

# Violence in the city: *exploring migration and sex work in Johannesburg*

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**Thank you to  
Marlise Richter**

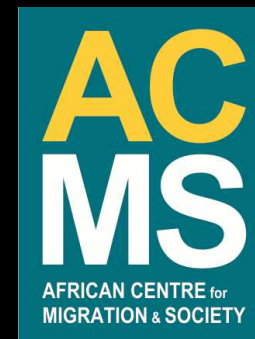
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# The African Centre for Migration & Society at Wits

*An internationally engaged; Africa-oriented; and African-based research and teaching centre dedicated to shaping academic and policy debates on migration, development and social transformation*

- Graduate degree programme with students from across Africa, North America, and Europe;
- Research in 12 African countries on issues related to migration, human rights, development, governance, and social change;
- Partnerships on 4 continents;
- Regional reference point for public and scholarly debate and policy formation.







# Today

## 1. Migration and sex work in Johannesburg

- An overview of “hidden spaces” (Vearey, 2010)
- Marginalisation

## 2. Mixed methods

- Research exploring impact of the 2010 World Cup on supply, demand and experiences of urban sex workers
- Participatory photography project exploring lived experiences of migrant sex workers in Johannesburg

## 3. Lived experiences of sex workers in Johannesburg

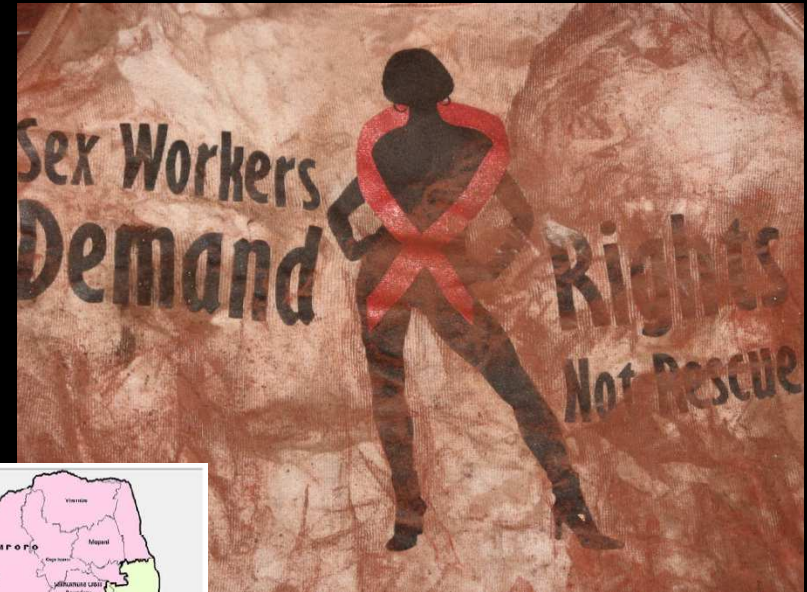
- Safety; violence; criminalisation; voice; invisibility

## 4. Some conclusions and implications for urban design

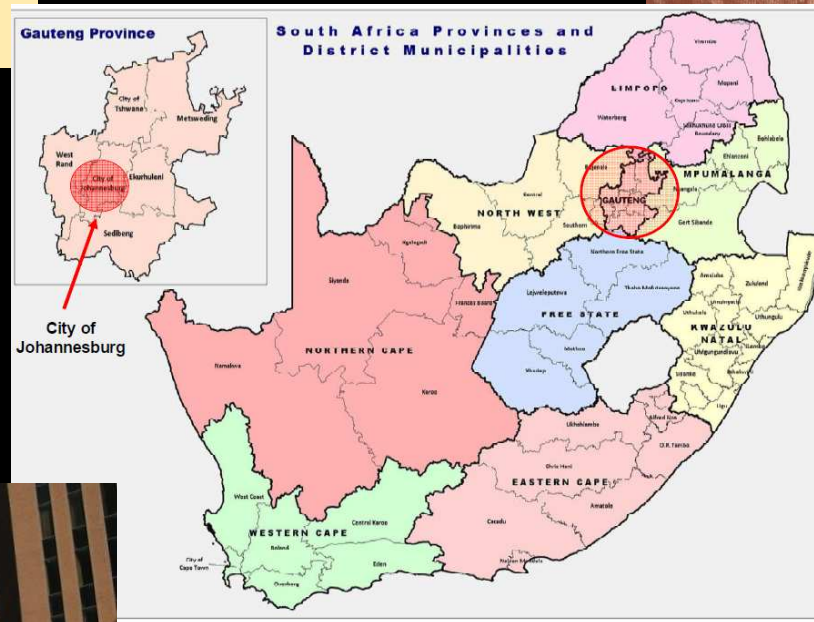
- How to address safety and security for sex workers in the city?



