of

close economic and social interaction with two other significant metropolitan complexes, namely the capital, Pretoria, and the powerful industrial complex of Ekurhuleni.

In other words, Johannesburg is the centre of what is by far the largest urban-industrial complex in Africa.

Table 1: South Africa's metropolitan areas: population and operating budgets

Metropolitan area	Population in 2007	Metropolitan government operating budget 2007/8
Johannesburg Metro	3,9 million	R18,3 billion
Durban/eThekweni Metro	3,5 million	R10,6 billion
Cape Town Metro	3,5 million	R16,6 billion
Ekurhuleni (East Rand)	2,7 million	R10,6 billion
Pretoria (Tshwane)	2,3 million	R9,4 billion

*CDE calculations from Statistics SA Community Survey 2007<sup>6</sup> and National Treasury data,<sup>6</sup> 2008*

Johannesburg's proximity to neighbouring countries is an added attraction for prospective migrants. It is situated 350 kilometres from the border with Botswana, 550 kilometres from the border with Zimbabwe, and 485 kilometres from the border with Mozambique. This is analogous to the migration routes from Mexico to the south-western United States, and is considerably less arduous than the sea-borne hardships that African migrants brave in their thousands to reach the borders of the EU.

For all these reasons, it is essential to look to Johannesburg for answers to the most pressing questions of migration management that face South African policy makers.

Johannesburg's proximity to neighbouring countries is an added attraction for prospective migrants

## Towards an estimate of the number of foreigners in Johannesburg

### Problems of enumeration

The starting point of all policy discussion on migration issues in South Africa has to be the fact that there is a dearth of reliable, empirically based estimates of the numbers of foreigners in our midst, and accurate information on their social characteristics and roles in the economy. Estimates of the foreign-born population in South Africa have been produced – in increasing numbers as concerns have mounted over the influx of political and economic refugees from Zimbabwe in recent months – but none of them have inspired much confidence in their authority. This is scarcely surprising given the difficulties of enumerating the foreign-born components of any population. Among these are:

- the desire of 'irregular' foreigners to escape detection in official surveys (censuses) or indeed any other kind of research sample;
- the difficulty of distinguishing between foreigners who are resident (with or without legal status) and those whose sojourn is in some way 'circular' between home and host country, involving multiple entries and exits. For instance, in 2006, there were over six

The challenges of enumerating migrants are even more formidable in a country like South Africa

- million *legal* arrivals from the SADC countries most likely (in the popular mind) to supply undocumented immigrants to South Africa (**see box: Recorded cross-border traffic to South Africa from African countries**, facing page). This is likely to contribute to popular anxieties about ‘floods’ of immigrants and to augment (though often only temporarily) the irregular population who stay after their visas have expired;
- the ability of undocumented immigrants to acquire documents in countries – like South Africa – where large-scale corruption among officials creates a potentially large class of ‘legal illegals’ which distorts numbers;
  - the problem of illicit documentation is exacerbated by the relative ease with which many migrants from neighbouring countries can assimilate in terms of language and other markers of identity; and
  - large-scale population research is extremely expensive and complex to manage.

For these and other reasons, simple head-count research, particularly on a scale big enough to have authority and confidence about numbers, can generally be ruled out – except in national censuses – and a variety of indirect methods of calculating numbers of foreigners is resorted to at other times. In South Africa the combination has yielded highly fluctuating estimates; these have usually been on the basis of official censuses or less comprehensive official estimates that are probably least valid in the case of irregular and non-recorded information. These official estimates of foreigners are generally regarded as questionable, mainly because they are usually too low to match the anxieties on the ground.

The reason for the absence of credible facts on foreigners is no mystery; unrecorded foreigners will avoid being counted in censuses. Furthermore, there are no universally agreed methods of enquiry into unrecorded immigration that are academically recognised, and research of any type in the veiled world of non-legal activity is very expensive.

This lack of systematic information is not unique to South Africa by any means. Confusion and political controversy reign over immigrant numbers even in the well-resourced and well-researched United Kingdom and USA (See box: **How do other countries count irregular immigrants?**, page 25).

A recent review of the challenges faced by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in the UK singled out migration as its main work priority and noted that, ‘It has long been recognised that international migration is one of the most difficult components of population change to measure accurately.’<sup>7</sup> Even so, the review points out that migration statistics are vital for policy because they are essential for population estimates and projections for the future that are ‘used for planning, resource allocation, business decisions and a wide range of public policy purposes.’

The challenges of enumerating migrants are even more formidable in a country like South Africa; not only because of more limited resources and capacities than those in the developed world, but because the country faces more extensive socioeconomic problems, and is both a sending and receiving country for international migration.

In this situation people reach their own conclusions on the basis of impressions and selective interaction with foreigners – often knowing nothing about their legal status – freely projecting their own anxieties and interests to develop myths and stereotypes about what foreigners mean for South Africa. In this they are often abetted by sensationalist media.



### Recorded cross-border traffic to South Africa from African countries

In 2006, 5.4 million people legally entered South Africa from the rest of Africa for trade, work, or tourism.<sup>8</sup> Of these, 97% came from South Africa's immediate neighbours in SADC.<sup>9</sup>

This fact might be misinterpreted as evidence that South Africa is being 'flooded' with immigrants. In fact, what this number reflects is that in many cases the same people will be making multiple trading or work trips across the South African border each year. This can be shown by looking in more detail at the statistics for Botswana and Lesotho. In 2006, there were 765 705 arrivals from Botswana. The total population of Botswana is around 1.8 million people.<sup>10</sup> This either means that 42% of the population of Botswana visited South Africa in a single year – which is near impossible – or that a great many people cross the South Africa-Botswana border legally multiple times in a year. The point is even stronger for Lesotho, which has a population of 2 million and sent 1.9 million people to South Africa in 2006.<sup>11</sup> Either nearly everyone in Lesotho visited South Africa in 2006 or – as is in fact the case – there are many people who cross this border monthly, weekly and even every day.

Of course, within this pattern of circular migration, some people will choose to stay permanently, and others will temporarily overstay their visas. But it is overwhelmingly likely that the vast majority of the African people who enter South Africa legally leave again after a brief and totally legitimate visit.

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One estimate of 9,84 million irregular immigrants in South Africa received wide publicity in late 2006

The result is that overly conservative official assessments of the phenomenon of non-official immigrant numbers alternate with alarmist estimates, greatly to the detriment of informed policy debate.

### One million? Five million? Ten million?

For example, one estimate of 9,84 million irregular immigrants in South Africa received wide publicity in late 2006: 'South Africa is home to as many as 10m (sic) irregular immigrants and must brace for a flood of new arrivals as its booming economy leaves poorer neighbouring nations behind.'<sup>12</sup> The report cited a study commissioned by a trade union to an economics consultancy which relied largely on deportation data for its estimate.<sup>13</sup>

The figure of 9,84 million irregular immigrants amounts to 21 per cent of South Africa's estimated population of 47 million. Alternatively, depending on their degree of invisibility to official survey enumerators, South Africa's real population could be as high as 56,84 million if there were indeed 9,84 million irregular immigrants here.

In fact, in the report the 9,84 million figure is one of a range based on possible percentages of undocumented immigrants who are deported. In this case the hypothetical percentage is 20 per cent of the total of undocumented migrants deported; that is, the 9,84 million figure depends on there being four irregular immigrants who evade deportation for every one sent back. This is rated no higher than 'possible' according to the report's authors, but the figures still made headlines. In addition, no allowance appears to be made either for circular or short-stay migration, or for the possibility that many of the deportees are multiple 'offenders' and that there is a well-recognised 'revolving door' phenomenon at work.

Public susceptibility to alarmist estimates of undocumented immigration is heightened by reports of action taken against corrupt officials

Not surprisingly, estimated figures for migration from Zimbabwe have received publicity in South Africa. For example, in a recent report, the Zimbabwe Central Bank claimed that 1,2 million Zimbabweans have migrated to South Africa since 1990.<sup>14</sup> How many have returned or been deported is not estimated, but uncorroborated estimates by some South African government spokesmen that 3 million Zimbabweans are currently living in South Africa have become accepted public wisdom. A figure of 3–4 million Zimbabweans in the diaspora has received wide currency, without appearing to have much in the way of statistical authority behind it. One NGO report quotes a Zimbabwe government spokesman as saying that ‘60-70 per cent of Zimbabwean adults who should constitute the productive population are living abroad.’ The figure cited this in support of an estimate of 3,4 million Zimbabweans outside the country, with the assumption that most are in South Africa.<sup>15</sup>

As we shall see later in this report, there are grounds for questioning whether such a large presence (especially of a single nationality) is compatible with what we know about the demography of South Africa. There are also grounds for scepticism based on population figures for Zimbabwe. As Loren Landau points out,<sup>16</sup> about 3,6 million of Zimbabwe’s population of 12,3 million are adult males, who are the most likely migrants: ‘As it is unreasonable to assume that all adult Zimbabweans have left the country, there is an upper cap on the number who might have come to South Africa.’ Since the pool of movers is shared between Zimbabwe’s other regional neighbours and more distant destinations like the United Kingdom and United States, serious scepticism about the figure of 3 million in South Africa is called for.

Certainly it is clear that deportations from South Africa are rising. The 2003–2004 annual report of the DHA put deportation statistics for all nationalities at 164 294. In 2004–2005 the figure had only increased to 167 137, but by 2005–2006 it had jumped to 209 988, a rate it sustained into 2006–2007, when the total was 266 067.<sup>17</sup> It is unclear what these figures mean; the trend might partly be due to increased capacity to detain and deport unrecorded immigrants and to the ‘revolving door’ phenomenon. In any event, the swelling numbers suggest that the volume of unrecorded immigrants is increasing substantially.

