

Is Africa the New Home For Deportees?



Editor's Note

With recent developments in global migration governance, the Global North's crackdown on migration has entered a new phase. Africa is increasingly becoming a destination for the displaced. In the United States, government administration has weaponised visa bans and restrictions, as well as cash transfers, to force African nations into accepting deportees from third countries – one example being Cambodians dumped in Eswatini in exchange for \$5.1 million (€4.4 million). While precise figures on Africans awaiting third-country deportation remain undisclosed, the US has already conducted over 300 such transfers at a cost exceeding \$40 million, with Sub-Saharan African destinations increasing by 32% in a single year.

Across the Atlantic, the Council and the European Parliament converged and agreed on a provisional deal in June 2026 to fast-track the establishment of "return hubs" in third countries, formalising a system where member states can outsource their unwanted to the Global South. These hubs would serve either as final destinations or transfer centres, with terms largely undisclosed to the public. The UK already maintains return agreements with 19 countries, including Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Somalia, and Ethiopia. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has condemned these arrangements, warning against turning the continent into a drop-off zone.



What ties these policies together is a shared claim that deportation is orderly and that return is safe. The policies, particularly the US third-country agreement, reveal that sovereignty can be purchased. The Cambodian who woke up in an Eswatini prison, the woman a US judge ordered returned from the DRC, the parents separated from their children in forced transfers, and persons deported under critical health conditions tell a different story. It is a story of arbitrary detention and refolement by another name. This issue follows the deportation flight and looks at the African countries now receiving these removals and what awaits those who land.

Cover Illustration

This design depicts a line of travelers disembarking from a large commercial airplane via a mobile staircase and how migrants are being transported through deportation flights to Africa.

Migration Monitor

Global crises have caused increasing numbers of people to flee for safety in other countries. In response, several governments have introduced policies that involve deporting or transferring asylum seekers to third-world countries. These measures, initially intended to curb irregular migration, have now raised legal and humanitarian concerns.

Below are recent developments

UNITED STATES

The Trump administration has pursued bilateral agreements with third countries. As of May 2026, over 21,000 people were deported to countries including Eswatini, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda, and South Sudan. The US has reportedly spent over \$40 million on these operations. Critics argue that the deals often involve concessions and send people to countries where they have no ties, and exposure to mistreatment and further danger.

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU set a new regulation that tracks the return of people staying in member states illegally. The law includes policies that reduce non-compliance, imprisonment in some cases, and permits member states to establish return hubs in third countries. Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Greece have already begun discussions with mostly African countries on hosting return hubs and deportation centres.



UNITED KINGDOM

In early March 2026, the United Kingdom and Nigeria reached an agreement to speed up the returns of Nigerians in Britain without a legal status, which includes failed asylum seekers, visa overstayers, and convicted offenders, reportedly alongside financial concessions. This follows after the collapse of the UK-Rwanda scheme to tighten migration control in the UK, which cost the UK nearly 300 million pounds and was recently annulled by British courts.

As the Global North externalises migration governance, African nations are increasingly being enlisted as destinations for disposal. At least 10 African countries have entered into various deportation cooperation with the US, EU, and UK, with the US alone already conducting third-

country transfers to Rwanda, DRC, Ghana, Uganda, Cameroon, Eswatini, South Sudan, Equatorial Guinea, Central African Republic, Cabo Verde, and others. Below is a scan of some African countries now embedded in this architecture of outsourced removal.

RWANDA

Rwanda reportedly secured a \$7.5 million aid deal to accept 250 deportees from the United States, building on its earlier agreement with the United Kingdom – which, though never fully implemented, inspired the EU's current push for externalised "return hubs." Human rights organisations note that Rwanda lacks the legal capacity to absorb and protect non-national deportees, many arriving with unresolved asylum claims.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The DRC became a US third-country destination in December 2025. The first flight in April 2026 carried 15 Latin American refugees, shackled for 27 hours. A US judge later ordered one woman returned, finding she was likely deported illegally. The deal is widely understood to be linked to US access to the DRC's critical minerals – raising questions about whether African resource wealth is being leveraged to secure compliance with deportation demands.

GHANA

Ghana received at least 11 US removal flights in 2025. The first carried 14 migrants, including non-Ghanaians restrained in straitjackets for up to 16 hours. At least 22 deportees had court-ordered protection in the United States, yet were removed regardless. Some were subsequently forced across the border to Togo without documentation, effectively rendered stateless.





