

How South Africa Is Turning Its Back on Pan-African Solidarity



Editor's Note

Once again, South Africa is witnessing renewed protests and violence against African migrants. The latest wave has gathered momentum in Durban and surrounding areas in KwaZulu-Natal, where the March and March movement has continued its anti-migrant campaigns and issued September 30 as the new deadline for undocumented foreigners to leave the country. However, the targeting has incessantly affected even documented African migrants with valid permits, raising critical questions about where the line between immigration enforcement and xenophobic exclusion is being drawn.

Public attention has been sharply drawn to the ongoing violence following Nigeria's decision to suspend all parliamentary engagements and official visits with South Africa after the killings of two of its citizens, Bishop Taiwo Michael Fakunle and James Uchechukwu Nwankwo, earlier this month. Fakunle was shot dead at his residence in Johannesburg on September 4, while Nwankwo died the following day after an encounter with police in Cape Town.

The circumstances surrounding Nwankwo's death have produced two sharply different narratives. Nigeria says he died following what it described as "gruesome interrogation techniques" by South African police, whereas South African police said Nwankwo had been arrested on suspicion of drug possession and complained of difficulty breathing while being transported to a police station. An inquest has been opened, and the



allegation against the police has not been independently established. Fakunle's killing also remains under investigation, with no suspect publicly identified.

Beyond Nigeria, the violence has created growing diplomatic tensions between South Africa and other African countries. Ghana has protested to South Africa and petitioned the African Union, with ECOWAS endorsing its effort. Nigeria has also raised the matter at both ECOWAS and the AU. As Pan-African solidarity continues to come under strain, the mistreatment of Africans by fellow African states risks deepening a sense of continental division. Similar concerns have emerged in North Africa, where anti-Black rhetoric and the collective expulsion of sub-Saharan migrants have also challenged the idea of African solidarity.

Migration Monitor

South Africa's renewed anti-migrant protests have triggered one of the largest intra-African repatriation exercises in recent years. As undocumented and documented migrants face growing hostility, several African governments have been forced to respond through evacuations, diplomatic protests, and calls for accountability. These developments are also exposing growing tensions within Africa over migration, security, and the principle of continental solidarity. This section focuses on the diplomatic fallout and ongoing repatriation of Africans involving some of the affected African countries.



NIGERIA

Nigeria has conducted the most high-profile diplomatic response. By mid-September the Federal Government had facilitated the return of about 1,716 nationals, with further batches still underway. The National Assembly indefinitely suspended all official parliamentary engagements with South Africa following the killings of Bishop Taiwo Michael Fakunle and James Uchechukwu Nwankwo in September. Abuja has formally raised the issue at both ECOWAS and the African Union, demanding stronger continental action against Afrophobic violence and insisting on thorough investigations into the deaths of its citizens. It has also been reported that 98 Nigerians have died in mob, hate-related, and extrajudicial incidents since 2022.

GHANA

Ghana has also taken diplomatic and

humanitarian measures following attacks against its nationals. The government subsequently evacuated 1,964 Ghanaians between late May and 4 September 2026. Accra postponed planned high-level bilateral meetings with Pretoria, including a scheduled engagement involving President Cyril Ramaphosa, citing the prevailing security climate. Ghana also petitioned the African Union Commission in May, asking that attacks against African nationals in South Africa be treated as an urgent continental concern. The AU Commission has acknowledged the petition and indicated that the matter is expected to be considered at the next AU Summit. Ghana's response therefore extends beyond protecting its citizens to raising the issue at continental level.

MALAWI

Malawians have been among the largest groups affected by South Africa's migration

crackdown. Malawi recorded the largest single-country repatriation, with government figures indicating more than 56,000 nationals returned by mid-August 2026. Many had fled informal settlements and temporary camps after receiving direct threats linked to the June and subsequent September deadlines. The scale of the returns has placed pressure on Malawi to facilitate transportation and reintegration. There is less evidence of a new diplomatic confrontation between Lilongwe and Pretoria comparable to the actions taken by Nigeria and Ghana.

MOZAMBIQUE

Mozambique reported several citizen deaths in the early phase of the unrest, particularly in the Western Cape. Five Mozambican nationals were reported killed during the attacks, while hundreds were subsequently repatriated. Mozambique has also been among the countries whose citizens feature prominently in South Africa's repatriation operations. This is significant because of the extensive movement of people between the two neighbouring countries. Diplomatic engagement over the attacks included a formal apology from the new South African High Commissioner to Mozambique. Beyond that, the current evidence points more to migration and protection concerns than to an open diplomatic rupture.