Public susceptibility to alarmist estimates of undocumented immigration is heightened by reports of action taken against corrupt officials. It is widely recognised – by the DHA among others – that this form of corruption has made it very easy for many otherwise unrecorded immigrants to purchase the documentation required to ‘legalise’ their stay in the country. For instance in late 2007, 15 officials at the Caledonspoort Port of Entry in Fouriesburg, Free State province, which borders Lesotho, were arrested on corruption charges related to abetting the entry of irregular immigrants in to South Africa.<sup>18</sup> During 2006 and 2007 the Chief Directorate Counter Corruption and Security of the DHA concluded 125 fraud and corruption cases, although it is not clear how many of these related to undocumented immigrants.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to reports and accounts such as these, estimates which are more securely grounded in population statistics usually converge on those made on the basis of the 2001 census. According to the census, around 1,1 million people declared themselves to have been born outside South Africa, which amounted to 2,3 per cent of the country’s population at that time. In Johannesburg, the census figure for these individuals was 216 715 – 6,2 per cent of the city’s population. This was close to three times the percentage for the country as a whole.<sup>20</sup>

## How do other countries count irregular immigrants?

Counting irregular immigrants is an extremely sensitive and involved process, where the counter must, by nature of the subject, make estimates, presume, extrapolate and standardise. The United States uses the residual method to calculate the number of irregular immigrants in the country. This method subtracts the number of immigrants who are authorised to be there from the number of foreign-born residents counted by the Census Bureau through their annual Current Population Survey report, then adjusts the number using estimates of immigrants' deaths and out-migration, and for census undercounting.

This figure is supplemented by analysing trends in foreign remittances and school enrolments in localities with high populations of irregular immigrants. Also, the figures that the residual methods reveal are compared with population deficit numbers from countries with high immigrant sending rates (such as Mexico).

However, the limitations of this method are worrying. The residual method doesn't take into account the student or other long-term (but non-immigrant) population. It also doesn't differentiate between irregular migrants, and those on their way to legalisation (waiting for a green card, temporary protected status), and the United States government doesn't offer a margin of error for these calculations.

Across the Atlantic, the United Kingdom has considered several options for estimating its irregular population. A variety of indirect methods could be used to measure this, all of them based on the premise that irregular immigrants will be recorded in some way during their period of residency, through police or employment records, birth/death/fertility data, employment records, or by monitoring the sex/age ratio (some of these subject to comparison with the same data from suspected sending countries). A popular choice for qualitative data is the Delphi method: surveying a range of people, and then using the answers to obtain an average estimate.

The Netherlands has used the 'capture-recapture' method, based on police records of apprehended irregular immigrants, while Switzerland sent 5 500 anonymous questionnaires to employees of employers who were known to hire asylum seekers. Numerous problems arise from these methods. Using different data sources to obtain a 'bigger picture' of irregulars in a country is problematic, as such data sources are not collated (for instance, there is no merging of prison population versus court appearances), or not detailed enough. The Delphi method often results in a 'census of opinion' which cannot be statistically and reliably verified. The Netherlands' focus on criminal records has a bias towards those irregulars with a good chance of getting caught (those with poorly forged documents, those who are engaged in criminal activity or who do not have a strong social safety net), while Switzerland's questionnaires presume a certain level of knowledge from the respondent, and also presume respondents would answer truthfully and altruistically.

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Censuses all over the world are notorious for undercounting people who would prefer to be invisible

The 2001 census must be treated with extreme caution. Censuses all over the world are notorious for undercounting people who would prefer to be invisible for whatever reason.

There are thus no reliable estimates of even the broad numbers of cross-border immigrants in South Africa at present. Almost everyone agrees, however, that the numbers are large. Given the fact that despite its relative wealth in an African context, South Africa is itself struggling to cope with high levels of unemployment and shortfalls in resources to

service the needs of its poor people, the issue of immigration flows is of vital importance in any strategic assessment of South Africa's socioeconomic challenges.

It is appropriate, therefore, to begin the analysis by considering the results of the enquiry into the estimated numbers of foreigners in Johannesburg. In various ways these estimates inform much of the substance of the rest of the investigation. The results will also shed further light on the extent to which it is effective to use partially indirect results in empirical surveys as a basis for estimating numbers of unrecorded foreigners in a city or country.

There are thus no reliable estimates of even the broad numbers of cross-border immigrants in South Africa at present

## Foreigners in the base sample

The most obvious and certainly the least controversial way of estimating the numbers of foreigners in the city is to make calculations based on the core sample. Hence, early in the interview, we asked the respondents which countries (other than South Africa) they knew well, and in which they had lived and worked. The intention was to provide initial indirect indicators of foreign origins among types of people who, if they were South Africans, would be most unlikely to have travelled outside the country. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 2: Respondents' acquaintance with foreign countries

Proportions of respondents who knew one or more foreign countries well or had lived or worked in foreign countries	Black sample	Minorities	Total sample
Knows foreign countries 'well'	19,4%	60,5%	28,7%
Has lived or worked in a foreign country	7,1%	28,1%	11,9%

*CDE Johannesburg Survey 2008*

These results must be cautiously interpreted. The large number of people in the minority sample who claim to know other countries well could be a reflection of active middle-class travel and tourism patterns, although it undoubtedly does include substantial immigration. In the black component of the sample, where only about 7 per cent would approximate middle-class status, the 19 per cent claiming to know other countries well is surprisingly high. However, many of these people could have been basing their claims on media accounts.

Living and working in a foreign country, however, comes a little closer to being an index of foreign origin in the black sample, among which very few people are of the type to have left South Africa to live or work elsewhere and then returned. The 7 per cent in the black sample who claimed to have lived and worked in a foreign country is high in a sample of predominantly poor or newly upwardly mobile people, and therefore probably does indicate foreign status among most of them, say around 5 per cent of the sample. Most of the countries mentioned in this context were BLNS countries, suggesting that the foreign respondents were still very cautious early in the interview – BLNS countries are so interwoven with South Africa that it would have been reasonably safe to mention them.

We have no doubt that 5 per cent is an underestimate of foreign origin among blacks, because not all foreigners who might be unregistered or dubiously registered would admit their citizenship or immigrant status, even in this indirect way.

Our next procedure was to ask the interviewers to record their impressions of the origins of people in the sampled households. The experienced interviewers were all proficient in several languages and they had conducted up to thousands of interviews in the Gauteng area. They were therefore in a good position to provide reports on respondents whom they considered to be foreign. Their judgements were not speculative and were based on discussion of the respondent's history. The results of the confidential interviewer reports were as follows:

In the black sample the interviewers considered 12,4 per cent of the respondents to be foreign, and among the minorities 6,6 per cent. In table 3 the results of the interviewer observations are given for the entire sample:

Table 3: Interviewer observations and judgements about the foreigners in the total core sample

Interviewer observations or judgements	Results
Proportion who admitted that they were immigrants	8,6%
Proportion in addition to those above who spoke a foreign language or spoke with a clearly foreign accent and whom the interviewers considered to be foreign	2,5%
Overall proportion of respondents who were judged to be foreign	11,1%
Breakdown of ethnic identities in the sampled foreign respondents: (% of foreigners)	
Zimbabweans	39%
Mozambicans	14%
BLNS countries	15%
British	7%
Europeans	5%
Nigerians	4%
Malawians	4%
Somalis	1%
Egyptians	1%
From elsewhere in Africa	8%

*CDE Johannesburg Survey 2008.*

As many as 40 per cent of inner-city respondents were judged to be foreign, a proportion that dropped to 8,1 per cent of shack dwellers and 7,5 per cent of suburbanites.

The details given are estimates of the proportion of foreigners in the drawn sample. They are likely to be on the conservative side, because of their reluctance to be interviewed in a regular sample. Some will claim that they are not members of the household, 'Ignore me, I am just a visitor here' etc, while others will simply not respond at all, either refusing or claiming to feel ill, etc. To allow for this, two further strategies were followed. These are described below.

## Estimates based on surrounding households

Firstly, within each household sampled, after thorough reassurances of confidentiality, we asked the respondents and other available well-informed members of the household to think of the four dwellings next door (two on either side), their own dwelling, and the five dwellings roughly opposite. We asked them to fix these dwellings in their minds. There was an element of estimate in the identification of the 10 dwellings, due to street corners,

As many as 40 per cent of inner-city respondents were judged to be foreign

vacant houses and other peculiarities of layout, while in the poorer areas there were quite often additional houses or shacks in the grouping of dwellings discussed. However the dwellings that the respondents fixed in their minds constituted ten or more closely clustered adjacent dwellings within sight and often sound of the respondent's dwelling. The exact number of dwellings being considered was recorded and interviewers provided a sketch map of the layout of relevant dwellings.

Then we asked how many adults of 16 years and older living in the group of dwellings, including their own, and including lodgers and people living in outhouses and garages, they knew or considered to be foreigners or immigrants. We also asked them why they thought so.

Finally, we asked them for the overall number of adults 16 years and older in all the dwellings under consideration. We generally tried to avoid speaking about a specific dwelling because of the understanding of confidentiality that we had established. The unit of discussion was the cluster of dwellings.

On the whole the co-operation was very good. In the sample as a whole, 98 per cent were able and willing to identify the numbers of dwellings in the surrounding clusters, 93 per cent were able and willing to estimate the numbers of foreigners in the dwellings, if any, and 86 per cent were able to estimate the total number of adults in the dwellings. Despite the high levels of response, in the informal areas there was a degree of tension relating to this question, because of the close proximity of houses to one another. Although the discomfort did not prevent most of them from giving estimates, it has to be noted that the responses could have been downwardly biased by this discomfort.