# 1. Migration and sex work in Johannesburg



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\* The sizes of continents are proportional to 2000 population.



# Migration

## Globally

- Approximately **214 million cross-border migrants** (around 3% of the world's population) and **740 million internal migrants** globally.

## South Africa

- Between 3 and 4% of the total population are cross-border migrants (around 2 million people).
- Internal and cross-border migration: different forms of migration and different reasons for migration are found to determine urbanisation experiences and relationships with the city.

UNDP, 2009; UNOCHA & FMSP, 2009; Zlotnick, 2006; Population Division of the Dept. of Economic and Social Affairs of the UN Secretariat, 2005

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# Sex work in South Africa

- All aspects of sex work are **criminalised** in South Africa.
- **Little sex work research** has been conducted in South Africa.
- **Violence:** High levels of violence against male, female and transgender sex workers; violence (and fear of) against cross-border migrants.
- **Health Care:** Limited due to fear of HCW discrimination and disclosing profession - only one sex work-specific health clinic in South Africa; challenges experienced by cross-border migrants.
- **HIV risk:** FSWs: HIV prevalence between 45% - 69% in 1998





# Urban space, migration & sex work

- **Urban space, migration and sex work**
  - Limited research in South Africa
  - Internal migration
  - Cross-border migration: regularisation, documentation, detention & deportation
  - Movement in search of improved livelihood opportunities
- **Our research (2010) found that**
  - 43,4% (n=971) were found to be cross-border migrants
  - 56,1% (n=1257) were internal migrants.
  - Only 11 sex workers or (0.5%) worked in the same province than they were born



# Sex work, migration & urban health *considerations for urban planning*

## Structural violence

- Individual, social
- Urban health inequities
- Deprivation
- Migration status
- Social determinants of health

## Legal frameworks

- Sex work as work
- Criminalisation perpetuates structural and direct violence
- Criminalisation has severe public health consequences

## An urban health approach

- Public health: social justice
- Addressing inequity
- Social determinants of health
- Healthy urban governance
- Intersectoral action

## Recommendations for action

- Urban design
- Address 'causes of causes'
- Practitioners, policy makers, researchers, sex workers and sex worker advocacy groups





©Anna, from Working the City, 2010

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Working the City:  
Experiences of Migrant Women in Inner-city Johannesburg

