

Deportations. Evacuations. Repatriations.

African Unity at a Crossroads



Editor's Note

In South Africa, many migrants have sought refuge in temporary shelters or chosen to leave the country voluntarily due to concerns for their personal safety. Human rights organisations, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have condemned the attacks and urged the South African government to strengthen the protection of migrants and refugees while ensuring accountability for those responsible for the violence.



Alongside the unrest, the South African government has intensified immigration enforcement. The Department of Home Affairs has reported that more than 100,000 undocumented migrants have been deported, while approximately 500,000 individuals have been denied entry through strengthened border management and immigration controls. Enforcement operations have included workplace inspections, action against businesses operating in violation of immigration and labour legislation, stricter penalties for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers, and efforts to accelerate deportation procedures. While the government maintains that these measures are intended to uphold immigration laws and improve border security, rights organisations have cautioned that enforcement should not contribute to discrimination against lawful migrants or asylum seekers.

The violence has also strained South Africa's diplomatic relations with neighbouring African states. Governments, including Nigeria, Ghana, Malawi and Mozambique, have condemned the attacks and implemented voluntary repatriation programmes to assist citizens wishing to return home. President Cyril Ramaphosa has publicly denounced xenophobia, reaffirming that violence against foreign nationals has no place in South Africa, while deploying additional police and security personnel to affected communities. Despite these interventions, many migrants continue to leave the country, highlighting the ongoing challenges of balancing immigration enforcement with the protection of human rights and regional cooperation within the Southern African region.

Cover Illustration

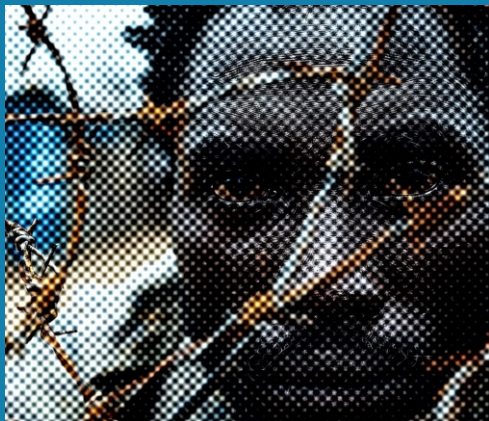
This design is a depiction of the waves of expulsions, deportations and evacuations in South Africa. A family stands in front of their home after an eviction exercise.

Migration Monitor

Responses from Other African Countries to the 2026 Xenophobic Attacks

Nigeria

Nigeria has been one of the most vocal countries in responding to the 2026 xenophobic attacks in South Africa. As violence against foreign nationals escalated, the Nigerian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that 1,094 Nigerian citizens had registered for voluntary repatriation, a significant increase from the 130 people who had initially requested assistance. Nigerian officials worked closely with South African authorities to verify the identities of those seeking to return home and to facilitate their safe evacuation. The Nigerian government also condemned the attacks, calling on South Africa to uphold its constitutional and international obligations to protect all people living within its borders, regardless of nationality. Reuters reported that the first group of Nigerian nationals departed South Africa under a government-assisted voluntary return programme as fears over continued violence increased.



Mozambique

Mozambique has been among the countries most severely affected by the recent violence because of its close geographic proximity to South Africa and the large number of Mozambican migrant workers living there. The Mozambican government confirmed that five of its citizens were killed during xenophobic attacks in Mossel Bay, while two others died in a road accident as they attempted to flee South Africa. In response, the government began repatriating vulnerable citizens and established emergency support measures for those crossing the border. Mozambican authorities also urged South Africa to take stronger action against the perpetrators and restore security for foreign nationals.





Ghana

The Government of Ghana initiated the voluntary repatriation of its citizens after growing concerns over their safety. According to Reuters, hundreds of Ghanaians chose to return home as anti-immigrant violence spread across several South African communities. Ghanaian officials maintained close communication with their High Commission in Pretoria to assist citizens requiring travel documentation, transportation and emergency support. The Ghanaian government also expressed concern that the attacks threatened the long-standing relationship between the two countries and called for the protection of migrants' rights under international law.

Malawi

Malawi has undertaken one of the largest repatriation efforts during the 2026 crisis. Thousands of Malawian nationals fled areas affected by anti-immigrant violence, particularly in Durban and surrounding communities. The Malawian government organised buses to transport citizens safely back home, while additional repatriation convoys were arranged as more people requested assistance. Reuters reported that hundreds of additional Malawians continued to return in organised groups, with many stating that they feared further attacks if they remained in South Africa. Malawian authorities also appealed for regional cooperation to ensure the safety and dignity of migrant workers across Southern Africa.