The second strategy was that after asking for the number of foreigners in the surrounding houses, the respondents were asked what particular kind of foreigners they were (nationalities). They then had to become more systematic and itemise foreign nationalities in the clusters. As part of this exercise they were asked how many there were of each nationality. The numbers of each nationality were then aggregated to arrive at an additional estimate or check on the previous estimate of the number of foreigners.

The results are summarised in table 4. Here we should point out that in the interests of the greatest possible precision, at a level not necessary in the other aspects of the analysis, we weighted the sampling results in black areas to make sure that formal and informal housing were in the correct relative proportions as indicated by the outdated 2001 Johannesburg statistics.

Note that the second estimate of the mean number of foreigners in the clusters is well above that for the first estimate – see table. There could be three reasons for this.

First, the task of itemising nationalities and then estimating numbers made the respondents more systematic, and probably more inclusive than they were in the first estimate. Second, the respondents were probably relieved that after the first estimation they were not asked for the foreigners' addresses. They were therefore more relaxed and trusting in the second estimation exercise.

Thirdly and most importantly, however, not all the people could or would specify the exact nationalities of foreigners. The rate of participation therefore fell, and with it the active sample on which the second estimate is based. Put differently, relative to the response rates in the first estimation exercise, far fewer respondents felt confident in identifying the nationalities of foreigners, and hence far fewer were able to estimate a total of all types of

The issue of immigration flows is of vital importance in any strategic assessment of South Africa's socioeconomic challenges

Table 4: The steps and calculations used to arrive at estimates of the proportions of foreigners in Johannesburg

Type of residential area	Base sample size (households weighted, see text)	Mean number of dwellings in surrounding clusters	Active sample (numbers able to respond to questions on numbers of foreigners in clusters)	Mean number of foreigners per cluster	Mean total number of adults per cluster
<b>First estimates</b>					
Suburbs: blacks	54	10,24	49	2,71	36,88
Suburbs: minorities	226	9,59	200	2,27	23,79
Domestics	64	10,19	29	0,66	11,91
Formal townships	384	12,32	382	1,55	38,73
Informal areas	347	15,40	345	3,70	31,39
Inner city: blacks	118	20,95	116	61,59	153,17
Inner city: minorities	2	7,00	2	19,50	172,50
<b>OVERALL</b>	1 195	13,29	1 123	8,60	46,30
<b>Second estimates</b>					
Black areas	967	14,15	425	26,35	49,92
Minority areas	228	9,56	69	7,25	25,68
<b>OVERALL</b>	1 195	13,29	494 (missing cases 701)	23,68	46,30

*CDE Johannesburg Survey 2008*

foreigners. The resulting changes in the sampling figures probably account for most of the difference between the outcomes of the two sets of estimations. We thus had a problem to reconcile the two sets of estimates in table 3. We decided to proceed as follows.

The first estimate in table 3, the total number of foreigners per cluster irrespective of nationality, may be accepted as a statistically adequate estimate because the response rates are rather high at roughly 94 per cent. Hence there is not likely to be a significant response rate bias in the estimate of 8,6 foreigners per cluster that emerged.

The second estimate, which is based on a response rate of only 41,3 per cent, cannot be accepted as is and has to be adjusted in some way. We suggest a midpoint between a minimum and a maximum figure, based on certain assumptions. If one assumes that in all cases where people could not respond there were no foreigners in the clusters at all, then we have a theoretical minimum. On the other hand, if one assumes that in all these cases of non-response the true number of foreigners was the same as that estimated by the people who did respond, we have a theoretical maximum. The theoretical maximum would be 23,68 foreigners, and the theoretical minimum would be 9,79 foreigners ( $23,68 \times 494$

+ 701x 0 / 1 195). Both the theoretical minimum and the theoretical maximum are highly unlikely, and the truth probably lies somewhere between the two. We have no recourse but to take the midpoint, which would be 16,74 foreigners. It is appropriate that the estimate be higher than the 8,6 foreigners, because of the more systematic method used.

Further adjustments to these estimates may be necessary, however. The major problem with the 'identification' of foreigners by local residents is the danger of over-estimation of foreign numbers because many people who look unfamiliar may be regarded as foreign, even people from distant regions within South Africa. How likely is this to have been the case in this exercise?

Both the theoretical minimum and the theoretical maximum are highly unlikely, and the truth probably lies somewhere between the two

After asking for estimates of the foreigners living in the clusters of surrounding houses, we proceeded to ask the respondents for their reasons for thinking that the people identified were foreign. This question was asked of each type of foreigner identified. The overall distribution of reasons is given in table 5, in descending order of likely validity.

Table 5: Reasons for considering the people in surrounding houses to be foreigners (multiple replies), weighted by the numbers of types of foreigners to whom the reasons apply

Weighted reasons	Blacks	Minorities	ALL
Has been informed by foreigner	26%	17%	24%
Has been informed by landlord or by wife/partner of foreigner	14%	8%	13%
Speaks a foreign language not known in SA	21%	26%	22%
(Africans') poor command of or inability to speak any South African languages except English	16%	3%	13%
Speaks with distinct foreign accent	9%	10%	9%
Clothing and style of dress	7%	15%	9%
Features and appearance	17%	28%	20%
Culture and behaviour	15%	35%	20%
Types of employment	5%	16%	8%
Does not mix with South Africans/hides away	1%	8%	3%

*CDE Johannesburg Survey 2008*

We must remember that interviews received multiple replies, and it often happened that both more and less plausible reasons were given for identifying particular foreigners or types of foreigners. The first four reasons are the most plausible and would be taken as good indicators of foreign identity by most people. They may be false indicators in some cases, but this bias would in all probability be counterbalanced by valid identifications on the basis of less plausible reasons. The first four reasons together accumulate to some 72 per cent of the reasons and (drawing from detailed cross-tabulations) about 66 per cent of the identifications. This would indicate that about two-thirds of the identifications were made on a reasonably plausible basis, and about 34 per cent on a less secure basis. (Here we must bear in mind, however, that West and North Africans themselves state that they are physically different from local Africans.)



Thus the two mean estimates of the numbers of foreigners in the clusters should perhaps be reduced by around 34 per cent each to eliminate the effects of less plausible identifications, yielding downwardly adjusted estimates of 5,68 and 11,05 respectively.

These estimates need to be related to the estimated mean numbers of adults both foreign and local in the clusters (46,30). Respectively, they would be 12,27 per cent and 23,87 per cent of adults in the sample.

## Estimating the size of the foreign presence in Johannesburg: estimates of numbers of foreigners compared and discussed

We now have a basis for comparing all the estimates derived so far, comprised as follows:

- Foreigners as an estimated proportion of adults in the base sample: 11,1%
- Foreigners identified in surrounding residential clusters:
  - Overall: 12,3%
  - Aggregated nationalities: (midpoint estimate – see above) 23,9%

Zimbabweans and people from BLNS countries are underestimated in the CDE Survey

These estimates are all in the form of proportions of adults. Grossed up as estimated numbers of foreign adults among the 2 218 000 adults in Johannesburg (as given by Statistics SA, *Statistics in Brief*, in 2005):

1. 246 242
2. 272 863
3. 530 189

These estimates are all subject to qualifications and statistical reservations but together they provide a basis for at least an informed assessment of the order of magnitude of the foreign adults. But the range of variation is wide. Are the numbers likely to be closer to the lower estimates of around 250 000 to 270 000, or to the higher estimates of 500 000 to 550 000 or more?

First we must assess the likely bias in the estimates. There is one major reason for suspecting that the lower limit of 250 000 is too low, ie that where foreigners have been identified by neighbours, they have usually been either legal immigrants of long standing or have been part of clusters of foreigners where there was no danger of victimising individuals in answers to our questions – therefore the more isolated foreigners dispersed through the fabric of residential areas are most certainly underrepresented. In this context the types of foreigners identified in the surrounding households is informative. See table 6.

It is important to note the following. The estimated numbers of Nigerians far exceed the numbers of Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and people from neighbouring BLNS countries. This rank order of numbers for all foreigners in Johannesburg is highly unlikely. It is precisely the Zimbabweans, people from Mozambique and those from the neighbouring BLNS countries who are best able to disperse themselves throughout the fabric of residential Johannesburg because their languages (isiNdebele, Xitsonga and Sotho and Nguni-based languages) allow them to interact freely at grassroots level and, in the case of Zimbabweans and those from the BLS countries, are quite soon able to pass themselves off as South Africans. They can work as gardeners and domestics and simply not be noticed. There can be little doubt that Zimbabweans and people from BLNS countries are underestimated in all the numbers produced above. Given the proximity of these coun-

Table 6: Number of types of foreigners identified in all the clusters surrounding the sample dwellings

Types of foreigners	Blacks	Minorities	ALL
Nigerians	4 410	112	4 522
Zimbabweans	3 216	39	3 255
Mozambicans/Angolans	1 784	30	1 814
Malawi and Zambia	440	18	458
Somalia and rest of Africa	378	24	402
East Africa	304	36	340
Neighbouring BLNS countries	168	21	189
All people from the East	91	128	219
All European countries/USA/Australia	30	141	171
<b>Total</b>	<b>10 821</b>	<b>549</b>	<b>11 370</b>

Serious scepticism about the figure of three million Zimbabweans in South Africa is warranted

*CDE Johannesburg Survey 2008*

tries, and the socioeconomic conditions in Zimbabwe, they can be expected to represent the largest numbers, and certainly not to trail behind Nigerians.

The Zimbabweans are also very poor in general and least able to establish themselves in visible households of their own, or rent rooms in houses, and hence were also under-represented in the very first estimate based on foreigners in the core sample of households. If they had been fully covered in the estimates, therefore, the numbers in the lower estimates would certainly have been significantly higher. CDE is confident that the lower grossed-up numerical estimates (circa 250 000) err significantly on the conservative side.

