



By: TA | AP Insight

Why are thousands of immigrants leaving South Africa?



Thousands of African immigrants are leaving South Africa because of a rise in **anti-migration anger** that sparked attacks against foreigners.

The attacks have coincided with a **series of protests** and marches in recent months by anti-immigration groups, who have set what they are calling a June 30 deadline for people in the country illegally to leave and the government to take action against what they say is a growing problem of illegal immigration in Africa's biggest economy.

The groups threatened a “national shutdown” if that doesn't happen.

South African authorities are on high alert, the police minister said, with the anti-immigration groups planning more major protests on the deadline day.

Meanwhile, thousands of immigrants have gathered in **temporary shelters**, near embassies and elsewhere citing fear of attacks.

Some countries have begun **repatriating citizens** while criticizing South Africa for what they call a climate of xenophobia.

There have been a series of anti-immigration protests

Anti-immigration protests in several major cities have put the issue at the top of national politics since March.

The protest groups have blamed immigrants without evidence for South Africa's high unemployment, public service failures and crime.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa gave a speech on national television earlier this month in an attempt to defuse tensions.

He has said some of the protest groups are exploiting the issue to advance their own political agendas and “illegal immigration is not the cause of our social and economic

difficulties.”

But Ramaphosa also conceded that there had been failures in South Africa's border control.

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The latest census figures from 2022 show there were 2.4 million foreign nationals who had immigrated in South Africa's population of 62 million – less than 4% of the population.

Critics of the government say those figures do not count many others in South Africa without proper documents.

South Africa is already cracking down on immigration

While immigration becomes increasingly polarizing in the United States and Europe, Africa's leading economy is also confronting the issue.

In the last two years, South Africa has deported more than 100,000 people the home affairs ministry says were in the country illegally, while also stopping around 500,000 others at borders trying to enter without documents.

Those figures have strengthened the claims by anti-immigration groups of a larger problem.

Police are investigating attacks

Police are investigating recent attacks as anti-immigrant sentiment surges, including the killing of two Mozambicans in a small coastal town this month during unrest that also saw

more than 50 homes set alight in an immigrant neighborhood, according to local authorities.



Antonio Guterres is deeply concerned by reports of xenophobic attacks and acts of harassment and intimidation against migrants and foreign nationals in parts of South Africa

A Malawian man was allegedly stoned to death in another part of the country during anti-immigration protests last week, prompting another police investigation. Other attacks have been reported.

South Africa has a history of xenophobic violence as migrants from poor nations like Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Malawi generally end up settling in impoverished communities in South Africa where **unemployment** and frustrations are high.

A spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that Guterres was “deeply concerned by reports of xenophobic attacks and acts of harassment and intimidation against migrants and foreign nationals in parts of South Africa.”

There is a history of anti-immigrant violence in South Africa

In 2008, more than 60 people — both South Africans and foreign nationals — were killed in a wave of anti-immigrant violence that spread from the biggest city of Johannesburg.

There have been intermittent outbursts of violence against immigrants since then.

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The latest tensions have led to strong criticism of South Africa by several African countries, including Nigeria, Ghana and Mozambique, who say their citizens are being targeted.

Thousands of migrants have also left South Africa as tensions rise ahead of the June 30 deadline set by protesters.

Nigeria and Ghana have repatriated nearly 2,000 people on government-sponsored flights, citing concerns over their safety, and say there will be more evacuations. Zimbabwe and Mozambique have also repatriated smaller numbers of people.

Around 10,000 Malawians had gathered at a temporary shelter in the eastern city of Durban last week trying to return home.

More than 8,000 of them have since left the country on buses provided by the Malawian government or private sponsors, but others continue to gather.

South African authorities said they helped facilitate the repatriation of Malawian citizens, but they also formally deported many of them for not having documents to live in South Africa.