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe is another major country affected by South Africa's anti-migrant unrest. Zimbabweans constitute one of the largest groups processed for repatriation and deportation, with official tallies exceed-

ing 100,000 citizens by July, the majority self-repatriating via the Beitbridge border while some received government assistance. The scale of movement is significant because of the longstanding economic and social links between the two countries. Harare deployed inter-ministerial teams to manage reception, extended duty concessions, and directed schools to enrol returning children. Zimbabwe's case demonstrates that South Africa's migration policies are not affecting isolated groups, but are reshaping movement across the wider Southern African region.

UGANDA

Uganda is also worth watching. South Africa's renewed anti-migrant tensions have affected Ugandan nationals, although not yet at the same diplomatic level as Nigeria or Ghana. Uganda has been among the countries involved in arranging assistance for citizens affected by the unrest. The government organised a structured voluntary evacuation after one national was killed in KwaZulu-Natal. By early July the first phase had returned 1,102 citizens on Uganda Airlines charter flights from Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, following an initial registration of 746 citizens. The inclusion of Uganda highlights how the consequences of South Africa's migration crisis extend beyond its immediate SADC neighbours.

From our Writers

A Timeline of Migrant Filmmaking in Africa: Addressing Migration through Visual Tropes

Seyi Lasisi

In the beginning, there were baton-passed stories about movements. In those vocally transmitted stories, African children are told of ancestors who dared to travel miles searching for something or a place to claim as home. During this time, movement was hinged on survival. People were scouting and hunting for the best land to plant, herd and live. As children get older and get frustrated with their economic realities, they too, like those distant ancestors, started moving and searching for anything and everything. Thus, movement and migration is an innate human endeavor. And the lore of migration

stories has woven itself into our daily existence. It's in our songs, prayers, culture and anecdotes. As natural oral storytellers, Africans have hitherto stretched the hands of those stories to willing children who further extend it to their children. This makes it unsurprising that in contemporary African society where filmmaking is continuously courting attention, African filmmakers have contended with the complexities of migration.

Ousmane Sembène's 1966 *La noire de ...* (Black girl ...), one of the first sub-Saharan African films, has confronted what migration means on a personal and national level. Following its lead, Diouana, on a personal level, who decides to leave Senegal to France as a domestic staff, we witness the unexplainable emotional disconnection she had to witness. Upon migrating, her friends, family and familiar



safe spaces become a remote presence in her mind. To assuage this emotional disconnection, Diounna left Senegal with a totem that reminded her of home, a mask. On a national level, her migration exposes racial discrimination. As Sembène is known for, his films deeply explore political and colonial themes against the story of a working class Senegalese and the seed of that are in *Black Girl*.

There are migration-themed films that framed its narrative from a female-focused perspective. In 2018, Joy, written and directed by Sudabeh Mortezaei, looked into the triggering realities of migration from the lens of sex work. Following the titular character, the film uncomfortably invites viewers into the grime world of sex work and how these mostly unsuspecting Nigerian and African women get caught up in a sex and human trafficking ring. Joy, unmindful of the physical and mental risk she gets exposed to as a sex worker, is expected to pay her exploitative pimp and send black tax home. These constant calls for help are cue of how socially, economically and politically stagnant her home country is. With no assurance of change, the film intimate us with the psychology of Joy and her fellow immigrants. From their listless and spirited individual and communal conversations, we feel the pangs of their hurts and pain. In 2024, under Kenneth Gyang's direction, the world witnessed the arrival of *Oloture: The Journey*, a miniseries devoted to the story of an undercover journalist working to expose sex and human traffickers. The series, in its grime depiction, hints at why Nigerians, in their large numbers, leave their country not

out of desperation as the media will have us believe, but out of relief from their daily woes. Gyang's *Oloture: The Journey* goes a step further by pointing accusative fingers at human traffickers who profit off the desire and interest of these Nigerians.

Salvador Calvo's *Adu* follows the harrowing story of six-year-old Adu, who, after witnessing several traumatic events, decided, with her sister, to flee Cameroon for Spain in search for their father. Littered with grief-stricken scenes, the film is a reflection on the realities of immigrants. From the opening scene, captured by Sergi Vilanova's camera, we are made to understand migration as a move for survival. For the migrant, leaving their country isn't an anti-patriotic move, it's a movement for self preservation. Based on a true story, *Adu* touches on the impact of migration from a child's perspective. Through Adu's innocent eyes, witness the risk, danger and determination of every migrant.