Does this mean that the higher estimate of circa 500 000 is probably roughly correct? The major reason for suspecting it to be too high is that people identify anyone who looks and sounds different as a foreigner. But we have already corrected for this possibility – the two highest estimates produced by the methodology were reduced by 34 per cent to broadly eliminate identifications based on mere appearance, culture and lifestyle. Furthermore, the higher estimate was also reduced to allow for non-response.

On these grounds, CDE is confident that the grossed-up numerical estimate in the range of 500 000 to 550 000 is more likely to be correct than the lower figure. In fact, if anything, even this estimate is likely to be too low, because it clearly under-estimates Zimbabweans and BLNS citizens relative to Nigerians (see again table 6 above). Johannesburg seems to be home to *at least* half a million foreigners – and it could be a couple of hundred thousand more. This suggests *at minimum* a foreign presence in the city more than twice that estimated by the 2001 census and an escalation from 6,72 per cent to more than 14 per cent.

Whatever the relative accuracy of the various estimates presented, they are all subject to a likelihood of under-estimation. We have already briefly noted the sources of under-estimation, but they are sufficiently important to be set out in detail. There are three categories of foreigners that are very probably under-represented to a lesser or greater degree in

all our estimates of foreign numbers, and also in our results from the foreign interviews. They are the following:

1. Those whose current vulnerability to arrest and deportation is so great that they choose to lead a highly reclusive life, avoiding contact with neighbours and so avoiding recognition as foreigners.
2. Those at the opposite end of the scale whose integration into the local community has been so successful that they are no longer recognised as foreign and therefore were not identified by neighbours in the first place. This applies particularly to immigrants from Britain, the Commonwealth and parts of Europe, to Indians and to Southern African immigrants whose ethnic cultures are close to those of the locals.
3. Those whose preferred residence is in the backyards of suburban houses and urban fringe smallholdings (usually as unregistered gardeners or agricultural labour) and who consequently are not located in visible concentrations. This applies particularly to Zimbabweans, Malawians and some other Southern African immigrants.

On this basis our concern should not be about over-estimation of numbers, but rather of underestimation. In this light the figure of half a million foreigners in Johannesburg in 2006 is probably a conservative estimate by a margin that is difficult to estimate but could be substantial.

The figure of half a million foreigners in Johannesburg in 2006 is probably a conservative estimate

## Assessing impacts: the balance sheet as seen by residents, immigrants and officials

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Besides questions related to enumerating the foreign presence in Johannesburg, the survey interviews had several other focal points:

- Johannesburg residents were asked about their perceptions of where foreigners live; how they recognised them; their perceptions of foreigners' contributions to the economy; their levels of acceptance or rejection of foreigners.
- The immigrants were asked questions aimed at constructing a profile (gender, age, length of stay, country of origin, etc) and about roles in the economy and experiences of acceptance or rejection.
- Officials and representatives of business organisations were asked about their perceptions of immigrant numbers and their impact on the city. Questions were also asked about business experiences of skills shortages and immigration as an approach to addressing skills issues.

### What do Johannesburg residents think of the foreigners in their midst?

How do they recognise foreigners? Where are they from? Where and how do they live? Are they a problem or an asset?

The stress of crime creates a perpetual need among people in Johannesburg to find scapegoats

## Recognition

Residents recognise foreigners on the basis of multiple indicators – on average between 2 and 3 different indicators, including controversial criteria like appearance, habits and physique. However, three-quarters of the recognition among black people in our sample is based on hard knowledge, and 45 per cent of the recognition among minorities has a similar foundation. Almost nobody identifies a foreigner on the basis of assumed physical and cultural characteristics only.

Johannesburg residents seem to agree remarkably on the relative numbers of immigrants in their midst. Mozambicans and Zimbabweans are the clear frontrunners, and this collective image is empirically plausible. Since the survey fieldwork occurred, a deepening economic crisis in Zimbabwe has probably lifted Zimbabweans above Mozambicans.

After the two leading groups, sheer numbers seem to alternate with cultural or ethnic visibility in determining the impact on Johannesburg residents. Nigerians seem to occupy third place in terms of impact, based on both a strong numerical presence and cultural visibility, followed by Chinese and Malawians, and then at a lower level by Indians, Pakistanis and Europeans. The number of people from the surrounding BLNS countries probably exceeds that of Nigerians, but they have very low visibility and cultural distinctiveness. Somalis have low numbers but strong visibility. Immigrants from elsewhere in Africa have relatively low visibility, due mainly to smaller numbers and a tendency to cluster.

Johannesburg has long been a magnet for in-migration from other provinces in South Africa, lifting its population by up to 10 per cent between 2001 and 2006.<sup>21</sup> Despite the significant numbers of local migrants, 60 per cent of black Johannesburg residents perceive foreign immigration to be larger than local in-migration, a perception shared by 40 per cent of minorities. There is clearly a substantially shared perception of massive foreign entry.

## Location

The dominant foreign groups – Mozambicans, Zimbabweans and Nigerians as well as significant numbers of Somalis – are perceived to cluster in the inner-city areas of Johannesburg, including Hillbrow and Joubert Park. These areas are also the first places that immigrants go to, and it seems that many of them move out once they have familiarised themselves with the city.

As one moves to the fringes of the inner city areas, so the composition of immigrants diversifies. Further out, the formerly white suburbs have a more selective immigrant presence, accommodating significant numbers of Nigerians, Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, and Europeans.

The Zimbabweans, Mozambicans and Nigerians are also well spread in the outlying areas of the city. The numbers of Zimbabweans and Mozambicans are so large in relative terms that they also have a strong presence in shack areas and townships. They are the most dispersed of all immigrants.

Nigerians and other West Africans have not hesitated to seek accommodation outside the areas and types of accommodation in which immigrants from Africa usually cluster. These West African groups, with some North Africans, have joined the Asians to lead the way in breaking the racial mould of the post-apartheid city.

## Work

Johannesburg residents have good collective vantage points to observe the labour and work of the immigrants. In order of relative importance, this activity is perceived to break down as follows:

1. Hawkers
2. Artisans and skilled trades
3. Miners and other semi-skilled labour
4. Domestic workers and gardeners
5. Shopkeepers and stallholders
6. Professional, technical and semi-professional activity
7. Personal services
8. Other service occupations
9. Security guards
10. Small manufacturing and craft work.

The residents also think that some 14 per cent of immigrant activity is illegal or criminal, but this could very well be a projection of their anxieties rather than well-founded empirical observation.

Two thirds of officials interviewed concede that foreigners are hardworking, determined and productive

## Acceptance/rejection

Roughly one-third of Johannesburg residents regard foreigners as generally 'bad for the city'. This is no worse than the image of low-income foreigners in most countries of the world. It is also significantly lower than the level of negative perceptions found in our previous study in the smaller town of Witbank. In this regard Johannesburg residents are responding very much as one would expect of people in a large cosmopolitan city.

Overall rejection may be at tolerable levels, but when it comes to specific aspects of the image of foreigners, however, the picture in the minds of local residents becomes more negative. Perceptions of specific negative features of foreigners outweigh positive features by a factor of 1,25:1 among black residents and 1,95:1 among minorities. These negative perceptions are substantially centred on suspected criminal tendencies among immigrants, including the fact that large proportions of immigrants are believed to have 'normalised' their residence in Johannesburg through bribing corrupt officials, as confirmed by the publicly expressed concerns of high-ranking government officials. Other important negative images are that foreigners compete for scarce urban land, housing and services, and, at a somewhat lower level of frequency, their image of competing for job and small-business opportunities.

We constructed an index of xenophobia based on a mix of evaluations of the assumed social and moral character of immigrants, and found that whites were least hostile and Indians most hostile to immigrants, with blacks and coloured people in between.

Other than this, xenophobia is not consistently based on the expected factors like perceptions of economic threat and competition among poor local people who might feel that their jobs and life chances are threatened. Neither can xenophobia be related to disguised racism. Higher levels of education also do not consistently lead to more positive perceptions of foreigners, except among middle-class minorities, among whom a relatively benign liberal mindset leads to a more welcoming attitude to people perceived as

underdogs. Even the length and quality of contact have a complex relationship to hostility – the attitudes of middle-class liberals tend to sour with more intensive contact, whereas blacks' attitudes improve, but the effects are generally weak.

Is xenophobia stimulated by the role and activity of foreigners in the city? Immigrant efforts to improve their circumstances, the skills and occupational experience that they bring to their new city, and even their contributions to job creation and the economy, do not ensure immunity from xenophobic hostility. Many of our respondents, black and white, were quite capable of saying that they felt that the presence of foreigners was dangerous, but that they would prefer employing some kinds of foreigner to local people.

One pervasive factor  
in xenophobia is crime

## Xenophobia unpacked

One pervasive factor in xenophobia is crime – not solid evidence about the crime that foreigners may or may not be committing, but the fact that the stress of crime levels creates a perpetual need among people in Johannesburg to find scapegoats. Crime, as a consequence, has negative associative effects and has created a self-perpetuating myth that a foreign presence is tantamount to a criminal presence.

Variations in the scores on our xenophobia index suggest that higher levels of hostility to foreigners are associated with higher incomes and managerial positions among blacks, but lower level incomes and occupations among minorities. Among minorities, members of the Pentecostal churches and Afrikaans-speakers generally have somewhat higher levels of dislike of foreigners. Among blacks it is the emerging middle classes and the English speakers who have the greatest dislike of foreigners. Other major factors include personality attributes of mistrust and misanthropy among minorities, and feelings of relative deprivation among both blacks and minorities. A Factor Analysis shows that, more often than not, being anti-foreign is not a consolidated mindset, but an accumulation of different kinds of hostilities to varied categories of foreigners, and that material threats and competition are often less important than ethnic affinities and psychological variables in shaping anti-foreign sentiment. Sometimes anti-foreign hostility is not related to anything in particular – except conformity to views expected of people and a shallow acceptance of urban legend.

