

# Is Africa Deporting Its People?



## Editor's Note

Away from U.S.A's ICE political operations of forcefully removing 'undocumented' immigrants from the US soil, South Africa trades in another metaphor of ICE operations in its country, proudly led by the locals. The story of South Africa's xenophobia demands to be told because the discomfort, death, and injustice it produces are precisely the point. Since 1994, waves of xenophobic violence have swept through townships

and city streets, turning neighbour against neighbour, reducing human beings to the category of 'foreigner' — a word wielded here not as a descriptor but as a judgement on the status of one's occupancy in another African state (South Africa). Nigerians, Zimbabweans, Mozambicans, Somalis, Ethiopians, Malawians: people who fled poverty, persecution, and collapsed states, only to find themselves at the edge of a different kind of fire. Among the defences that South Africa has raised for the justification of their violence include: jobs are being taken by foreigners, crimes are being committed by foreigners, and foreigners were responsible for the spread of AIDS.

What does this mean for the foreigners being displaced? But especially, what does it mean for South Africa themselves? Today, the hallmark of contemporary South Africa tells a completely different story from what has been, especially from the stance of their founding fathers..

This issue confronts the xenophobic timeline in South Africa, including the recent protests that have displaced many Nigerians and other foreigners in the country, and the responses and conversations that have emanated from these incidents.



### Cover Illustration

The design depicts the rising xenophobic threats on African migrants in South Africa.

# Migration Monitor

## South Africa's Xenophobic Timeline

Xenophobia in South Africa dates back to the 1990's, with hostility towards foreign nationals structured by not only discrimination but also connected to historical and economic realities. Following the end of the Apartheid, many socio-economic expectations remained unmet. Increasing unemployment, inadequate housing, and shortages of basic amenities. These challenges largely stem from weak government structures and economic strain. This anger, rather than being directed at institutional failures, is being redirected towards vulnerable migrants who become scapegoats for broader economic hardships.

Below is a timeline of recorded xenophobic violence in South Africa throughout the years:





**1994:**

Surveys indicated that a large percentage of South Africans supported a strict restriction or a total ban on foreign nationals entering or remaining in the country.

**1995:**

In Alexandra, a township outside of Johannesburg, migrants' homes and properties were destroyed, and foreign nationals were marched to the police station for forceful removal from the country.

**2000:**

Seven foreigners were killed in the Cape Flats area, among whom were Nigerians, Kenyan and Angolans

**2008:**

In March, two Somali shop owners were murdered in the Eastern Cape, while seven foreign nationals, including Zimbabwean, Pakistani, and Somali migrants, were killed and their shops set ablaze, in Atteridge. In May, violence erupted in Alexander, leaving 2 killed and 40 injured. The attacks spread across other urban areas, particularly Gauteng Province.

**2013:**

Eight South African police officers tied a 27-year-old Mozambican man to the back of a police van and dragged him along the road in East Johannesburg, leading to his death after sustaining head injuries.

**2014:**

In June 2014, a group of Somalians was stoned, leaving two dead. The Somali government evacuated some of its citizens the following year due to safety concerns

**2015:**

In January 2015, a 14-year-old boy was shot and killed during an alleged robbery attack, followed by further shootings that triggered widespread attacks and looting of foreign-owned shops. In April, a Zulu king made a comment urging foreigners “to return to their countries,” which further caused widespread xenophobic attacks within South Africa.

**2019:**

Riots and looting targeted foreign nationals' shops, with approximately 50 Nigerian-owned businesses affected.

**2021:**

The emergence of Operation Dudula (“force out”), an anti-migrant movement in which vigilante groups target foreign nationals under the guise of immigration enforcement.

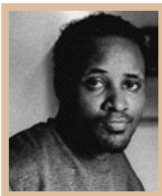
**2025:**

The vigilante members have been linked to confronting migrants at public health facilities, demanding identification documents, and denying access to individuals perceived as non-South African.

**2026:**

Amid ongoing xenophobic attacks, other African unions, such as Ghana's high commission and the Nigerian Union of South Africa, have advised their nationals to maintain a “low profile” and temporarily close up business to ensure their safety.

## Denied: The Hidden Toll of Visa Rejections on African Travellers



Prosper Ishaya

Every year, millions of Africans travel outbound for the rest of the world. They leave home either to resettle permanently, pursue educational or career

opportunities, seek medical care, or even simply for vacations to experience foreign cultures. Whatever the reason is, this desire to move, as is inherently human, is met often by a complex, sometimes opaque systems that dictate who gets to cross borders overseas. For beneath this flux, Africans face a steep, unusual climb shaped by officials processes and

gatekeeping mechanisms which determine access in their pursuit for global mobility.