UGANDA

Uganda accepted its first third-country deportation flight from the US in April 2026, receiving 12 deportees. Ugandan legal groups described the arrivals as "undignified, harrowing and dehumanising." The country's own refugee hosting record has long been praised, but accepting non-national deportees under opaque terms represents a departure that could strain protection systems.

ESWATINI

Africa's last absolute monarchy agreed to accept 160 deportees for \$5.1 million. A Cambodian national found himself in a notorious high-security prison, with no

understanding of how he had ended up in southern Africa. Eswatini's limited asylum infrastructure raises concerns about monitoring and accountability.

CAMEROON

Cameroon initially resisted US pressure, with officials calling it "blackmail." Washington reportedly withheld \$30 million in UN funding to secure compliance. The first non-Cameroonian deportees arrived in January 2026. The EU is now pursuing a bloc-wide readmission deal – positioning Cameroon as a destination for both American and European removals.

From our Writers

When VISA Inequality Hinders Cultural Mobility: “Art Knows No Bounds” Until It Reaches the Border

Giselle Musabimana

Artistic expression is arguably one of the most ‘powerful’ mediums to connect and communicate beyond borders. Music, visual arts, dance, theatre and other art forms can be created and shaped in one corner of the world and almost simultaneously be experienced, absorbed, and reinterpreted by people across the globe. Yet, just as art travels and unravels fluidly, does the same hold true for the same individuals who create it?

In 2012, Brussels-based arts network On The Move (OTM) published a report addressing Schengen visas for non-EU

artists and cultural professionals. This report was part of broader efforts to facilitate cultural mobility by bridging perspectives between the cultural sector and policy- and decision-makers. Eleven years after that, OTM expanded on this research through a new survey as part of the EU joint project Deconfining, this time focusing on arts and cultural professionals from Africa. This new survey, titled Schengen Visa Code and Cultural Mobility: Latest Insights with a Focus on Artists and Culture Professionals from the African Continent, gathers the voices of 86 individual respondents from 25 African countries and 35 hosting organisations based in 10 different Schengen countries.

The need to revisit this subject grew stronger following the amendment of the Schengen Code of Visas in 2019, which was set to ensure faster and clearer process-



-ing for non-EU nationals. OTM's research revealed that, despite the revisions, the visa application process remains extremely tortuous, time-consuming, and costly, frequently resulting in a high proportion of rejections, especially for people from the "Global South". A recent research by arts and migration research group LAGO Collective, visually depicted the disproportionate rates of UK and Schengen visa refusals faced by Asian and African nationals, with rates for the latter as high as 40-70%.

OTM's 2023 report reveals that, since 2019, 61.6% of African artists and 77.1% of arts organisations have faced at least one visa rejection. In the case of rejection, 45.5% of individuals and 59.3% of organisations were not given a definitive reason, despite this being mandatory under the Visa Code. When reason was given, it was for alleged "insufficient proof of commitment to return" or "lack of sufficient financial means". The situation appears thus unchanged from the scenario depicted by OTM respondents in 2012, with non-EU applicants still having difficulties in scheduling appointments, and with transparency regarding requested documentation, as well as facing unfair and humiliating treatment at embassies and by external service providers. Even among successful applicants, 76.7% of individuals and 100% of organisations encountered the same challenges during the application process, indicating that these issues are not due to lack of compliance but rather from the application process itself, as articulated by OTM.

OTM's 2023 report also highlights a widespread misunderstanding of the specific conditions of artists' mobility among entities in charge of visa processing. Some confusions seem to arise due to the lack of a "clearly defined" professional status, irregular income of cultural/arts professionals, and the often short notices for the invitations. These framings are distorted as many artists across disciplines define their subsistence through modest means, therefore defining livelihood on "macro" paradigms is incompatible to the reality of individual lives; moreover, Article 21 of the EU Visa code states that proof of private sponsorship or official sponsorship by the inviting body can serve as evidence of adequate means of subsistence. Nevertheless, many artists from countries with less powerful passports continue to face visa denials, even when officially invited by international hosting organisations.

