

Informality and the context of reception in South Africa's new immigrant destinations

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Abstract

This study examines the context of reception for Zimbabwean migrants who are engaged in South Africa's informal economy. It seeks to contribute to two areas of migration scholarship: (a) the emergence of new immigrant destinations in the global South and (b) the role of the informal economy in shaping the context of reception for migrants in new gateway cities. Through surveys of Zimbabwean day labourers in Tshwane (formerly Pretoria), we document the poverty and the food and housing insecurity these migrants and their dependents endure resulting from underemployment in the informal economy. The analysis presented here suggests that although it has received little attention from migration scholars, the informal economy can play a significant role in shaping the context of reception for immigrants in the new gateway cities of the global South. In many destination countries, the informal economy absorbs large numbers of migrants, making it an important, if flawed, source of employment, earnings, and remittances. With increasing levels of migration to major cities, the informal economy has become a key arena of migrant incorporation, with far-reaching implications for lives and livelihoods.

1 | Introduction: new immigrant destinations

The global map of migration is changing. It is estimated that in 2015, approximately 244 million persons were international migrants, an increase of more than 40% since 2000 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2016). This unprecedented movement of people has contributed to a reconfiguration of the spatial patterns of migration. New gateways are opening as migrants search for economic opportunities or seek to escape armed conflict, political turmoil, and persecution. Major cities have been the locus of much of the new migration. The twin processes of migration and urbanisation, which in many parts of the world have become mutually reinforcing, have led to the pluralisation of new immigrant destinations (NIDs) and in some cases, contributed to the explosive growth of cities, particularly in the global South (International Organization for Migration, 2015; Price & Benton-Short, 2007).

Through an examination of the intersection of migration, urbanisation, and

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