## Who is accepted in Joburg?

Despite all the generalised hostility, there is surprising agreement among Johannesburg residents, both blacks and minorities, that certain categories of immigrants are beneficial for Johannesburg. In three broad categories of approval the immigrants are:

- Highly approved: BLNS citizens, Westerners, Indians
- Approved: Chinese, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans
- Approved with qualifications: Malawians, Pakistanis

These people have a reputation for contributing to the economy, for being highly productive and willing workers, and for having noteworthy skills and education. While not cancelling certain xenophobic reactions and mixed feelings of various kinds, most Johannesburg residents will concede that there is a place for all these immigrants in the city. Nigerians, Somalis and people from non-English-speaking African countries (except

neighbouring Mozambicans who belong to ethnic groups found in South Africa) do not achieve this status of approval.

## Immigrants speak for themselves: a profile based on immigrant interviews

Unfortunately, the results of the follow-up survey among 302 foreigners cannot give a complete picture of the foreign residents of Johannesburg because, as already noted, the results underestimate the foreigners who live and work on suburban and peri-urban properties, as well as former residents of the BLNS countries and immigrants who live in non-residential circumstances. Nevertheless, the results are a good representation of those in the residential fabric and who are less reclusive.

One general observation on survey feedback is crucial and should be made at the outset. In a large number of the interviews with foreigners it became subtly apparent that the respondents were neither 'illegal' nor fully legalised in terms of formal entry requirements. Details were obviously never stated, but it seems that widespread corruption among petty officialdom has created a new category of people who will probably go on to become proudly South African – people who have purchased their rights of residence, or perhaps even South African identity documents from corrupt officials. Although it is not possible to quantify this suspicion, it had a sufficiently strong and frequent effect on experienced interviewers to be worth noting.

The foreigners in our sample are concentrated in informal housing areas (41 per cent) followed by a variety of types of accommodation in formal townships (23 per cent) with the remainder more or less evenly divided between the inner city and the suburbs. Had we included more recently arrived foreigners, the inner city would have gained, because its anonymity makes it an important receiving area for new arrivals.

We cannot repeat the full profile presented in the body of the report, but a few significant features of the foreigner profile stand out:

- They are predominantly male (64 per cent) and 25–49 years of age.
- The median length of stay in Johannesburg is 5 years, but no fewer than 14–15 per cent have been resident for less than two years. The tempo of arrivals is generally not decreasing and it should be assumed that it is increasing sharply at the present time, with accelerated entry from crisis-ridden Zimbabwe.
- Two-thirds of the people in the sample come from either Zimbabwe or Mozambique, with the rest evenly spread in terms of their origins.
- When it comes to home visits, the sample is largely divided between those who visit their homes one or twice a year, and those who never leave Johannesburg.
- About half live in shacks, either in informal areas or in townships, and the rest are spread across other types of accommodation.
- They have a wide spread of educational qualifications, but the largest single group has an incomplete high school education.
- Of the African immigrants 75 per cent earn less than R2 000 a month, but the people from the West and Asia have middle-class incomes. Hence the South African race-class division is repeated among foreigners.
- Some 80 per cent are in permanent or semi-permanent relationships, mostly with other foreigners (59 per cent), and more than 60 per cent have children in South Africa.

Two-thirds of the people in the sample come from either Zimbabwe or Mozambique, with the rest evenly spread in terms of their origins

- The majority speak English and major African languages either fluently or very well.

## Work: immigrants in the economy

Only some 20 per cent of the foreigners interviewed are unemployed and looking for work, and they have been here the shortest time

Only some 20 per cent of the foreigners interviewed are unemployed and looking for work, and they have been here the shortest time. A high proportion of some 44 per cent of the immigrants are self-employed, relatively far more than the 12–16 per cent of South African adults in Gauteng who are self-employed. Some 12 per cent of the immigrants employ people, an average of nearly four staff members in their operations, almost half of them South Africans. This means that the number of people employed by immigrants would amount to almost half the immigrant numbers.

The list of occupations yielded by interviews of the sample of foreigners was much the same as the list of perceived foreigner occupations in the core household sample. There is clearly a great deal of experience-based skill among the foreigners. They seem to comprise a very self-sufficient economic community and are generally recognised as such by residents. The core household survey finds that some 40 per cent of black residents and 60 per cent of minorities perceive the foreigners as offering real value for money as employees, and they are also generally seen as self-sufficient, cooperative and trouble-free employees who don't create hassles for employers.

The attitudes of South Africans towards immigrants in the world of work are clearly far from simple. The kinds of jobs and business activities that foreigners are perceived to perform so well are broadly the same jobs and opportunities that some Johannesburg residents consider foreigners to be taking away from the South African unemployed, without thinking about the capacity or willingness of local people to perform these tasks at the levels of remuneration available.

It is also important to note that minorities may be more worried about the jobs that immigrants take away from black South Africans than worried about their own jobs (a marked feature of white attitudes to foreigners in CDE's Witbank survey).

The sensitive issue of willingness to work at given remuneration levels tended to emerge in the informal comments that many residents gave on how they distinguish foreigners, rather than in formal responses. Black respondents in the household survey, and sometimes minorities as well, said that foreigners perform work that South Africans prefer to avoid, even if unemployed. There is some hypocrisy in the notion that foreigners take jobs and opportunities away from South Africans, because often the foreigners do not aspire to, or initially aspire to, the wage and income levels that have become norms for most local people. These norms are very close to the unionised wage levels in industry and commerce, and the foreigners strategically pitch their expectations below these levels.

## Acceptance and integration

How do the immigrants themselves experience the reactions of people in Johannesburg? Nearly three-quarters of the foreigners are very or fairly happy in Johannesburg. However, some 60 per cent of them experience significant hostility or negative treatment in Johannesburg; even among those who are happy in Johannesburg, some 50 per cent experience hostility. Men rather than women bear the brunt of hostility. The inner-city areas are least



hostile to foreigners, mainly because of their cosmopolitan composition. People from the BLNS countries, Europeans and East Africans experience least hostility, while Nigerians, West Africans, people from the East and Mozambicans face substantial hostility.

Two main factors condition the foreigners' experience and happiness in Johannesburg.

First of these is the attitude and manner of police and officials. We are realistic and accept that this is a sensitive and disputed feature of the formal interface between foreigners and host countries in many parts of the world.

The second is whether or not they are accepted as a South African or at least as part of the South African community. As many as 56 per cent of the foreigners interviewed are accepted as South Africans or as part of the community, which operates as a very effective neutraliser of what would otherwise be very damaging xenophobia. Therefore, the ability to blend into the local community is the critical factor in the lives of Johannesburg foreigners. It should be noted that some of the happy foreigners are well accepted by ordinary residents, but experience hostility from officials and police, which accounts for the apparent contradiction between high levels of hostility experienced and general satisfaction with life in the city.

The foreigners that are most easily integrated, in order of acceptance, are Europeans, people from the BLNS countries, Malawians, and Zambians. Trailing them, due to their large numbers and great poverty, are Zimbabweans.

The crucial factors in becoming accepted as a South African include cultural compatibility, the ability to pass oneself off as belonging to one of the South African ethnic groups, the ability to speak one of the core South African languages, and becoming part of South African social networks. Most of the foreigners have a significant number of South African friends.

The people who bear the brunt of xenophobia are those that dress, look and speak differently from any South African ethnic category – Nigerians and other West Africans, Somalis, and, to a lesser extent, Mozambicans. They are either unhappy or have to establish tight and segregated niche communities, which provide emotional security but do not solve their problems with xenophobia.

How serious is xenophobia in Johannesburg? The short answer is that it would be utterly crippling for foreigners were it not for the fact that so many foreigners have ethno-linguistic and cultural characteristics that are fairly closely related to the ethnic categories that exist in South Africa. South Africa has varieties of European, Nguni, Sotho, South Asian and East Indian cultural templates, and the majority of the immigrants in Johannesburg, white and black, share some or other of these very basic ethnic characteristics. In short – xenophobia is tolerable for most of the immigrants but penalises some immigrant minorities quite mercilessly.

Despite the fact that the foreigners have all the appearance of a fairly settled community, some 75 per cent say that they intend to return to their countries of origin to retire. This may be a nostalgic dream for many or most of them. We note from the findings that some 40 per cent never visit their home countries or do so less than once a year. We should accept that, by the time they need to retire, far fewer than 75 per cent will actually return home.

The people who bear the brunt of xenophobia are those that dress, look and speak differently from any South African ethnic category

## Key perceptions of local officials and business organisations

### Local officials

The 32 local officials interviewed were all very senior in the national and metropolitan police services, planning divisions of local government, regional immigration, and welfare administration.

Key points in officials' responses were:

Generally the officials lean significantly towards negative views on immigration

#### Numbers

The key perception of respondents in this group was that the in-migration of foreigners to Johannesburg is out of control. A large majority (84 per cent) of them observe that the numbers of semi-legal or non-legal immigrants are increasing apace at present, and a further 13 per cent see a 'steady' increase.

However, the most arresting indication of this belief in the failure of immigration control is seen in the officials' estimates of the numbers of foreigners in the city. Their estimates average out at 2,5 million, of which 86 per cent are believed to be non-legal in status, with a further 7 per cent semi-legal in the sense of being 'corruptly legalised' through the payment of bribes for falsified documents. Researchers may dismiss these estimates as indications of how ill-informed and poorly trained in numeracy even quite senior bureaucrats are, but that misses the point. If we have officials who are close to the action on the streets, and if they think that 2,5 million of Johannesburg's official population of some 3,9 million consists of (overwhelmingly irregular) foreigners, the estimates have disturbing implications for the morale of people administering the city.