Mati Diop's *Atlantics*, her feature directorial debut, is a blend of romance and mystery. The film premiered and in 2019 the Grand Prix at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, making her the first Black woman to win an award in the festival's history. What's brilliant in Diop's film is that its major character doesn't leave Senegal but we witness the effect of governmental negligence and how it motivates migration decisions. Claire Mathon's cinematography constantly conditions our attention towards the sea. This serves as a visual metaphor of how close the decision to leave is on the characters' mind. Narratively reminiscent

of Diop's *Atlantics*, Chuko and Arie Esiri's *Eyimofe* follows two intending migrants (Rosa and Mofe) who didn't leave the shore of Nigeria. But, referencing Warsan Shire, for Rosa and Mofe, Nigeria is the mouth of a shark. Their daily reality, in Lagos, Nigeria's most canearious city, is filled with gore and depressing news which both compels and propels their migration interests.

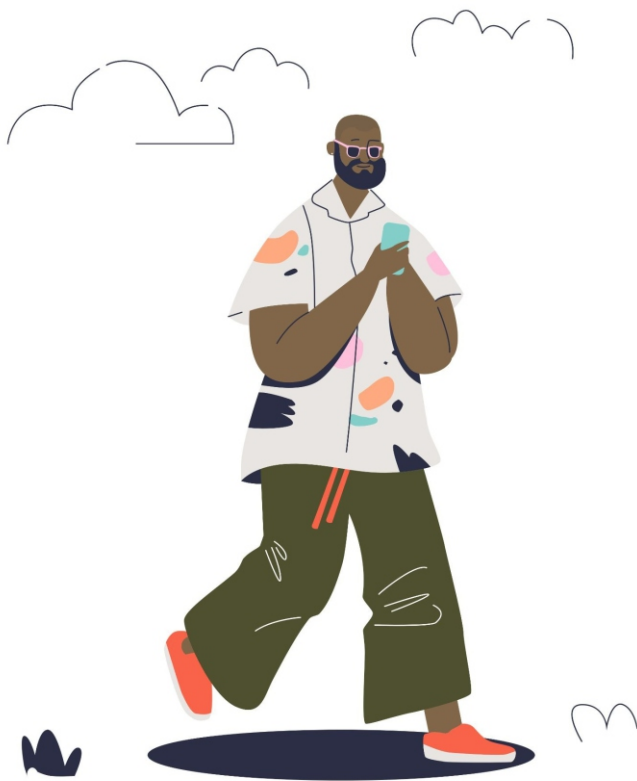
Elegant in their simplicity, the people in both films are motivated by their desire to escape harsh conditions, to be respected and to be seen. Though they're physically stuck in their home countries, they are mental migrants as most Africans. Disillusioned and exhausted of their daily realities, Africans listlessly move through the rigour of their daily lives hoping that, by some divine orchestration or luck, they will escape their country. This mental migration phase places citizens in a limbo where a sizable chunk of their youthful lives gets spent scouting and plotting escape routes. Similar to the characters in *Eyimofe* and *Atlantics*, a large number of Africans meekly accept their lot. For these people, it's a dull submission of their realities, not a defeatist stance.

All through the films and TV series that I have mentioned, the active and inactive

mental decision of these characters to leave, in my understanding, implies their continued refusal to accept the shoddy social, economical, cultural and political realities of their immediate environment and country. Their migration dream isn't an apathetic decision. Rather, it's a human decision to find preservation in a space that supposedly provides a better alternative. It matters less the political and economic realities they will encounter in the cities and counties they have mentally migrated to or will geographically move to.

The filmmakers whose films I have spotlighted in this essay are a meager amount of an exhaustive list of African films and series that have tackled migration. However, they offer a lens through which a keen reader and watcher could start interrogating migration from an African perspective. As minority groups, especially members of LGBTQ community, continually advocate for their place and space in media spaces, there will definitely be the rise of documentaries and films that address the nuances of migration from a minority group perspective. These documentaries when they start arriving in their numbers will provide a "complete" glossary of African's perspective on movement and migration.





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What to Read Now

At the centre of Alain Mabanckou's *Blue White Red* is Massala-Massala, a young Congolese man whose modest life as a peanut farmer cannot compete with the glittering fantasy of France embodied by Moki, a former villager who returns home dressed in designer clothes and performing Frenchness with enviable confidence.

For Massala-Massala, Paris becomes an escape from poverty, and proof that he can become someone beyond the limits of his village. In France, Massala-Massala finds not the glamorous life Moki seemed to promise, but an invisible world of undocumented immigrants, precarious work, deception and constant vulnerability. His eventual arrest and deportation make painfully clear the distance between imagining migration and actually living it.

