

JUSTICE 360 DEGREE

AFRICA REVIEW

INSIGHTS ON LEADERSHIP, JUSTICE, SOCIETY, AND ISSUES SHAPING AFRICA



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South Africa's democratic transition was built on a powerful moral promise: that a society once defined by exclusion, racial hierarchy, and state-sanctioned violence would become one grounded in dignity, equality, and human rights. Yet, recurring waves of xenophobic violence and hostility toward African migrants threaten to undermine that very foundation. At its core, xenophobia is not only a social problem but also a constitutional and economic contradiction. South Africa's Constitution guarantees equality and human dignity for all persons, not only citizens. When foreign nationals are attacked, displaced, or excluded from economic participation, it signals a failure to uphold those foundational values. In that sense, xenophobia is not just about "others"; it reflects on the integrity of the state itself.

Economically, xenophobia is self-defeating. Migrants in South Africa are often entrepreneurs, traders, workers, and service providers who contribute to local economies, create jobs, and fill gaps in informal and formal sectors. When violence or intimidation forces them to close businesses or relocate, communities lose income streams, investment, and economic vibrancy. Fear replaces commerce, and instability replaces productivity.

WHY SOUTH AFRICA CANNOT AFFORD TO BE XENOPHOBIC.

Historically, South Africa's liberation struggle was deeply connected to the wider African continent. Many countries across Africa hosted South African exiles, supported liberation movements, and paid economic and political costs in solidarity. This history carries a moral responsibility: South Africa's freedom was not achieved in isolation. It was a continental effort. To now turn inward against fellow Africans is to forget that shared history.

Socially, xenophobia erodes cohesion. It fractures communities along artificial lines of "us" and "them," when in reality most people whether citizens or migrants, share the same struggles: unemployment, inequality, poor service delivery, and economic insecurity. Violence against foreign nationals often emerges in contexts where frustration is high but directed at the wrong target. It diverts attention from structural problems and weak governance.

Politically, xenophobia weakens South Africa's standing on the continent and globally. The country positions itself as a regional leader, a champion of African unity, and a key voice in multilateral forums. Yet recurring xenophobic incidents damage diplomatic relations, undermine soft power, and raise questions about South Africa's commitment to Pan-Africanism and human rights leadership.

Importantly, addressing xenophobia is not about ignoring legitimate concerns around unemployment, inequality, or weak border management. These are real issues. But blaming foreign nationals for structural failures is both inaccurate and dangerous. Policy solutions must be grounded in evidence, fairness, and constitutional values, not scapegoating.

South Africa cannot afford xenophobia because it contradicts its Constitution, weakens its economy, fractures its society, and undermines its continental leadership. More fundamentally, it contradicts the spirit of a nation that once demanded dignity and justice for itself. The choice is not between citizens and migrants. The real choice is between fear and solidarity, between fragmentation and shared prosperity. South Africa's future depends on choosing the latter.