date: 06 October 2010  
place: Photo Workshop Gallery  
time: 18h00

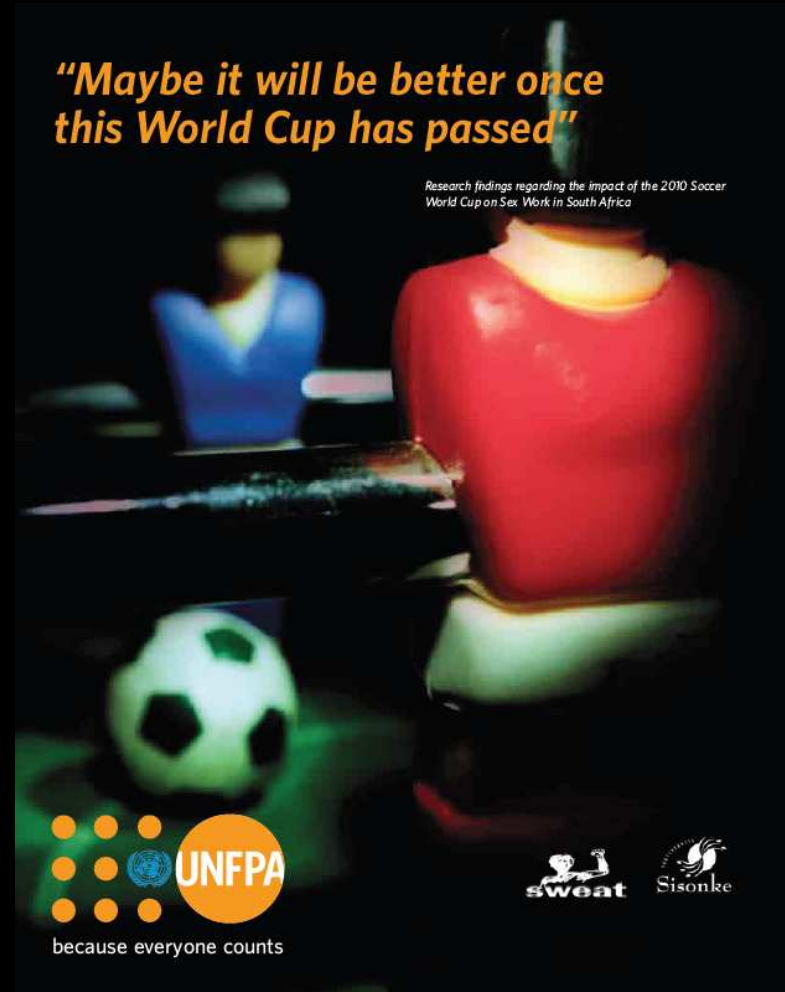
This exhibition is the result of a participatory photography project with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg in August 2010, as part of the Health and Migration Research Initiative of the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits in collaboration with the Market Photo Workshop.



## 2. Mixed methods

**"Maybe it will be better once  
this World Cup has passed"**

*Research findings regarding the impact of the 2010 Soccer  
World Cup on Sex Work in South Africa*