Mabanckou does not paint his desire to leave as foolish. In a postcolonial world still shaped by unequal histories, the former colonial metropole retains an almost mythical power over those whose lives were left on its margins. France promises escape precisely because poverty has made staying feel like failure. Instead, he exposes the absurdity of the fantasies that sustain this longing, from villagers boasting about relatives in "the country of Digol" to the performance of success by returnees.

Alain Mabanckou

BLEU BLANC ROUGE

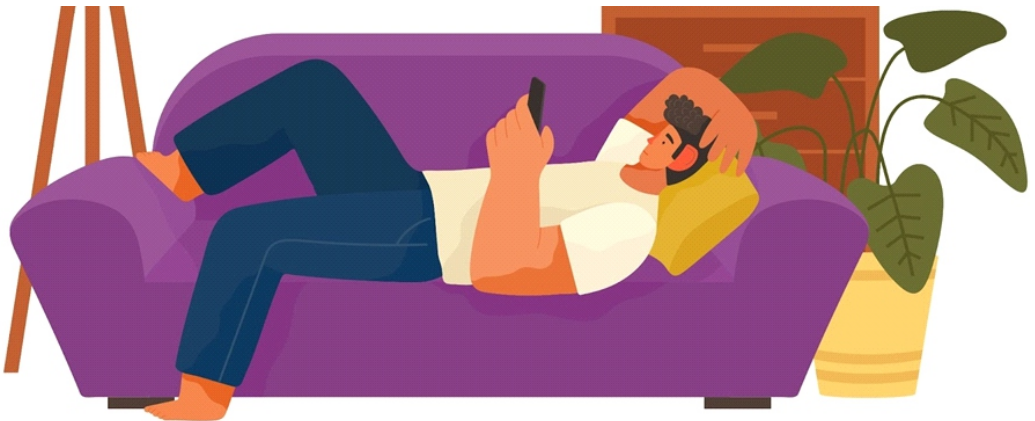


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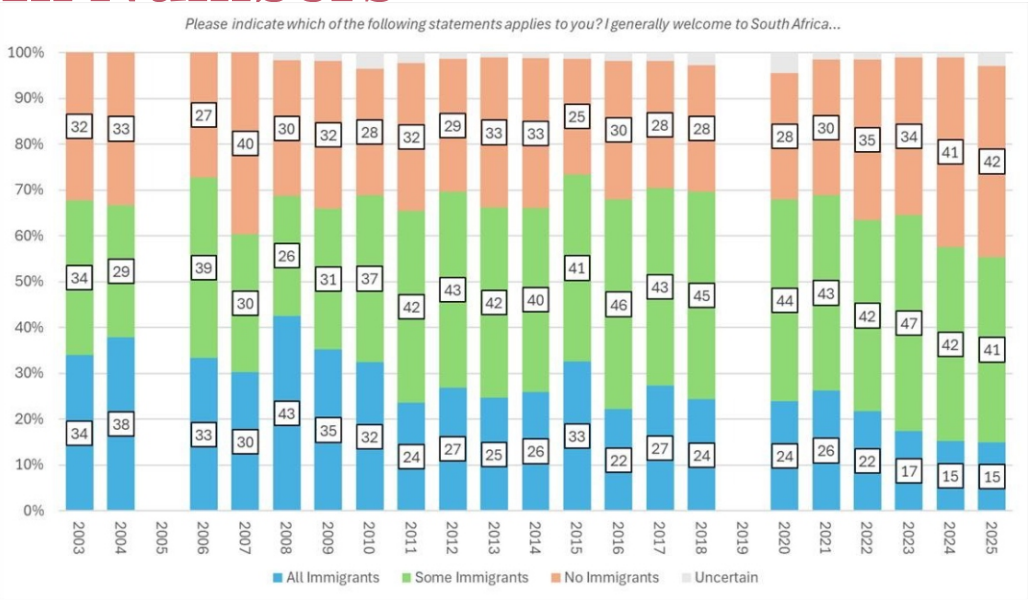


Kopanang Africa Against Xenophobia (KAAX) is a coalition formed to combat xenophobia, racism, and gender-based violence in South Africa. The term “Kopanang” means “to unite” or “come together” in Sesotho, reflecting the coalition’s aim of bringing people together regardless of class, borders, or culture, while protecting the dignity of everyone in South Africa.

