

MEDIA RELEASE
BULKSMS.COM
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Community organisations use bulk SMS messaging during the refugee crisis

BulkSMS.com, a Cape Town based messaging service provider, recorded its highest ever monthly SMS volumes on the Community.BulkSMS messaging platform during the recent refugee crisis fomented by xenophobic violence against foreign nationals. These above average SMS statistics for organisations within South Africa's civil society were largely based on calls for volunteers and essential items to assist displaced African immigrants.

"We have a large number of NGOs, faith-based organisations and schools across the country registered on our Community.BulkSMS service. Daily messaging traffic during May of this year more than doubled as the refugee crisis broke out," said Dr Pieter Streicher, managing director of BulkSMS.com.

One such NGO was SHAWCO, the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation based at the University of Cape Town, which successfully used the Community.BulkSMS messaging platform to coordinate relief efforts to assist foreign nationals who fled from areas in Cape Town due to xenophobic violence. SHAWCO sent bulk SMS messages to mobilise student and medical volunteers, sent notifications of emergency meetings, and arranged for the collection of blankets and food for immigrants.

"BulkSMS.com's community messaging solution has been fantastic. The sending of bulk SMS messages was massively helpful in coordinating efforts to assist displaced immigrants. The ability to contact volunteers directly on their cellphones enabled us to quickly mobilise a large number of volunteers to help as the refugee crisis was beginning," said Wendy Lewin, from SHAWCO's health sector.

Bulk SMS messaging mobilises student volunteers

On the evening of Friday, May 23rd SHAWCO received a call requesting volunteers to help with the distribution of blankets and food to the five hundred immigrants who had gathered at the police station in the Cape Town city centre.

"On the Friday night we realised we needed to top up our SMS credits before we could send out more messages to our database. I thought I would have to wait until after the weekend to go through our usual procurement process. Thankfully, all I had to do was go online to the BulkSMS website and purchase credits with my credit card. The SMS credits were available immediately and we were able to start communicating with our volunteers," said Lewin.

SHAWCO immediately began mobilising recruits by sending out a bulk SMS at 22h45 from the office's internet enabled computer to its list of volunteers, including students and medical doctors. By 01h30 that Saturday morning, SHAWCO had already started collecting blankets and medical volunteers were deployed to assist foreign nationals at the police station.

Later on that same Saturday morning, SHAWCO's student leaders were alerted via SMS to an emergency meeting. The SMS was sent out just over an hour before the meeting and gave venue and meeting time details as well as noted the need to assess SHAWCO's ability to offer support during the escalating refugee crisis. At the meeting it was decided that the SHAWCO students assembled should drive SHAWCO's relief efforts and one of the first tasks was to make further calls for health volunteers and essential items.

A further bulk SMS was thus sent to SHAWCO's database of volunteers early on Saturday afternoon. The SMS succinctly specified what relief support was needed, collection drop off locations and time as well as the contact person coordinating volunteer activities:

Urgent:blankets,foodetc=needed4victim of crisis. Pls drop@claredon b4 3pm2day!If want2volunteer with medical assistance,sms jess 07xxxxxxx asap!thandi: bulksms.com

SHAWCO was also involved in the first coordinated NGO assessment of refugee sites around Cape Town on Sunday, 25th May. In planning for these site visits, SHAWCO sent out an SMS alert the night before calling for medical students and volunteer doctors to assist with assessments of, amongst other aspects, the shelter, medical care and meals provided to immigrants in camps.

As the week progressed SHAWCO continued to use SMS to mobilise medical students as volunteers for its medical assistance outreach programme. Over and above the weekly evening health clinics run in Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, Masiphumelele, Nyanga and Joe Slovo in Milnerton, the student volunteer organisation also ran an additional nine clinics at various refugee sites within the first two weeks.

"SHAWCO provides a perfect example of how mobile messaging technology enables a non-governmental organisation to address a local crisis by quickly mobilising and coordinating local resources. By using SMS messaging, SHAWCO was able to instantaneously broadcast to their contacts their need for volunteers to help with the refugee crisis," said Dr Streicher.

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About BulkSMS.com

[BulkSMS.com](http://www.bulksms.com), a division of Celerity Systems (Pty) Ltd, has been in operation since 2000 and is headquartered in Cape Town, South Africa. BulkSMS is a leading wireless application service provider offering bulk SMS messaging solutions to large and small businesses, public benefit organisations, and individuals. BulkSMS.com has a global market presence, including Europe, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. To further an organisation's SMS communication needs, BulkSMS offers two-way bulk SMS messaging, premium rate solutions and supports mobile marketing campaigns. BulkSMS flagship messaging solution is the BulkSMS Text Messenger, a desktop application. BulkSMS is a member of the Wireless Application Service Provider Association (WASPA).

For more information on BulkSMS's commercial messaging services visit www.bulksms.co.za and for details on BulkSMS's messaging service offering discounted bulk SMS message prices for public benefit organisations (such as schools, NGOs and faith-based organisations) visit <http://community.bulksms.com>. For direct enquiries email info@bulksms.com or contact BulkSMS telephonically on +27-21-552 6321.