From our Writers

African Students Abroad are Rethinking their Decisions Amidst Global Discrimination

Promise Okezie

Masika*, a Kenyan student, has recently secured a scholarship at the University of Toronto and is awaiting his flight date to relocate for his studies. Looking back at his undergraduate days, he thinks about how he made a mistake going through the Kenyan education system for a Bachelor's degree in Education which he never wanted but was imposed on him by the government. Now, Masika is counting the days left until his flight date, looking forward to starting a new phase in Canada to pursue his true passion for Medicine and fulfill a long-held aspiration.

Stories like those of Remi and Masika persist across different countries in Africa and are fueled by economic and social factors. In Nigeria, for example, the education sector is in a deplorable state characterized by lack of adequate funding, poor infrastructure, incessant strikes at the tertiary level, irregular academic calendars, and so on. These challenges have forced several Nigerians to relocate abroad in search for better educational opportunities. Similarly, African countries like Angola, Kenya, Malawi, and Sudan have recorded a large number of youths who desire to migrate to other countries due to factors such as poverty, insecurity, economic hardship, and poor education systems. Research shows that in Kenya, over one-third of youths consider leaving the country for better job prospects, to escape from poverty, or pursue better educational opportunities.



While studying abroad can be an excellent opportunity for African migrants, they often grapple with several unforeseen challenges in host countries. These challenges range from language barrier and racial discrimination, to homesickness, culture shock, academic and financial constraints. When asked about his experience as an educational migrant in the United Kingdom, Anthony told Diaspora Africa “Missing my family, friends, and life back home hit me hard. It was really difficult trying to adapt to a new country with different cultures, food, and surroundings. I experienced moments of homesickness so many times and I also struggled to make new friends.” Chinedu, another educational migrant, recounted his initial weeks in Canada, stating “Within the first few weeks of moving to Canada, I felt so lonely that I wanted to pack my bags and go back home to Nigeria. It was really scary and I even developed depression because there was no one I could really talk to or connect with.” Nadia shared further insights on the issue when asked about her own experience as an international student in the United States. She said, “I knew racism was a huge deal here, but feeling constantly conscious of my race was unexpected and unsettling. The perpetual reminder of being black doesn’t sit well with me.”

As students of colour and foreigners in their host countries, African migrants experience language barrier, discrimination and racism which take a high toll on their mental health. According to a recent study, there is a profound connection between psychological distresses among international students and racial discrimination.

This is exemplified in the different stories of 21 black Africans studying in 10 different universities located in eight English cities, reported by Solomon Zewolde. One student who was interviewed described how she was told to return to Africa during a Christmas job pitch. She said, “I was about to approach this white guy, and he just raised his hand and dismissed me, saying that I ‘should go back to where they brought me from,’ I ‘should go back to Africa where I came from,’ and that I am not needed here.” Another study revealed that graduate students from Sub-Saharan countries face disrespect rooted in neoracist assumptions about national origin and skin colour. The findings emphasized that, instead of feeling integrated into the institution, these students are marginalized and treated as instruments for campus enrichment.

Even during the Russian-Ukraine war, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Somalis and other Africans studying in Ukraine faced discrimination while attempting to escape across the borders. Disturbing reports reveal instances where Ukrainian police and security personnel barred Nigerians from boarding buses and trains headed for the Ukraine-Poland border. Those who successfully escaped the war still face numerous obstacles as they seek to achieve their educational goals. Aljazeera reported the story of Esther Oluwafeyisayo, a 22-year-old Nigerian student, who has lost track of the university applications she submitted after escaping the conflict in Ukraine. Seeking refuge in neighboring Hungary, she now grapples with the challenge of securing a scholarship before her temporary permit to stay expires. The

intricate web of European migration laws leaves war-affected African students stranded in uncertainty. Compounded by exorbitant tuition fees in the host countries and a scarcity of scholarships available mostly to Ukrainian students, these students find themselves caught in a difficult predicament.

In light of the many challenges faced by African students abroad, it is imperative for the international community to collaborate with host and home countries to address these issues. Host countries should implement comprehensive cultural orientation programs to help African international students adapt to their customs and social norms.