This image of a process out of control inevitably produces feelings of helplessness or desperation among the officials who have to cope with its effects. The unreality of their own estimates may be easily exposed, but they are fully aware that the authorities do not have the faintest idea of how many foreigners there are or how many are coming in; at best the authorities know how many people are deported, which our respondents on average placed at just over 100 000 per year, and that knowledge is far from reassuring.

Generally the officials lean significantly towards negative views on immigration and its impact in Johannesburg, although their views are certainly not one-sided or one-dimensional, perhaps surprisingly in view of their perceptions of numbers. Broadly, only 12 per cent of the officials see immigrants as an advantage for Johannesburg, and 55 per cent see them as a liability with the rest (32 per cent) giving qualified answers.

#### Employment and roles in the economy

When specifically asked about the contributions of immigrants, many of the officials concede that they make a significant contribution to small-business activity and are obviously 'investing' in the city in small but pervasive ways. They often admire the skills and work ethic among the immigrants and concede that the immigrants are remarkably self-sufficient as individuals.

Many of the officials perceived considerable occupational specialisation among foreigners, with 71 per cent observing that foreigners mainly do particular jobs that locals do not occupy. This in itself indicates that foreigners have a significant role in the economy.

The officials are very clear on why they think that people employ foreigners, and their views tend to be cynical. The reasons they perceive are:

- The labour is cheap and exploitable and some work mainly to get accommodation.
- Labour laws and union protection are circumvented.
- People pity them.
- People do not realise that the foreigners are undocumented.
- The foreigners have low aspirations and will do work that South Africans shun.
- The foreigners are compromised by their situation and hence are very cooperative or passive.

At the same time, however, almost two-thirds of the officials also admit that foreigners are hardworking, determined, and productive.

Many officials observe that foreigners mainly do jobs that locals do not occupy

### Pressure on services and resources

The officials believe that all services, facilities, basic resources and agencies operating at community level are critically oversubscribed or overloaded, and accretions of new people of any kind will inevitably place critical stresses on the local urban system.

More specifically, the officials named significant stresses and pressures as follows:

- Available housing space
- Law enforcement and the criminal justice system
- Capacity of the infrastructure
- Availability of employment
- Services, including welfare and education
- Health services
- Control of street trading, begging and the condition of the streets in general
- Immigration control through bribery, illegal marriages and costs of repeated deportations
- Local revenue through non-payment of rates and taxes.

In the officials' view, these economic costs, plus the knock-on effects on the investment image of the city, cost the city more than the economic benefits that the foreigners bring.

A particular concern among the officials is the amount of time and resources that have to be spent in deporting foreigners. Over six out of ten are convinced that foreigners deported at great cost return very soon. Seven out of ten are aware of violence and conflicts between locals and foreigners that have to be controlled, and seven out of ten therefore see the police as spending a disproportionate amount of their time on managing the consequences of a system that has collapsed.

### Crime

Johannesburg already has to cope with high levels of crime, drug use and sexual exploitation and violence, and it is a widespread public perception that foreigners worsen the situation quite significantly, or at least undermine the effectiveness of law enforcement by tying up police personnel in immigrant control. However, views on the criminal propensities of foreigners vary among the security personnel interviewed. The following views sum up their perceptions:

- Foreigners more likely than locals to be involved in crime: 50 per cent

- Foreigners and locals equally involved: 43 per cent
- Foreigners less likely to be involved: 7 per cent.

Hence about half the officials believe that foreigners are no worse than locals in their criminal propensities. Among those who perceive the foreigners to be more vulnerable to criminal involvement, there are some who add that the circumstances of many foreigners force them into crime. Another specific amplifier of the crime issue among foreigners is that they are so often unrecorded immigrants and hence are untraceable in criminal investigations. On balance the views of the officials are reasonably rational – the police officials are not crudely xenophobic by any means, and they motivated their views very plausibly.

Views on the criminal propensities of foreigners vary among the security personnel interviewed

The officials are not fundamentally opposed to immigration as such. We asked three different questions about skills needs, the contributions of 'legal' immigrants and the kind of people Johannesburg needs more of. There was broad consensus about the following desirable immigrants:

- Engineers
- Other professionals
- Teachers and educators
- Entrepreneurs and cross-border traders
- Personnel for the construction industry
- Experienced people to work on important projects
- Artisans and technicians
- Manufacturing industrialists
- IT specialists
- A range of other, similarly useful, skills.

### The balance sheet of immigration: officials' views

The officials conceded the past contributions of foreign artists, industrialists, craftspeople, chefs, sports coaches, medical experts, entertainers and the like. Many of their answers emphasised the value of immigrant contact with the global economy, the advantages of cultural diversity, and the link between immigration and foreign investment. Some had lower expectations of useful immigrants, asking only that they should pay their taxes. Hence the officials are far from being sullenly parochial in their cynicism about current inflows. They do not appear to be xenophobic.

Nor do the officials think that Johannesburg residents are xenophobic. Some eight of them were adamant that there is no xenophobia in Johannesburg; more felt that hostility towards foreigners is mild under the circumstances, but three of them felt that there is unnecessary aggression among law enforcement personnel. In talking about xenophobia the officials were at pains to point out that it is difficult for people to feel warm and welcoming about people who break the law, pay no taxes and who seem to be flooding in at an increasing pace. Generally they argued that what appeared to be xenophobia was mainly a response among people who are themselves struggling to survive.

Finally, when asked about their prescriptions for policy, most of the officials argued for better immigration controls, including improved border surveillance, more capacity and effectiveness in the Department of Home Affairs and, the deployment of special task groups in immigration control. They particularly wanted the authorities to establish the

true numbers of immigrants as a basis for strategy. Some recommended more cooperation between the sending countries and South Africa, including control over irregular emigration in such countries. One person said that the government should stop the hypocritical practice of employing prominent foreigners in high paying positions, while pretending to control immigration on the ground.

Understandably, most of their prescriptions focused on better control of immigration, but some added that if controls became too strict they would be violated. They often agreed that arresting and deporting undocumented foreigners was a waste of time and resources. At least a third accepted that scarce skills should be welcomed into the country, and their replies made it clear that such skills included entrepreneurial talents.

## Business organisations

The views summarised here were expressed in interviews with senior people in all 45 significant business organisations operating in Gauteng, including major chambers of industry associated with foreign countries. Rather than a sample, then, this is a representative census of the viewpoints of organised business on an issue that is close to their core interests. Average membership of these bodies in Johannesburg alone is 11 300 businesses, with around 20 per cent of the membership being composed of small businesses and 40 per cent of large corporations.

Key points in business responses were:

The pattern of distinct unease expressed in many people's perceptions of immigration to South Africa today was mirrored in the responses of business organisations, which confirmed the perceptions of loss of control already recorded.

How problematic are large numbers of undocumented foreigners?

- A very serious problem: 49 per cent
- A fairly serious problem: 27 per cent
- Both a problem and a benefit: 16 per cent
- A benefit rather than a problem: 9 per cent.

As with the officials, the balance of views is very negative. The perceptions of the business organisations are also that the problem is escalating.

Growth or decline in the numbers of undocumented foreigners:

- Numbers growing rapidly: 53 per cent
- Numbers growing steadily: 44 per cent
- Declining: 2 per cent.

## Numbers

When asked to estimate numbers, business respondents who were prepared to hazard an estimate (32 out of the 45) put the total number of immigrants in Johannesburg at 2 766 000 on average. Like the officials (whose estimates they slightly exceed) they too see this as a problem out of control. Around 70 per cent of the business respondents feel that the common estimate of the numbers of non-legal foreigners in South Africa made by the police and the government, namely some 2,5 to 3 million, is an underestimate, and less than one-third think that the estimate is about right.

Most of the officials argued for better immigration controls and a more effective Department of Home Affairs

## Skills and the economy

This does not mean to say that they do not see benefits in the presence of foreigners. For example, when we asked them whether they see immigrants contributing to small business start-ups, 20 per cent said that the contribution was considerable, and a further 44 per cent felt that it happened to some extent.

Business respondents  
feel that business  
start-ups by  
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than they subtract  
from opportunities  
for local people

Where it happens, the business respondents feel that business start-ups by immigrants add more than they subtract from opportunities for local people. Only 24 per cent of them feel that foreigners reduce the business opportunities for locals, and 76 per cent feel that they add value, with initiatives that would not happen without them. The organisations add that there are genuine shortages of work experience and practical skills, even at 'unskilled' levels that foreigners help to address. Hence even if foreigners are taking away certain opportunities from locals, they are very often adding value in the process. Examples of this given by the business organisations include the following detailed points:

- Foreigners create jobs even at low levels of skill and complexity.
- There are many specialised skills in SA that can be traced back to foreign inputs.
- Foreigners provide contact with Africa that we would otherwise not have.
- Foreigners introduce styles of dress and products that attract tourists.
- The introduction of foreign food adds value.
- They create role models of a work ethic.
- Their communication eases the fear of South Africa that exists in many parts of Africa.
- Foreigners are known to take over failing businesses and make a success of them, eg Somalis.
- They provide low-cost maintenance and repair services.
- They have a large impact on the recycling market.

Whatever the benefits, however, the business organisations are aware of pervasive problems in the scope and activity of foreign migrants in Johannesburg. They are painfully aware of the widespread feeling that the immigrants take work and opportunities away from local jobseekers or street traders. Part of the problem lies in the responses of the unions, but the tensions would exist anyway. The responses of the business organisations remind us once again that as long as the government cannot adequately control and steer the process of foreign in-migration, the benefits of immigration, even at the levels of skill at which it is occurring, could be lost in the tension and conflict created by a process that is widely perceived to be out of control.