Further inquiries: <https://kaax.org.za/>

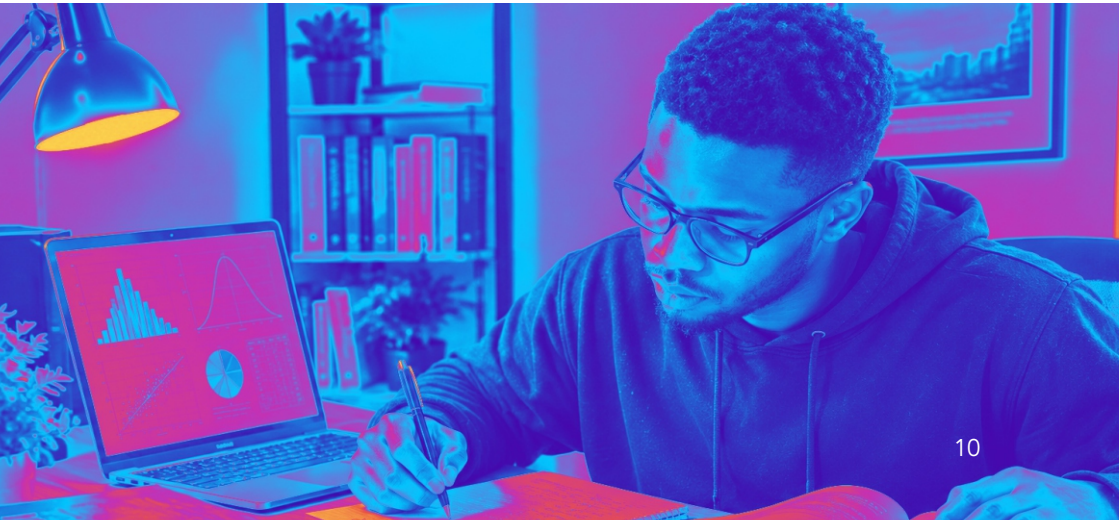


In Numbers



Public attitudes towards immigration in South Africa have become increasingly restrictive over the past two decades. The share of respondents who generally welcome all immigrants fell from 34% in 2003 to 15% in 2024–2025, while those who welcome no immigrants rose from 32% to 42%. Throughout the period, those who welcome some immigrants generally represented the largest share of respondents. The findings point to growing negative sentiment towards immigration and provide context for understanding the social environment in which xenophobic attitudes and tensions towards migrants can emerge.

Drawn from Human Science Research Council (HSRC)



Adeyale Adeyale

place to sit several hours at a time, and in the sun, with their toddlers.

Some thought that the white people would have intermarried and move apart. But the South Africans were really worse than the whites who emigrated as a population.

In South Africa, too, many of the so-called Nguni people were very corrupt. They were very greedy and in the end they were forced to see the commission of corruption in the plans win the day in this section. So they did not desert.

• President Oliver Tambo

Bakassi. C

But the most disturbing is the fact that Bakassi people were not consulted on their future before the judgement was passed. It is too bad that the World Court repeated the mistake of 1885 when Africa was cut like a cake without consultation with the people. The United Nations should conduct a referendum in Bakassi, so that the people can choose, on their own, which country they want to belong.



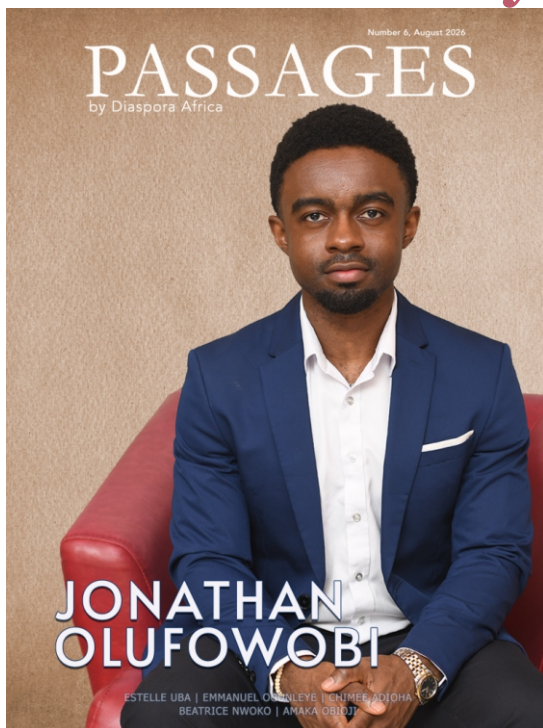
* *Pa Rewang.*

paper report by

Common Problem

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The Community Corner



For many ambitious people, success is often measured by achievement. The titles earned, the rooms entered, the milestones reached. But for Jonathan Olufowobi, speaker, author and CEO of MIPAD, success is connected to something deeper: purpose.

Purpose has shaped the way he understands leadership, community and the responsibility that comes with opportunity. It has also driven his commitment to creating access for others. It is a philosophy that would later inform his new book, *Tips From The Top*. As Jonathan often puts it, “Success without purpose is meaningless.”

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

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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.

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