

Migration Flows in southern Africa: Flows and the Feminization of Migration

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Migration Flows: Some figures

An estimated 864,000 African migrants entered South Africa between 2001 and 2005, and this increased to an inflow of 974,000 between 2006 and 2010. An estimated 998 000 African migrants were thought to have entered the country between 2011 and 2015 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

The presence of immigrants and immigrant workers has increased since the dawn of democracy in the 1990s. South Africa's population was said to have increased to just below 53 million by the middle of 2013. According to South Africa's Statistician General Pali Lehohla, an inflow of migrants is the cause of the **1.2 million population** increase since the 2011 Census. The South African Government News Agency said,

The population is expected to have grown from just under 51.8 million in 2011, to an estimated 52 981 991 [in 2013]. However, driven by a net inflow of migrants, the population grew slightly faster per year in 2013 than over a decade a year– having increased by 1.34% between 2012 and 2013, up from a 1.3% increase between 2002 and 2003 (South African Government News Agency 2013:1).

Most international migrants in South Africa are from the Southern African Development community, and this has a lot to do with declining economies of southern Africa and geographic proximity of these countries to South Africa.

African migrants from SADC are 68% of the total international migrant population in South Africa.

There are only 7.3% African migrants coming from outside of the SADC.

International migrants in South Africa by origin

Country	%
Africa	75.3
Asia	4.7

Europe	8.2
Latin America and The Caribbean	0.3
North America	0.3
Oceania	0.2
Unspecified	11

Source: Census 2011

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [International Migration Report](#) for 2013 indicates that the annual level of net immigration (net migration is the difference between immigration and emigration) for South Africa stood at 96,000 per year for the period between 1990 and 2000, and then rose dramatically to 247,000 annually between 2000 and 2010.

The [International Organisation for Migration \(2016\)](#).

Country	2016 Community Survey	2015 DESA Estimate
Zimbabwe	574,047	475,406
Mozambique	293,405	449,710
Lesotho	160,749	350,611
Malawi	78,796	76,605
United Kingdom	56,412	318,536
Swaziland	38,038	91,232
Democratic Republic of Congo	31,504	70,077
Namibia	30,701	133,282
Nigeria	30,314	17,753

The Uneven Development of Capitalism and the Migrant Labour System in Southern Africa: A Historical Perspective

According to Professor Landau of the University of the Witwatersrand's [African Centre for Migration and Society](#), Zimbabweans and Mozambicans constituted the

largest group of migrants. However, close to half of working age Basotho men work in South African industries.

There is a rich body of scholarship on the mining labour process, migrant labour, and the nature of compounds in Southern and South Africa¹.

This literature also demonstrates that South Africa, and Johannesburg in particular, drew its labour from the reserves as well as other southern African countries. Subsequently, the manufacturing sector also drew its labour force from here.

What was fundamental in this period was the fact that migrants from other Southern African countries were workers who later joined the South African unions. A number of these workers became leaders in the trade union movement.

For example, Clements Kadalie was born in April 1896 in Nkhata Bay District at Chifira village near the Bandawe Mission Station in Nyasaland, presently Malawi. He became a prominent leader in the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in the early 1900s. James Motlasi, the former President of the NUM, was born in Lesotho. In an interview with Dominic Tweedie, a former shop steward magazine editor, two of the current National Office Bearers of COSATU trace their origins back to Swaziland and Mozambique respectively.

Migrant labour in post-apartheid South Africa

Lehure (2008:36) argues,

As sure as day follows night, the movement of people will always follow the movement of capital. The direction of migration in the Africa continent will be towards South Africa, and can only be changed once South Africa loses its position of hegemony on the continent.

¹ See Abrahams, Peter. 1963 [1946]: *Mine Boy*. (London: Heinemann), Allen, Vic. (1992): *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa: The Techniques of Resistance 1871-1948 (Volume I)*, (Keighley: The Moor Press), Allen, Vic. (2003a): *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa: Dissent and Repression in the Compounds 1948-1982 (Volume II)*. (Keighley: The Moor Press), Allen, Vic. (2003b): *The History of Black Mineworkers in South Africa: The Rise and Struggles of the National Union of Mineworkers 1982-1994 (Volume III)* (Keighley: The Moor Press). Also see Callinicos, Luli (1980): *Gold and Workers*. (Johannesburg: Ravan), Cohen, Robin. (1980): 'Resistance and Hidden form of Consciousness among African Workers.' *Review of African Political Economy*, 7(19): 8-22, Crush, Jonathan. (1992): 'Inflexible Migrancy: New Forms of Migrant Labour on the South African Gold Mines.' *Labour, Capital and Society*, 25(1): pp. 46-71. See Gordon, Robert. (1978): *Mines, Masters and Migrants: Life in a Namibian Compound*. (Johannesburg: Ravan), Moodie, T. Dunbar, with Vivienne Ndatshé. (1994): *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*. (Johannesburg: Wits University Press).