But beyond this administrative hurdle lies the financial toll especially for Africans. As of March 2025, a standard EU Schengen visa fee was pegged at €110, (from last year's €90) but additional costs such as travel insurance, biometric fees, transportation to embassies, and courier charges can bump up expenses to nearly double the official fee in a single attempt. In contrast, UK visas can range between £115 – £963.

Putting this in perspective, Nigeria's national minimum wage, for instance, sits at ₦70,000 per month (approximately €35) meaning the cost of applying for a Schengen visa can easily consume or exceed entire months of salary for the average Nigerian worker. In Ghana, where the minimum wage stands at about GHS 539.19 per month, the €110 visa fee around GHS1,523

represents more than two months of wages. Even for middle-income earners, these expenses are substantial as it carries no refund guarantee if the visa is denied.

## The Toll of Denial

Abigail Jacob (not her real name), a Lagos-based cloud engineer, was sponsored to travel to London earlier this year to attend a tech convention she'd been earlier selected for. The \$2000 sponsorship by the organisers, also backed with support from her employer meant that she had enough financial backing to support her trip. In February, she submitted her UK visa application complete with the required documentations alongside the invitation letter from the event organiser, and a permission letter from her employer.

Through the days and weeks following her application, though anxious, she grew enthusiastic about the possibilities which the convention promised. The

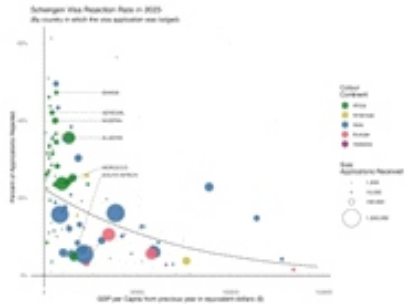
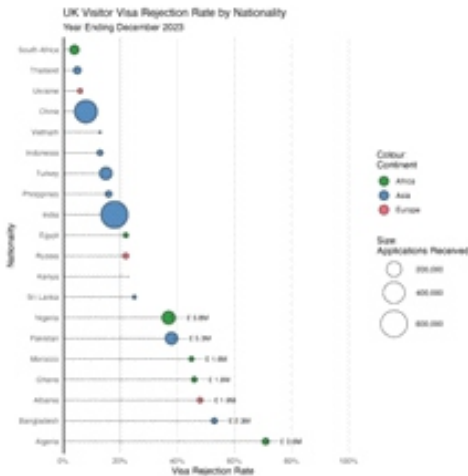
connections, lessons, the opportunities, and beyond. This all excited her. To Abigail, the trip, which was to be her first overseas, was a personal breakthrough, a major milestone for a Nigerian woman in tech like herself.

Weeks later however, Abigail received a rejection letter from the embassy. The decision cited her lack of travel history, and insufficient ties to Nigeria —or better put, as she shared, her lack of convincing reason for why she’d return home. It

mentioned also that she was financially unfit despite her being sponsored. The news crushed her.

“I cried that night,” Abigail recalled to **Diaspora Africa** of when she received the rejection email. “All my dreams, everything I planned, all gone. I missed an opportunity I’ll never get back.”

While heartbreakingly personal, Abigail’s story is just one of the countless others of similar



*all data, sources and methodological notes available at LAGO.*

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Source: LAGO Collective

disappointment faced by Africans annually in their quest for global mobility.

Just last month, LAGO Collective, a London-based research and arts organization, released an analysis showing that African applicants face the highest rejection rates for EU Schengen and UK visas globally. According to the analysis, in 2024 alone, African individuals lost about \$70 million in non-refundable visa fees due to denied applications.

These figures represent hundreds of thousands who, mostly in good faith, fulfilled application requirements only to be denied entry. Their stories are told often in the news, on social media, and on migration forums. But year in and out, still, the pattern remains unchanged.

Ten years ago, African applicants faced an 18% rejection rate for Schengen visas, already significantly higher than the global average of 5% at that time. By 2022,

that disparity had widened: African countries faced an average rejection rate of 30% compared to a global average of 17.5%. The following year, financially, the consequences were tangible: Africans lost approximately \$61 million (from 704,000 applications denied) in non-refundable visa application fees to European states.

These high rejection rates are not limited to Europe. In the United States, data obtained by Shorelight and the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration revealed that in 2022, 54% of African student visa applications were rejected, compared to just 21% for applicants from North America and 9% from Europe.

This signifies a dire problem.

Professor Mehari Taddele Maru, a migration policy scholar at the European University Institute, argues that the European visa regime is notably more stringent towards African

applicants than those from other regions. In 2022, for instance, he notes that while Africa topped the list of rejections with 30% of all processed applications being turned down, it by comparison had the lowest number of visa applications relative to global valuations. This suggests, he explains, a predetermined bias against African applicants, influenced by factors such as low passport power and economic status.