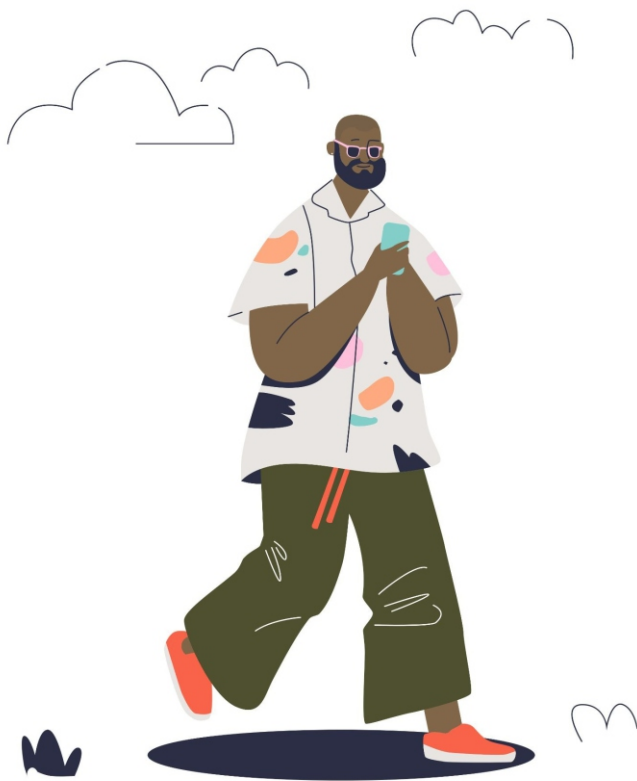
The claim of 'lack of sufficient financial means' loses weight even more so once we realise that refusal rates do not necessarily correlate with an individual's financial resources. Two years ago, Congolese singer Innoss'B was unable to perform at Afronation in Portugal as his visa was refused shortly before the event. When we consider the scale of a globally renowned festival such as Afronation, attracting over 40,000 attendees each year, it is clear that when an invited artist's visa is still denied, the issue is beyond financial resources. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) ranks 92 out of 101 on the Global Passport Power Rank (2024); as a Congolese citizen, a popular artist like Innoss'B would be

required an entry visa for 144 countries. In contrast, U.S. and Canadian citizens require visas for only 26 countries, UK citizens for 25, and Europeans from countries like Italy, Germany, and France for just 21.

In this scenario, we are prone to ask anew the question: who “deserves” to travel, to move, to emigrate? While the migration debate keeps on revolving around ‘illegalised’ travel to Europe, those who attempt to move ‘legally’ face ever-increasing constraints. The current visa system can be described as a form of “global apartheid”: people in the Global South, once colonised and exploited, now face modern forms of control through limited mobility. Many African applicants report feeling viewed with mistrust, particularly with the assumption that they won’t return to their countries of origin. If prominent and well-resourced professionals face these challenges, then smaller artists and freelancers with less financial and managerial support are subjected to even higher economic expenses and frustrations.

This “visa apartheid” hinders artists’ professional and personal development, ultimately compromising their quality of life as well. As poignantly expressed by Ahmad Sarmast, director of the Portugal-based Afghan Youth Orchestra in an interview with *The Guardian*, the “world is open” for Europeans, but “those from Africa, the Middle East and Asia are second-class citizens”. It is also worth noting that, in 2023 alone, the UK and the EU respectively generated £44 million (roughly €52 million) and €130 million in fees from denied visa applications, with the majority coming from low- and middle-income countries – evidence of how Visa policies provide important economic leverage for UK and European governments.

How can meaningful changes be made in a system where the very structures that limit mobility for some are profitable to the entities that enforce them? As Art is shared, exchanged, sold and consumed “freely” and transnationally, what does it mean for us in the Global North to appropriate and enjoy said art coming from afar, while its creators are unable to reap the benefits?