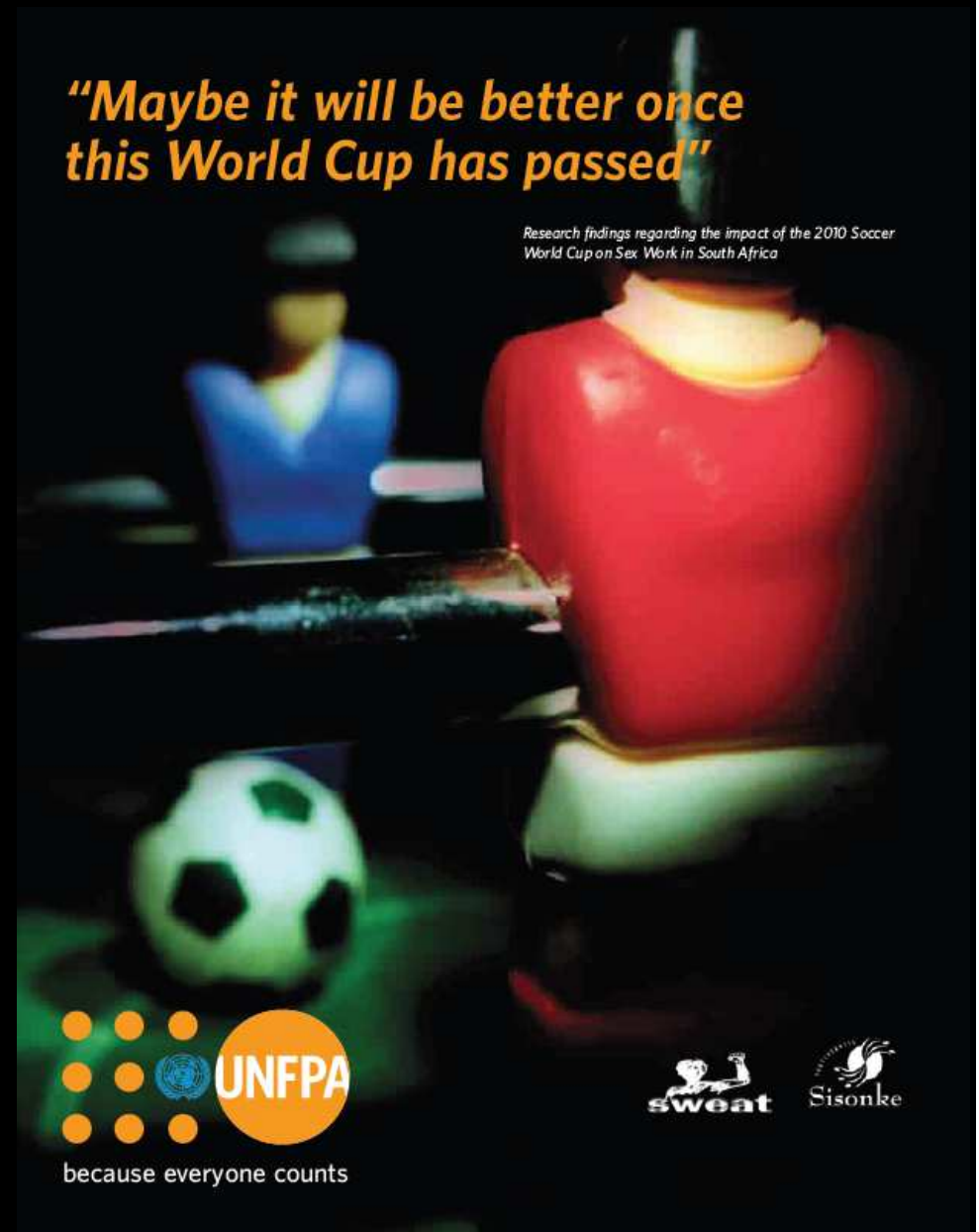




# A. Impact of the 2010 Soccer World Cup on Sex Work in South Africa

Consortium of researchers from Wits University (South Africa), Ghent university (Belgium), the Sex Worker Education & Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) and Sisonke Sex Worker Movement (South Africa)

Aims: To gather information on sex worker mobility, access to services, frequency of health care visits, interactions with healthcare providers and interaction with police.



Available: <http://www.sweat.org.za/>



# A. World Cup research

- 3 cities and 4 research sites:
  - Cape Town
  - Johannesburg
    - Hillbrow
    - Sandton (added in Phase II and III)
  - Rustenburg
- 3 phases:
  - Pre-World Cup
  - During World Cup
  - Post-World Cup
- Sex workers and peer educators as fieldworkers
- Mixed-methods approach:
  - Longitudinal component: follow 60 sex workers for 4 months
    - Focus group discussions (FGDs) and daily diary
  - Cross-sectional:
    - Survey 200 sex workers per phase per research site
- Data gathered:
  - 2 260 surveys
  - 14 FGDs
  - 53 diaries





## B. Visualising the city

*lived experiences of hidden urban populations*

- Designing cities that respond to the needs of diverse urban populations.
- Absence of the voices of marginalised, hidden, urban populations:
  - Sex workers; non-nationals; residents of informal housing
- “Participation”
  - Research, planning, governance

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©Mimi. from Working the City. 2010

## Working the City: Experiences of Migrant Women in Inner-city Johannesburg

date: 06 October 2010  
place: Photo Workshop Gallery  
time: 18h00

This exhibition is the result of a participatory photography project with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg in August 2010, as part of the Health and Migration Research Initiative of the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits in collaboration with the Market Photo Workshop.







Iketleng



Sku



Mimi



Ana



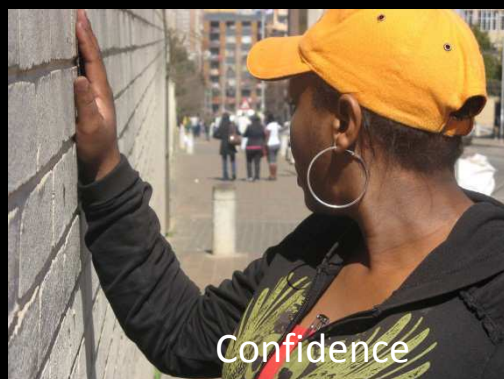
Monica  
Mombassa



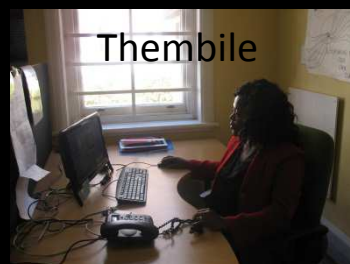
Lety



Shorty



Confidence



Thembile



Pinky



Thembi







# LAND OF OPPORTUNITIES



## LETY

I came to the land of opportunities (Johannesburg South Africa) in 2006. I faced difficulties crossing the border illegally, from Zimbabwe.