The political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe contributed to an increase of migrant to South Africa. Of course people moved to South Africa primarily because of its economic power in the southern Africa region.

It is the actions of the South African state that ensure that immigration into South Africa will continue with or without the Zimbabwean crisis. As an agent of South African capital, the South African state is responsible for policies that undermine African economies, it is responsible for policies that extract wealth from Africa into South Africa, and it is responsible for policies that are concentrating the capital of the continent.

Migration to South Africa has also been accompanied by xenophobia and a violation of the rights of immigrants and immigrant workers in particular.

Feminisation of Migration

According to Pophiwa (2014),

Migration from Africa has historically been a male-dominated phenomenon, but the pattern has changed significantly in recent decades. African women are leaving their countries of birth to create new lives elsewhere. Economic opportunities are primarily available in childcare, domestic and sex work.

Over the past few decades there has been an overall rise in ‘feminisation’ of migration in Africa as millions of women gradually became economic beings with a responsibility to contribute financially to their families. As it stands now, nearly half (49%) of all migrant workers are women².

The situation is worse for women immigrants. According to Musetha, ‘Three out of 10 Zimbabwean women are gang-raped while trying to illegally cross the border into South Africa through undesignated entry points along the Limpopo River’ (2012: 1). Pamela Khumalo, a woman migrant worker working in South Africa’s early childhood development sector said,

We have to persevere. Resilience keeps us going. We have to survive against all odds and that has to do with the fact that there are no job and economic opportunities in Zimbabwe. We survive violence on the way to South Africa, because we are looking for work (P. Khumalo, interview, 10 October 2014).

² International Committee for the Red Cross Advisory Meeting. (No Date) Special Report: Migration and Gender in the African Context. <http://tinyurl.com/lggq2zf>

Women immigrant workers face even more serious obstacles and discrimination based on sex. Sizani Gumede, an immigrant worker from Zimbabwe, said:

I bought groceries. I was paying R70 [US\$7] per week for rent. We would go and work in Mayfair doing piece jobs and we were getting R50 [US\$5] or R70 [US\$7] per day. I then got contract work in Crown Mines and they did not see that we are pregnant. They then chase me away as they realised that I was pregnant. ... I got fired. I realised that if I was not pregnant I would be working. We just have to be strong and resilient, because the situation is worse in Zimbabwe. There are no piece jobs. (S. Gumede, interview, 6 October 2014)

Trade Union Responses

There is a strong yearning for South African-based trade unions to provide solidarity to immigrant workers.

Elsewhere I have stated that trade unions under the banner of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) have not been able to organise immigrant workers, related to the fact that there was no appreciation that immigrant workers are a permanent feature of the South African economy and that these COSATU unions are largely interested in established skilled and semi-skilled workers who are South Africans (Hlatshwayo, 2011, 2012, 2013).

COSATU is the biggest trade union federation in South Africa with possibilities of reaching out to all workers, but it has adopted a narrow nationalist chauvinist approach which prioritises organising South African workers located in relatively permanent positions, or what I regard as ‘low-hanging fruits’, to the exclusion of vulnerable workers and immigrant workers.

COSATU has also complained about immigrant workers taking over the jobs of South African workers, and stated that immigrant workers are prepared to accept low wages, thereby ‘undercutting’ South African workers.

Instead of viewing immigrant workers as part of labour in a struggle against capital, COSATU has tended to see immigrants as a problem that must be fixed through tighter border controls (Hlatshwayo, 2013).

However, in the Western Cape province, there has been some collaboration to build an organisational response to xenophobia and around the challenges facing immigrant workers. COSATU’s Western Cape provincial office supports NGOs such as the International Labour Research Group (ILRIG), the Labour Research

Service (LRS) and the Ogoni Solidarity Forum (OSF), an organisation of immigrants (Jara and Peberdy, 2009).

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