These programs should also provide information about the host university's academic practices and campus resources, so African students are well-informed and aware of where to seek assistance. It is also essential that vital information be easily available and accessible about scholarships, grants, and financial aid options to ease the financial burden on African students pursuing education abroad. Finally, the host university must make an effort to reduce the stigma surrounding seeking professional help and offer mental health support. Regular check-ins with individuals and the creation of safe spaces for students to express themselves can contribute significantly to helping students cope with the challenges associated with studying in a new country.



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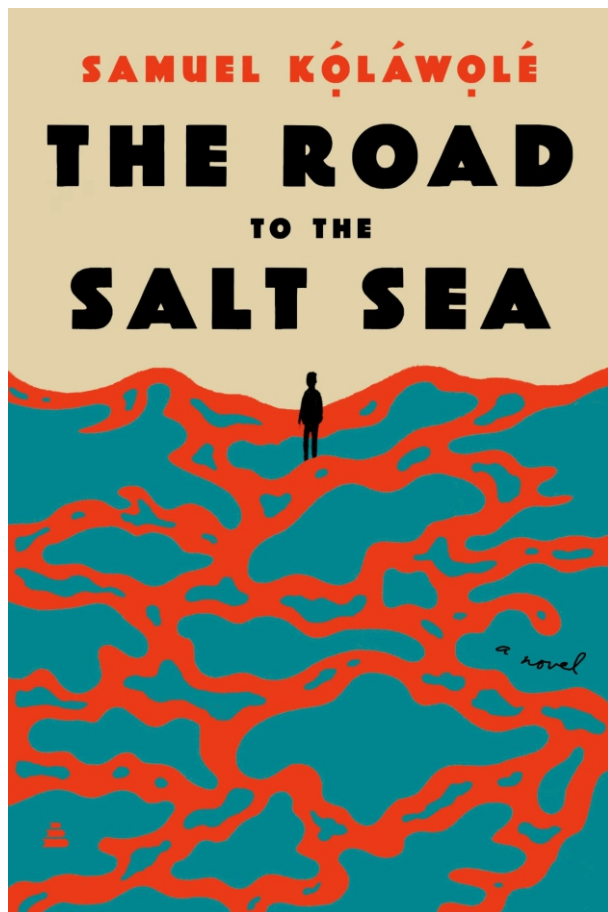
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What to Read Now

In *The Road to the Salt Sea*, Kòláwòlé writes the odyssey of Able God, a young man whose flight from Nigeria thrusts him into the brutal realities of human smuggling and trans-Saharan migration. He renders this struggle with profound gravity, illustrating the nuanced experience of the African migrant.

The novel serves as a searing indictment of how international border regimes and local exploitation conspire to dictate the survival of the displaced. It forces a confrontation with the limits of resilience within the volatile space of the migrant trail. While the story remains tethered to Able God's specific trials, it simultaneously interrogates the ethics of a world that restricts the movement of some while facilitating the seamless mobility of others.



Ultimately, *The Road to the Salt Sea* is a forceful reckoning. Kòláwòlé's work demands an acknowledgment of the humanity of those on the move; a humanity too often ignored by systems of detention and transit. The book stands as both an urgent, intimate portrait and a devastating critique of the policies that turn migration, which is often a search for safety, into a matter of life and death.