One of their central objectives is to make representations to government in respect of their business needs and interests. In general the response that they get from government is as follows:

- Helpful and responsive: 44 per cent
- Not helpful: 24 per cent
- Qualified reactions of various kinds: 31 per cent.

In the light of the importance of the interests that they represent, the 24 per cent who experience an unhelpful reaction is rather high. Among the issues which cause problems in representations to government, and on which government is least helpful, are labour and employment issues; education and immigration issues are particularly prominent, with eight organisations making special mention of difficulties in engaging the DHA.

Representations on immigration issues and work permits are not a major ongoing function of any of the business organisations, but are significant functions of the organisations nevertheless.

Some 40 per cent of the organisations observe that their members frequently have difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled staff; a further 48 per cent have fairly frequent difficulties. This is a sobering finding. Specific skills shortages that the business organisations mentioned, in order of the number of mentions, were:

- Management and project management skills
- Artisan skills
- Other technical skills (excluding IT)
- Financial skills
- IT skills
- Engineering
- Sales and marketing
- General administrative skills.

There were many others at lower levels of mention.

We need to understand these skills constraints in the light of the experience of the business organisations with the SETA-based training scheme funded by the business levy-based National Training Fund.

Reactions to the sector based (SETA) learnerships:

- Generally very useful: 25 per cent
- Moderately useful: 21 per cent
- Some useful, others not: 27 per cent
- Most not really useful: 16 per cent
- Not useful at all: 11 per cent.

These reactions indicate that the SETA-based training is making a useful contribution but, with around 27 per cent of the organisations expressing reservations, there are clearly gaps in the production of new skills. The objectives of the SETAs are to produce skills in standard categories, however, and they were never intended to be a vehicle for producing specialised skills.

Specific problems with SETA-based training included the following major issues:

- Positive, useful contribution to skills shortage/help trainees to get work experience and become marketable, etc: 16 mentions
- Keeps industry up to date in techniques: 3 mentions
- No other alternatives: 2
- Sound concept but inefficiently implemented: 13 mentions
- Insufficient incentives for employers in relation to time and effort in claiming back: 19
- Poor management/disorganised: 20
- Poor communication with employers: 8
- Bureaucratic: 5
- Training not practical, relevant or focused enough: 17
- Complex interaction required to derive benefit: 7
- Technical mismatches in training: 2
- Long delays in accreditation and placements: 4

Some 40 per cent of the organisations observe that their members frequently have difficulties in recruiting suitably skilled staff

- Training at too low a level: 2
- SETAs have skills constraints: 2
- Learners are confused about whether employed or not: 2
- Employer-based training more effective: 2

As a consequence of both the gaps and the levels of training offered by SETAs, it is not surprising that some 30 per cent of the organisations observe a great need among their members to recruit foreigners, and a further 36 per cent have a moderate need for foreign recruitment. Hence some two-thirds of the organisations represent members who need to access and recruit foreign skills.

Two-thirds of business organisations represent members who need to access and recruit foreign skills

The skills that the organisations consider to be in short supply in South Africa, and that are very likely to be found in foreign recruitment include, in order of mention:

- Artisans (non-construction-based)
- Engineers
- Other technical skills of various kinds (non-IT)
- Management and project management skills
- Financial skills
- Various applied professions
- IT skills
- Construction technicians and highly skilled artisans
- Health professionals
- Entrepreneurs
- Planning and strategy skills
- Catering skills
- Marketing skills
- A range of others, including R and D, art and design.

Ironically, seven organisations also claimed that their members were short of cost-effective, efficient and productive unskilled labour. This small finding is but one of many indications that South African unskilled labour may have priced itself out of the market. Another point made was that increased diversity in the supply of labour would do much to improve efficiency.

Clearly then, the organisations representing South African industry consider that foreign skills have a major role to play in the further development of the economy.

Against this background we asked them about experiences with the Department of Home Affairs. They responded as follows:

- Very helpful: 4 per cent
- Fairly helpful: 22 per cent
- Not at all helpful: 51 per cent
- Do not use them/have not had to use them: 22 per cent.

More detailed accounts of their experiences with the DHA can be broken down as follows:

- Bureaucratic/rigid/petty/sluggish: 28 mentions
- Various problems with visas and work permits: 29 mentions
- General problems of communication that are encountered with all departments, not only DHA: 17 mentions



- Experiences of corrupt officials: 3 mentions
- Evidence of breakdown of systems of control and the need for tamper-proof documents: 3 mentions
- Unsympathetic attitude: 2 mentions.

The recruitment of foreign skills is obviously highly cost-effective for an economy, but in South Africa it has wider political and socio-economic implications, as the earlier parts of this report have indicated. Part of the complexity of the issue is that we are said to have a problem of xenophobia. Hence we asked the organisations how, in their experience, local staff react to and treat foreign recruits, and the following pattern emerged:

- Acceptance at higher levels of skill or in specialised skills areas: 18 mentions
- Negatively/with resistance, particularly at lower skills levels and among unionised blue collar workers: 23 mentions
- Negatively because of the belief that SA has all the skills it needs: 11
- Dislike of competition from foreigners: 11
- Evidence of racism in reaction to foreigners: 5
- Resignation/reluctant acceptance: 3
- Other and qualified answers.

We also asked the organisations about the problems that foreign recruits have in adjusting to South Africa. The effects of high crime levels on foreigners were mentioned above all other effects. Mention was also made of problems in finding suitable accommodation and the lack of adequate public transport. Social integration into communities with a different culture was mentioned, as was adjusting to a different pace of work and occupational culture. Entrenched antagonism and xenophobia emerged as a middle-level problem; nine of the organisations said that they had not noticed any particular problems.

In concluding this section, we must observe that there is considerable negativity about the foreign presence among both key officials and business organisations. They display the underlying cause of this negative response in their estimates of the numbers of foreigners in the city. Their astoundingly high estimates are clearly unrealistic, but they are important in that they reflect the perception that the present state of immigration control is in chaos. Estimates of more than two-and-a-half million foreigners on average tell us that they see the government as having lost control completely. What they express through dramatically high estimates, ordinary residents are expressing in their apparent xenophobia.

The recruitment of foreign skills is obviously highly cost-effective for an economy, but has wider political and socio-economic implications

## Summary of results

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- The method of estimating foreigners within households adjacent to sampled dwellings, with safeguards and corrections, is a more useful method of getting closer to the real numbers of unrecorded foreigners than any other approach. However like other methods of estimating foreign presence, it probably yields conservative results.
- The numbers of foreigners in Johannesburg at the time of the study (2006) are estimated to have been over 500 000, or 14,1 per cent of the estimated adult population. Due to the under-representation of identified types of foreigners, however, in reality the number could be somewhat higher, most likely nearer 600 000 to 700 000 today.

There is much less direct job competition between foreigners and locals than people imagine

This however is not a firm finding of this research, and we should adhere to our estimate of 500 000 to 550 000.

- The method has other advantages, however, since it provides a roughly representative selection of most kinds of foreigners interviewed who live in the residential fabric, excluding servants' quarters.
- The method is useful in empirical research, but is not recommended for large mass or commercial surveys because of the need for high-quality face-to-face interviews with qualitative components.
- The foreigners in Johannesburg have significant skills to offer, although these are more often than not experience-based rather than certificated skills.
- On average the foreigners are not highly educated, although the average level of education (incomplete high school) is often of a higher standard than equivalent South African schooling.
- The foreigners are more than twice as likely to be self-employed and self-sufficient as local adult residents. Their level of unemployment, which occurs mainly among very recent immigrants, is also significantly lower than the South African equivalent.
- The immigrants employ almost half their total numbers, almost half again being South African employees.
- Up to one-third of the immigrants take paid employment that unemployed South Africans say they would like to have, but the immigrants are grateful for the opportunity, whereas the jobs would be regarded as inferior or underpaid by local standards. In reality, there is much less direct job competition between foreigners and locals than the estimate of up to one-third would suggest.
- Although they claim to intend returning to their countries of origin, we should accept that very substantial proportions of immigrants are likely to remain in South Africa for the rest of their productive lives, and many will even retire here.
- Most immigrants integrate well into the South African community, with many South African friends, and nearly 60 per cent feel accepted as part of the local community. Most of them are happy with life in Johannesburg, rather more so than local people.
- Xenophobia is pervasive in a broad sense, and is associated with an accumulation of a large variety of specific negative attitudes rather than a consolidated mindset. It is caused less by competition for jobs and resources than we expected, and at least as much by personality attributes and ethnic loyalties among the local people. However, it is not the result of colour-based racism on the part of black or white South Africans.
- The accumulated specific hostilities that make up the overall picture of 'xenophobia' is important in that it does cause unhappiness among foreigners. The reactions of officials and police are a major cause of the unhappiness.
- The key potential effects of hostility are muted, however, by the fact that a majority of the foreigners interviewed feel accepted in the local community. On balance, therefore, xenophobia is far from being a crippling problem for immigrants.
- The national origins of immigrants are an important intervening variable, however, and the people from more distant countries in Africa, excluding English-speaking East Africa, are exposed to considerable hostility and stereotyping. The reasons are predominantly cultural, although they are expressed as an assumed proclivity for criminal behaviour.
- The hostility to foreigners does not extend to a reluctance to employ or trade with foreigners. In fact their utility as employees and people in business is generously recognised by South Africans, by businesspeople, and by many key functionaries.

- The cultural diversity that immigrants bring is not disruptive in general, and some of the black immigrants who are culturally quite distinctive have broken through the informal residential segregation of a South African city. However, less well-educated minorities, and even better educated black South Africans, find it difficult to enjoy contact with people from culturally remote areas of Africa. Our interpretation of the patterns, however, is that the additional diversity that immigrants bring is helping to blur the edges of inter-ethnic hostility among South Africans.