Similarly, Marta Foresti, the founder of LAGO Collective recently shared an observation with CNN. According to her, “The poorest countries in the world pay the richest countries in the world money for not getting visas.” She revealed further that as of 2023, the rejection rate per country was directly proportional to how poor the country of application was, suggesting an “inbuilt discrimination and bias” in the process. Per further analysis for that same year, although African countries accounted for 2.8%

of global Schengen visa applications, yet it faced a rejection rate of 50%, a stark contrast to the global average rejection rate of 16%.

This data, and all of it, reveals a broader pattern of unequal treatment in global mobility systems, where African applicants face higher barriers despite often meeting stated requirements. Of course, this has had some critics thinking about possible ailments, asking critical questions, such like:

### **Can Refunds Work?**

In light of the staggering financial losses suffered by Africans from visa denials, most notably, Hakainde Hichilema, the President of Zambia, came out and publicly urged the European Union and the United Kingdom to adopt a refund system of visa fees from all rejections. He described it as a matter of fairness and accountability, arguing that people should not pay for access where they’re ultimately denied. In reality,

his statement reflects a growing frustration across the continent.

One might ask: Is this call feasible, though? In truth, most visa application fees are categorized legally as “service fees” paid to cover the administrative cost of processing the applications, not the outcome. Countries make it clear that the fees are non-refundable, regardless of whether a visa is granted. This policy is standard in visa regimes across Europe, the UK, the US, and beyond.

Even so, some critics argue that charging full fees to applicants from countries with consistently high rejection rates, without transparency or feedback, borders on exploitation. At the very least, some suggest there should be a partial refund or clear appeal mechanisms for denied applicants, especially those who met all the requirements. At present though, whether a refund policy is politically viable remains uncertain.

## **Rethinking the System**

As conversations around visa fairness grow louder, some are beginning to ask: what would a just and equitable mobility system for Africans and therefore, the rest of the world look like?

For starters, the use of “migration risk” as a blanket reason for refusal as a common default in visa denials is both outdated and discriminatory. Many applicants are denied without any explanation, often after complying with every documented requirement. That opacity reinforces a power imbalance in which African applicants are expected to trust systems that offer no transparency in return.

***The length of this story has been reduced for this magazine. You can read the full report on the Diaspora Africa website***

**African Migration News  
Biweekly**

**Compiled By Migrants  
For Migrants**



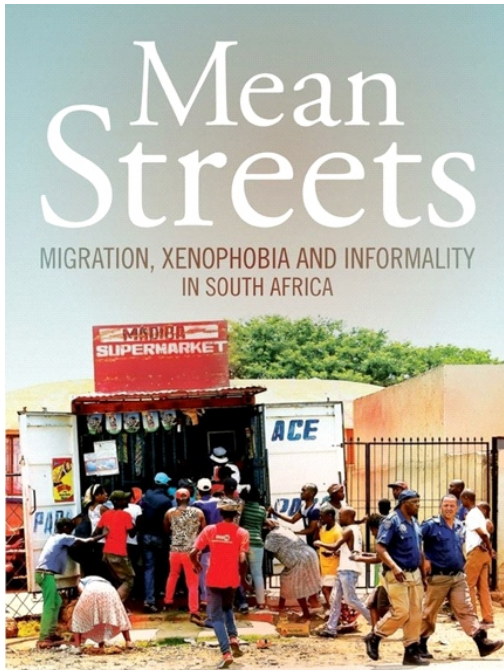
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## What to Read Now



Edited by Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikanda and Caroline Skinner

The title is the first exposition of what to expect in the book. Mean Streets is a book of thirteen chapters, published in 2015, that attempts to diagnose the xenophobic problem in South Africa, especially in relation to the informal business sector, an area migrants are often documented to be most resourceful while facing life-threatening hostility from the locals.

Kate Dawson for Africa at LSE suggests that the book throws vast empirical light

on what are sometimes considered 'saturated' topics. She insists that it is 'absolutely fundamental in critically engaging with how we talk and think about the economy, how policy gets made, and crucially, how we understand the ways in which people make a living in many of the world's urbanising spaces'. The book offers a critical perspective in understanding the why, the how, and the way-forward to the problem of xenophobia in South Africa, but perhaps it can also offer some understanding to the concept elsewhere in this global village.

Edited by Jonathan Crush, Abel Chikanda, and Caroline Skinner, it is a non-fiction that looks at the facts, interrogates the facts, and examines the intersection of growing migrant entrepreneurship and violence in South Africa.