Life was hard in the city. I was alone with no job or source of income but I was fortunate to share a cottage with Zimbabweans.

It was hard to get a job because I did not have a work permit neither did I have SA citizenship. I had no choice but to create work for myself. As the saying goes, "A girl has got to do what a girl has got to do."

Johburg was not as easy as I had anticipated. Hillbrow was shady and evil. I was pushed around to hunt for myself, to be streetwise and to survive in the city.

## CAPTIONS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

- This picture reminds me of when I first came Hillbrow. Life was hard and I was alone.
- My first home in Hillbrow was a shared cottage with Zimbabwean friends on Sandaga and Nugget streets.
- I am in charge and in control of my life. My hands and mind are the main elements to my dreams and aspirations.
- Johannesburg is the land of opportunities for most people in Africa, although most of the time it is a struggle to survive. I am in charge and in control of my life. My hands and mind are the main elements to my dreams and aspirations.
- Siyabonga son gantsi at the 'Wagtail Children's Shelter on Van der Merwe and Chain streets, a reminder of feeling safe and trusting Johannesburg.



# DOUBLE VISION



SPU

I moved from Kibera Nairobi to Johannesburg in 1985 to look for a job. I could not get employment so I started selling fruits and vegetables on the streets.

In 1986 lost my husband and I also lost my stock and I went through a tough time. The situation forced me into sex work as that seemed to be the only way I could make some money to pay rent and look after my family.

In 1987 I fell ill. I was scared to go to the clinic because I was afraid of being questioned about my sexual relations. This is when I first heard about Evelyn Clinic. The nurses at the clinic were great as they treated us (me and other sex workers) with respect. They taught us more about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections.

The photo story is about my relationship with Hillbrow. In the photographs I am telling a story about how I see Hillbrow. I see Hillbrow in so many different ways, there are so many things I like and do not like about the place. I like the security in some other parts, the churches, cleanliness and the clinics. Most of Hillbrow is dirty, unsafe and there are so many homeless people.

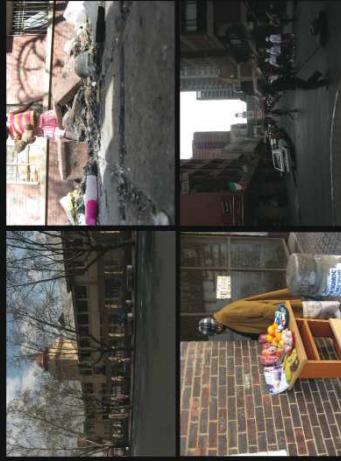
I see Johannesburg as a very difficult place to live because I have to pay for everything. It is also a dangerous place to live and especially at night the people in Jo'burg are so different to the people in KZN. I hope to start my own business.

CAPTIONS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT


- The passages in Hillbrow are so dark, quiet and dangerous. Lots of different crimes happen in or near passages.
- When you go to the Hill in Hillbrow as a sex worker, people throw different stuff out of the windows.
- This picture brings out all my memories. It's the picture of the collection of my photos before I came to Johannesburg.
- The clinic is my home. That makes Hillbrow to be known as a bad place.
- The library is in my house at Baginima. It belongs to me and my three other family members. I know the importance of education and started the collection of books in 1996.
- The people in Hillbrow are so different to the people in KZN. It is interesting to see people sleeping on the streets while there are centers for those people.