## Concluding remarks

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CDE's field research was undertaken in the second half of 2006 at a time when concern was mounting at escalating numbers of irregular migrants in South Africa. However this anxiety was not backed by any hard data on numbers. Xenophobic attacks were not unknown in the country at that time, but they were sporadic, isolated, targeted (at particular nationalities, including Somali shopkeepers) and appeared to follow local dynamics.

CDE's goals in undertaking the research were ambitious, but limited. They were ambitious because enumerating undocumented migrants is very difficult and little fieldwork had been done in South Africa – on any scale at least – to provide the hard numbers that sound public debate and credible policies require.

The goals were limited in that they were confined to one metropolitan area and to the specific goals of counting foreigners, constructing a profile of them, and reporting on the perceptions and attitudes of Johannesburg residents to their presence and impact.

From this perspective, what did we find out?

## Numbers

We believe that we are reporting a more credible number of foreigners in Johannesburg in the figure of upwards of half a million or slightly more than 14 per cent of the estimated population of 3,9 million. This is less than the popular imagination, and much less than the greatly exaggerated figures volunteered by the highly placed officials and business organisations that we interviewed. We believe that this figure is more credible because it is based on actual field research.

However, we are too conscious of the difficulties of research in this field and the limitations of our own methodology – which we have been careful to point out – to claim that this is an authoritative figure. Complete authority will remain elusive on this subject. It is worth recapping some of the caveats which we believe apply.

- We make no finding on the specific numbers of irregular migrants, nor on those who have genuine or forged documents (ID books, refugee permits, work permits, study permits, etc). Our interviewers strongly suspected that the problem of forged documents was a large one, but this simply could not be quantified.
- We believe that our findings are likely to be an underestimate, partly because of the problem of 'reach' – for instance in the anonymity of servants' quarters in the suburbs. It is also possible that there has been a sudden and dramatic spike in numbers since

The hostility to foreigners does not extend to a reluctance to employ or trade with foreigners

CDE's methodology and findings provide the basis for a more reasoned and informed public debate on immigrant numbers

late 2006. We believe that even if this were so, it would not account for millions more immigrants.

However, even if our figures are an underestimate, some of the figures that have become common currency challenge logic and simple arithmetic. If there are 9,84 million irregular immigrants in the country, South Africa is hosting an underground population two-and-a-half times the population of Johannesburg, as estimated in the Community Survey of 2007. If there are 3 million Zimbabweans in South Africa, this presence amounts to more than three-quarters the population of Johannesburg.

At the very least, our methodology and our figures provide the basis for a more reasoned and informed public debate on numbers, and a challenge to anyone who believes in the 'tidal wave' of immigrants to prove us wrong with alternative estimates based on fieldwork.

At most we would hope that our figures might give confidence to policy-makers that management of these – still admittedly large – numbers is feasible, and that policies that will restore public confidence are achievable.

## Impact and attitudes

CDE's research findings in both the pilot survey of Witbank and the Johannesburg survey found ample evidence of hostility to foreigners. However in both instances, there was also evidence – mainly from the foreigners themselves – that a kind of *modus vivendi* existed, allowing South Africans and foreigners to get along tolerably well. Clearly, however, since the research was completed, some sort of tipping point was reached which in certain specific areas led to a chain reaction of violent hostility to develop and break down this mutual tolerance (see box: **This thing has always been there . . .**, facing page).

### 'This thing has always been there but it was a light thing'

'We were against these people from the onset: that's when the term like *makwerekwere* (derogatory term for foreigners) came about, we were against them in a light manner but now people are getting angry that is why they beat them up, their numbers are growing and some have babies this side it's as if this is their hometown; this violence happened because people are getting angry, this thing has always been there but it wasn't as strong as it is now. We never said we are happy to live with them but it was a light thing so people resorted to violence because of the realisation that the situation was getting serious.'

Focus group respondent, HSRC Xenophobia study, June 2008<sup>22</sup>

CDE 2008

A combination of several factors has probably brought us to this tipping point:

- The escalation of Zimbabwe's political and economic crisis following the 29 March 2008 elections drew attention to the refugee numbers that had been growing visibly but uncounted for over a year.
- The sense of a flow of refugees that was out of control was exacerbated by the absence of any display of leadership, sense of urgency or organised response by the South African government (see box: **'Just live with it'** below).

- The sharp downturn in the economy and sharp rise in the cost of living that immediately preceded the xenophobic attacks produced a generalised climate of unease, tension and protest – foreigners became one among several foci.
- Many or most of the focal points of violence saw looting of prominent immigrant shops. With the retreat of township retail commerce into shopping centres or mini-spaza shops, the prospect of looting these immigrant-owned retail outlets was an incentive for more general unrest.

These factors point to a chain of social, economic and political causation much more complex than viewing the violence as the outcome of a spasm of ‘xenophobic violence’. Investigation of the causes of violence should be an urgent priority and preferably it should be carried out by an independent, well-resourced and high-profile judicial commission.

Investigation of the causes of violence should be an urgent priority

### ‘Just live with it’

‘As for Zimbabweans who enter South Africa legally, well, they enter South Africa legally and there wouldn’t be any need to do anything about that, but as to this other influx of illegal people, *I personally think it’s something that we have to live with ... You can’t put a Great Wall of China between South Africa and Zimbabwe to stop people walking across...*’ (emphasis added)

President Thabo Mbeki in the National Assembly, 17 May 2007

CDE 2008

On the other hand, while it is important to bear causal factors like these in mind, it would be wrong to treat hostility towards foreigners as merely some sort of displacement behaviour by people driven to strike out in anger by the poor conditions of their lives.

In this regard it is worth recalling some of the conclusions of the CDE Witbank report:

Large majorities of every racial group among Witbank residents expressed uncompromisingly negative views and attitudes towards immigrants ...

Despite this:

... our interviews with immigrants showed that much of the hostility expressed is defensive rhetoric, and that *by and large, Witbank treats its foreigners rather well*. Nearly 90 per cent of the immigrants felt good about the way they were treated, more than two thirds like Witbank and its people and most of them said that they would like to stay ...

Although on this basis we concluded that ‘host’ citizens had at least a grudging tolerance of foreigners, we issued a warning:

Negative attitudes by no means always translate into hostile acts ... We need to know much more about the triggers that could turn negative attitudes into hostile action.

In our much larger Johannesburg study we found broadly similar effects, with the exception that Johannesburg residents were *less*, rather than more, likely than their Witbank counterparts to express hostility to immigrants, while immigrants in Johannesburg were much *more* conscious of ill-treatment from officials and police than their counterparts in Witbank.

It is unlikely that large majorities of immigrants in our pilot and main surveys independently volunteered false information about the degree of acceptance that they encountered and integration that they felt. As a result it would seem that there *was a modus vivendi* and that it has broken down, at least temporarily and in places.

## Managing migration in the national interest

There is no reason to panic about immigrant numbers, but there are no grounds for complacency either

CDE's findings on immigrant numbers and impact may show that there is no reason to panic about immigrant numbers, but there are no grounds for complacency either. If we are to restore, never mind improve on, the precarious tolerance that broke down under the pressures we have described, the direction in which our analysis clearly points is the need for a comprehensive and effective strategy to deal with immigration issues. This needs to be coupled with clear and bold leadership to build public confidence in the government's ability to deal with the realities of migration.

What are those realities? As the country – and especially Johannesburg – counts the cost of the May 2008 violence, we would point to three realities that will shape future challenges of immigration policy.

The first is that continuing and probably increased immigration is inevitable. South Africa – Africa's richest economy – has long and porous borders at the bottom of a poor and conflict-prone continent. Increased migration pressures from climate change to improved transportation to political conflict will push out-migration from sending countries, while the performance of South Africa's economy will act as a magnet for those with the get-up-and-go to leave their own countries and try for a better life elsewhere.

The second is that most immigrants, at all levels – from the street trader to the boardroom – make a contribution to South Africa's economy, sometimes against daunting odds. We need to understand, manage and capitalise on that contribution much better. But we will only be able to do this if we are able to manage flows of people across our borders more rationally and efficiently, that is in ways that give South Africans confidence that these flows of people make a positive contribution to the common good and that the country is controlling its own borders.

This means, thirdly, that popular fears and misconceptions about immigration must be dealt with. All over the world migration issues are disputed between elite concerns for skilled labour needs and human rights on the one hand, and popular concerns about preferential treatment over locals, unfair competition in the labour market, border control, and bogus claims to asylum. When they show themselves here, these concerns are not the products of blind prejudice or some national predisposition to xenophobia, but local versions of universal and understandable fears. None of them is as simple as it looks and all may be fanned by misinformation. But if immigration is to make the contribution it can to our economic growth, then they have to be taken seriously and treated on their merits.

This report and the research on which it is based were not intended to produce a strategy for addressing these realities. This aim belongs to a larger and more ambitious CDE study which covers all aspects of immigration policy but with a focus on skills needs and the economy. The forthcoming final report of this project will provide a comprehensive overview of migration policy issues facing South Africa and include research-based recommendations for more effective policy making in the country's approach to migration management.

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CDE's findings on immigrant numbers and impact may show  
that there is no reason to panic about immigrant numbers,  
but there are no grounds for complacency either

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CDE's estimate places immigrant numbers well above any level that could be an excuse for complacency, and our analysis clearly points to the need for a comprehensive and effective strategy to deal with immigration issues. This needs to be coupled with clear and bold leadership to build public confidence in the government and the city's ability to deal with the realities of migration

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Cover: A trader sells Zimbabwean handicrafts in Bruma, a suburb east of the Johannesburg CBD. Henner Frankenfeld / PictureNET Africa

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