# Resources



The Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) was established in 1988 and comprises 33 member organisations. Formed to coordinate efforts on refugee protection and migration, it aims to address challenges faced by non-nationals while ensuring that the human rights of all asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants are recognised and protected in South Africa. The organisation supports migration and refugee protection through advocacy and lobbying, including policy submissions, coordination and network building, capacity building, community engagement and dialogue, rights awareness and information sharing.

Its membership includes legal practitioners, academic institutions, social service providers, and migrant-led organisations, to collaboratively provide migrants with the legal, social, and humanitarian support needed.

**Further inquiries:** <https://www.cormsa.org.za>

# In Numbers

Figure 1: Incidents per Year: Breakdown of reported xenophobic discrimination incidents- year 2022 -

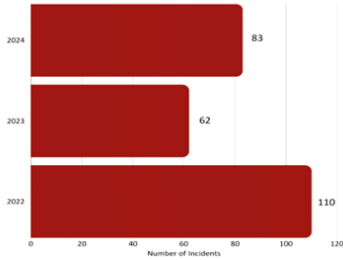


Figure 9: Total Effects of Xenophobic Discrimination over Three Years

Total Incidents: 2022 - 2024

**255**

Displaced: 2022 - 2024

**6,134**

Total Deaths: 2022 - 2024

**57**

Shops Looted: 2022 - 2024

**810**

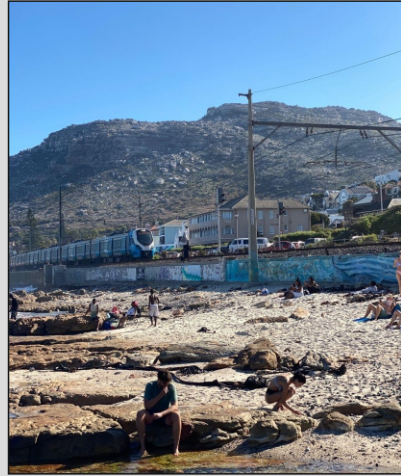
Between 2022 and 2024, South Africa recorded 255 reported xenophobic incidents, which reflects the continuous violence directed towards foreign nationals and migrants. While the number dropped in 2023, it rose again in 2024 to 83 cases. The human toll over these 3 years includes over 6000 people displaced. These actions have disrupted livelihoods and spread insecurity across the country, further intensifying the ongoing xenophobic tension.

Source: *African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS), Xenophobic Discrimination in South Africa: An Overview of Trends, Effects, and Responses (2022–2024), 2025.*

# The Mobility Gaze

In this mobility gaze, we share the lens and gallery of our readers living in Cape Town, South Africa, through travelling, eyes to see a new world and opportunities, we learn others' history and the stories that have shaped their world.

Photos: Oliver Obilo (2026)





Cape Town's history has been shaped by indigenous heritage, colonialism, migration, apartheid, and resistance. The region was originally inhabited by the Khoe and San peoples before the Dutch East India Company established a settlement in 1652 under Jan van Riebeeck. The colony relied heavily on enslaved labour from Africa and Asia, contributing to Cape Town's diverse cultural identity, especially the Cape Malay community.

The British later took permanent control of the Cape in 1806, and Cape Town grew into an important colonial port and eventually the legislative capital of South Africa in 1910. During apartheid, forced removals and racial segregation devastated communities such as District Six, though the city also became a centre of anti-apartheid resistance. Since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994, Cape Town has continued to rebuild while preserving its rich cultural heritage, making it a major hub for tourism, politics, and the arts.

**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**

## The Community Corner



Name: Helen Ndubuisi  
Location: South Africa

### **What is that one significant experience as a migrant?**

When the news of the anti-immigration march started in April, I was so afraid for myself and my children. I live in Johannesburg with my kids and family, the protest started in Durban and suddenly spread across other cities, and we were already been advised by our friends that the March and March group would also be organising their protest in Johannesburg, I was afraid, I have always lived with this fear since I moved to this country, everyone talks about the low tolerance of African migrants in South Africa, the xenophobic sentiment and how people have lost their lives to these attacks. I locked myself up at home with my children, afraid to take them to school, even afraid to step out to buy food. We live close to the city centre, and the chaos of it all heightened my anxiety. It is such a terrible thing to witness, to be in a place where your hard work and contributions are not recognised, where people like you, with the same skin as you, are willing to mess you up just because you're trying to live and survive. No one deserves to feel this way.

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

Send us a message on WhatsApp at [+44 7986 983956](https://www.whatsapp.com/business/profile/447986983956), and we will chat with you!

Join our community on WhatsApp, message us "Hi"

[+44 7986 983956](https://www.whatsapp.com/business/profile/447986983956), and we will allow you into the large room!

When you JOIN THE COMMUNITY, you get free 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](https://monitor.diasporafrica.org)

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