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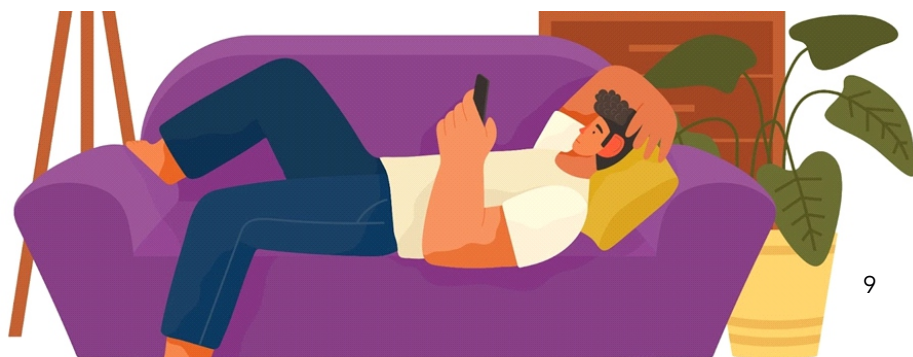
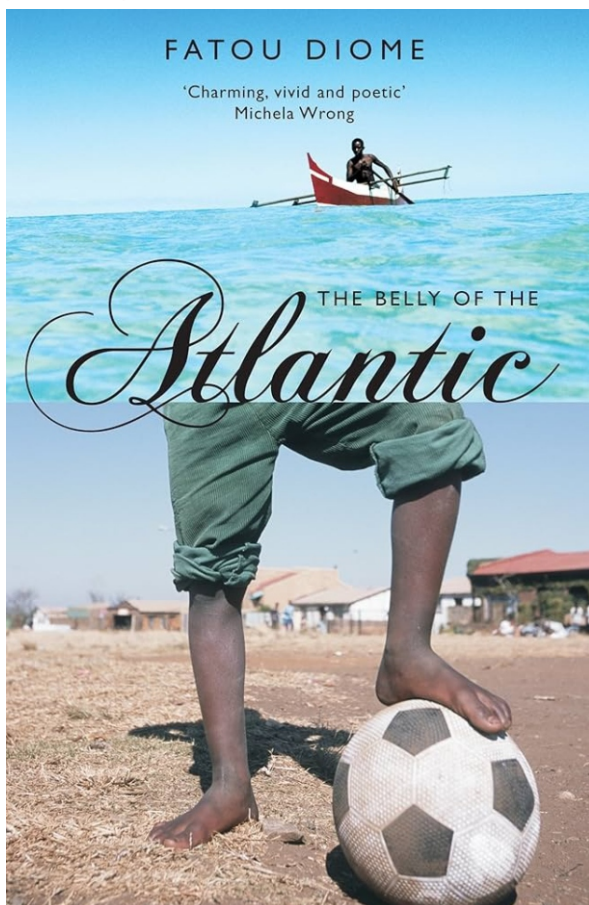
What to Read Now

Fatou Diome's debut novel, *The Belly of the Atlantic*, is a powerful exploration of the immigrant experience and the seductive, often deceptive, allure of the West. Set between the French city of Strasbourg and the Senegalese island of Niodior, the narrative centres on Salie, a woman living in exile, and her younger brother, Madické.

Madické, like many young men on his island, is obsessed with football and dreams of escaping poverty by finding stardom in Europe. He views France through the lens of televised glamour—a vision Salie desperately tries to dismantle. Having lived the harsh reality of being an "other" in France, she understands the isolation, racism, and struggle that accompany migration.

Diome skillfully weaves a tale of two worlds, highlighting the stark

contrast between the idealised "Europe" of the African imagination and the cold reality of life as a migrant. The novel serves as a sharp critique of post-colonial dynamics and the metaphorical "belly" of the Atlantic that consumes the hopes of those who dare to cross it. Lyrical yet unflinching, the book is a profound meditation on home, belonging, and the high cost of the "European Dream."



Resources



International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Founded in 1933, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a global humanitarian organisation that supports refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and other people displaced by conflict and crises. Operating in more than 40 countries, the IRC provides healthcare, education, legal assistance, protection services, and livelihood support to help people rebuild their lives. In response to deportations and third-country removals, the IRC offers legal and humanitarian support to asylum seekers, advocates for fair and humane asylum policies, and works to ensure that people affected by forced returns have access to protection and essential services.