Resources

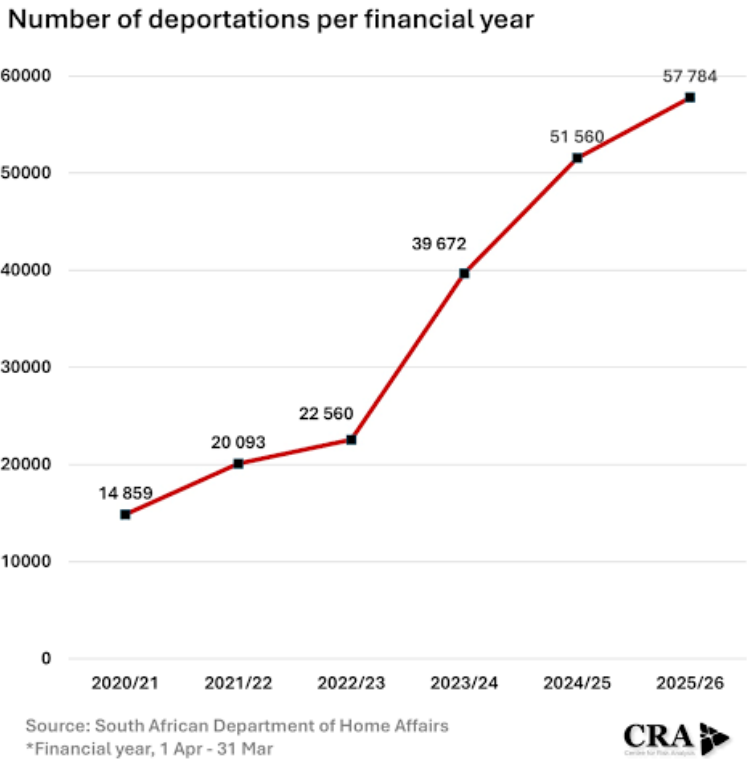


HIAS South Africa works to improve the lives of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants by addressing the challenges they face and supporting their access to fundamental rights and protections. The organization is committed to combating and preventing Afrophobia and xenophobia across South Africa. Its work spans legal protection, advocacy, mental health and psychosocial support, and initiatives to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

Culled from HIAS Website, South Africa section
<https://bias.org/where/south-africa/>

In Numbers

Deportations have almost quadrupled in 5 years



The graph shows a consistent rise in deportations from South Africa, with numbers increasing from 14,859 in 2020/21 to 57,784 in 2025/26, nearly quadrupling over five years, with the biggest increase occurring between 2022/23 and 2023/24.

Source: South African Department of Home Affairs, 2026

The Mobility Gaze



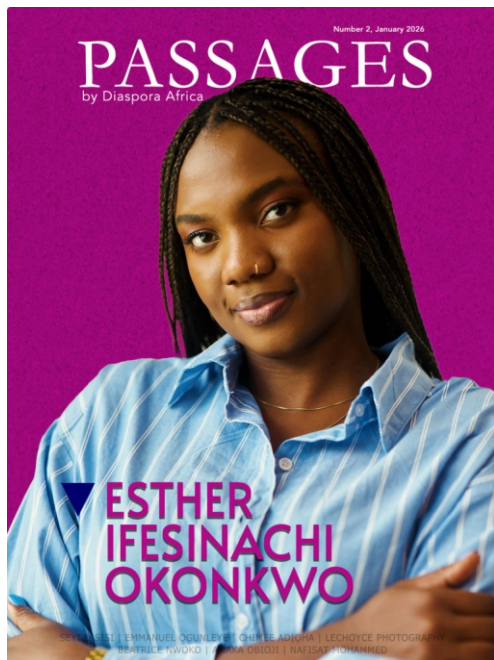
Image: South African Tourism, via Wikimedia Commons (CC BY 2.0).

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The Community Corner



Got a migration experience to share or want to be featured?

Send us a message on [WhatsApp at +44 7986 983956](#), and we will chat with you!

In 2025, Esther Ifesinachi Okonkwo published *The Tiny Things Are Heavier*. The novel, which she started working on after the #EndSARS protest, carries ‘specific emotional truths’ she wanted to confront. The novel’s plot is entirely invented, but its themes of identity formation, privilege, un-belonging and familial responsibility are drawn from Esther’s lived experiences. At age twenty-four, similar to the novel’s protagonist, Sommy, Esther migrated to the United States for graduate school. That migration, as the writer told *Diaspora Africa*, was a necessary step toward her dreams of becoming a writer. As she grew older, and began witnessing family and friends struggle under the weight of Nigeria’s collapsed systems, her focus broadened. As she fittingly described it, her life “became mostly about putting off one fire or the other.” Thus, on one hand, she holds onto that small dream of reading and writing, on the other she holds a sense of responsibility towards others.

A full essay is available to read on Diaspora Africa’s website.

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When you JOIN THE COMMUNITY, you get early access to:

- The biweekly migration magazine
- Verified global migration updates
- Resources and opportunities
- Policy and data on migration explained simply
- Help decide what you want us to talk about in our next issue

We are building a newsroom & community that counters misinformation and bias in global mainstream news about African migration. We are working with local and cross-border journalists to challenge biased global reporting frameworks that shape migration. We want to disrupt extractive storytelling practices & expand the range of perspectives represented in international media discourse surrounding migration.

The magazine is independently funded by the Diaspora Africa team. Many updates featured in this publication are sourced from our Migration Monitor database, which tracks migration trends affecting African migrants and diasporic communities globally.

monitor.diasporafrica.org

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Published by Diaspora Africa

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