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Beyond Survival: Building Culturally Inclusive Societies for Refugees and Migrants in Cape Town, South Africa

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Abstract

Cape Town, situated in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, has become a significant destination for refugees and migrants from across Africa, particularly from countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. While the city provides economic opportunities and relative safety, refugees and migrants continue to face significant cultural integration challenges that go beyond basic survival needs. This study examines how cultural inclusion can be strengthened to promote social cohesion between refugees, migrants, and host communities in Cape Town.

A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative surveys ($n = 80$) and qualitative interviews ($n = 20$) conducted with refugees, migrants, and residents in Bellville, Wynberg, and Observatory. The findings reveal recurring problems such as language barriers, discrimination, limited cultural understanding, and weak institutional support for integration programs. Many refugees reported feeling socially excluded despite participating in local economic activities, while host community members expressed uncertainty and fear arising from cultural differences.

The study identifies the lack of cultural awareness programs, inadequate government coordination, and minimal community engagement as key barriers to inclusion. It recommends establishing community cultural exchange initiatives, language training programs, and municipal-led intercultural platforms to foster dialogue and shared understanding. Collaboration among local NGOs, faith-based organisations, and the City of Cape Town is crucial in creating culturally inclusive spaces where diversity is valued and mutual respect is fostered.

Ultimately, this paper argues that building culturally inclusive societies requires more than providing safety and employment; it demands intentional efforts to celebrate diversity, promote empathy, and ensure that every individual, regardless of origin, feels a sense of belonging in the broader South African

community.

Keywords: Cultural Inclusion; Economic Migrants; Integration; Social Cohesion; Western Cape Province