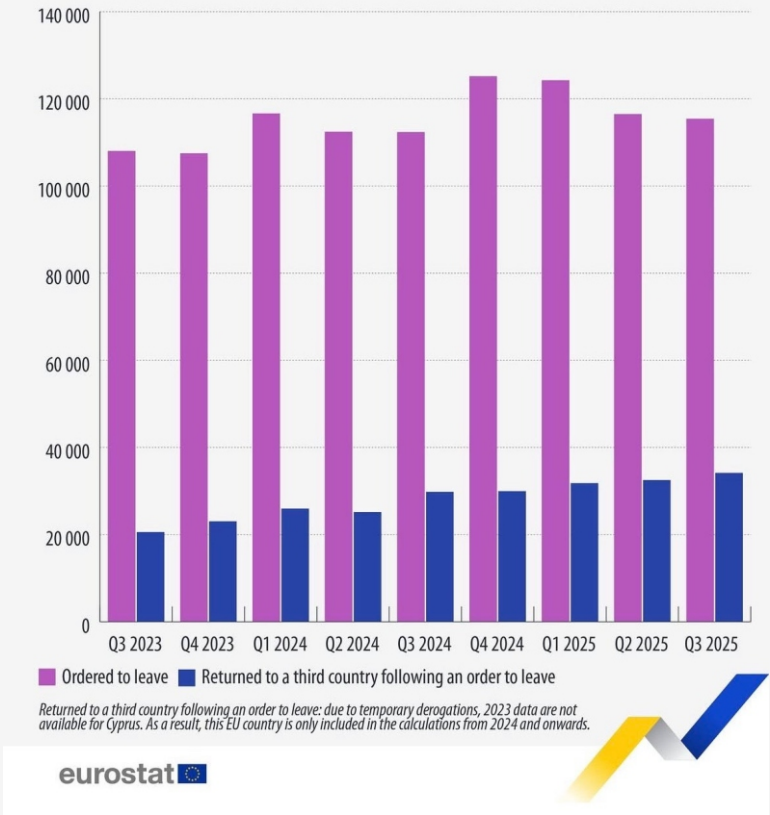
Further inquiries: <https://www.rescue.org/>

Are you a traveller or just someone who is on the move? Share with us intriguing photographs of your travels. Send us a message on [WhatsApp +44 7986 983956](https://www.whatsapp.com/channel/0029983956)

In Numbers

Non-EU citizens ordered to leave and returned following an order to leave, Q3 2023 - Q3 2025

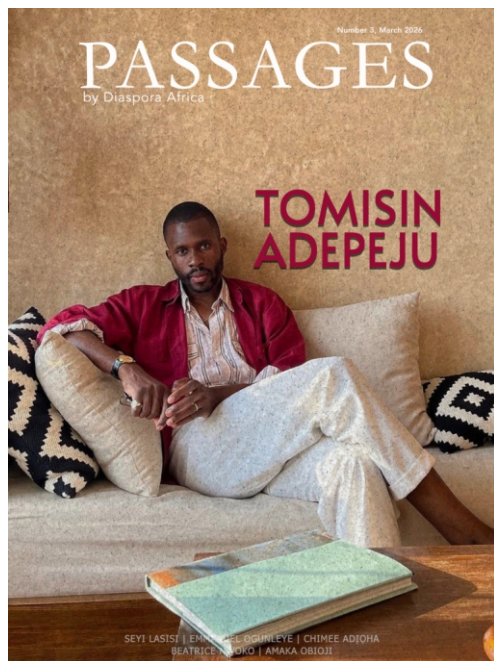
(number of persons)



The chart above shows the quarterly data on non-EU citizens issued return orders and those returned to third countries, following an order to leave. Covering the period from Q3 2023 to Q3 2025. This provides an insight into the scale of return enforcement across the European Union and agreements between European states and countries in the Global South.

Source: Eurostat.

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!

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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

Tomisin Adepeju moved to England with his parents at 12 years old. Prior to moving, he was exposed to Nigerian soap-operas that aired on Nigerian television stations and American films. 24 years later, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)’s Super Story’s opening theme song’s lyrics are still etched on his mind. “This is Super Story, a life of strife and sorrow....,” the filmmaker recalled in a recent conversation with Diaspora Africa. He recalled watching Paul Verhoeven’s masterpiece Starship Troopers as a 10 year old and describes it as a truly unforgettable experience. The story, themes and plot served allure for his impressionable mind. When he got to England, he felt a loss for the community he had left behind and struggled to fit in. In this mental and psychological moment, films became his escape. “All I looked forward to was going home and watching films. I would watch the British and American films that would play on TV on Saturday and Sunday nights. Film is such a powerful medium; from my flat in South London, I would travel to all these countries around the world,” Adepeju recounted.

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

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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