# DREAMS



**CONFIDENCE**



My first time in Johannesburg was a beautiful experience. I stole a coke bottle on top of a shop at the corner of Klein and Pretoria Streets, which was my first stop in Hillrow. During a visit to one of my friend's place at the High Point building, the same friend tried to kill me by throwing me out of an open window. We had been drinking and having fun out of an usual form of entertainment. He was

high on drugs.

One of my dreams is to be my own boss; have my own saloon in Hillbrow. At the moment I am a beauty therapist operating in Pretoria Street.

I do not like Hillbrow because there are some unhealthiness and dirty spaces. I also do not like Lifehouse. It is bad for a business. I think street vendors need clean spaces to work from. Life in Hillbrow is good. I go to church every Sunday after I go out for a drink at the bar. I also go to the shops to do some shopping. I think if most flats were repaired and maintained more people will have a proper place to live. I hate the fact that the place is not safe. My slaving in is dirty and I needs to be fixed.

Johannesburg is a good place as I have learned lots of things, and made some friends. I have participated in educational projects, like peer education; educating my friends about taking care of themselves and what they can do to live a healthy life.

CAPTIONS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

[illegible]

MARKET  
PHOTO  
WORKSHOP



Kingdom of the Netherlands

This poster is a result of a participatory photography project with migrant women involved in sex work in inner-city Johannesburg in August 2010, as part of the health and migration research initiative of the Forced Migration Studies Programme at Wits University in collaboration with the Market Photo Workshop.





Working The City Public Poster Exhibition, Newtown. 2010





### **3. Lived experiences**





I share my flat with ten people so  
I put my food in my bedroom  
because it is safe.





High Point building reminds me of a client who  
wanted to kill me because he was high on drugs.



© Constance, 2010





These are ARVs that I take to improve my CD4 count as well as lowering the viral load that weaken the immune system. I've been taking ARVs for six months now and there has been great improvement in my health.



Memories: This is a place, which brings a lot of bad memories to me. I was passing by this place near Faraday and client approached me and I decided to go with him. He later tried to rob me on the corner just after a five minutes walk. Two street boys helped me by beating the guy.





Before I was raped in 1998, the guy beat me up. I chose to recreate the scene in this picture as a way of trying to highlight the abuses that sex workers go through as they work to fend for themselves and provide for their families.





# Police Contact

- 25% (n=491) of all respondents had a negative experience with the police in the preceding month
- 1.2% (n=29) of all respondents had a positive experience
- Negative experiences
- 9% (n=170) of respondents **had been arrested** in the month preceding the survey
- 5% (n=91) were **sexually or physically assaulted** by the police in the month preceding the survey
- 2.4% (n=47) were **given a warning or threatened** by a member of the police force.



“The police officers took my money, they put me in [the police car] and drove around with me, on the way they threw me out of the moving car, my leg got injured and I went to the hospital [....]

I was afraid to open a case because our job is not legal, up till now I still have problems with my legs”

Female sex worker, Johannesburg





### 3. Some conclusions and implications for urban design





# What is needed to address safety and security for sex workers in the city?

## Training

- undergraduate, postgraduate, continuous professional development

## Partnerships

- creative engagement
- sex workers - researchers— civil society — planners — national government - municipal authorities - law enforcement

## Visual & participatory methodologies

- valuable research and (community, government, academic, civil society) engagement tools.
- plural audiences, plural narratives
- collectively develop integrated responses:
  - (Un)safe spaces
  - (In)visibility
  - (De)criminalisation



<http://workingthecity.wordpress.com/>

## WORKING THE CITY: EXPERIENCES OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN INNER-CITY JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

Participatory Photo Project with Migrant Women Sex Workers

ABOUT AFRICAN CENTRE FOR MIGRATION & SOCIETY (ACMS) SISONKE SEX WORKER MOVEMENT MARKET PHOTO WORKSHOP (MPW)

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MA Thesis by Elsa Oliveira- Migrant Women Sex Workers: Exploring How Urban Space Impacts Self-(re)presentation

Oliveira, E. (2011) Migrant Women Sex Workers: How urban space impacts



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- UNFPA
- Members of the Johannesburg Migrant Health Forum
- Sisonke Sex Worker Movement
- SWEAT
- Market Photo Workshop
- WRHI



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