



Refugee Digest 99

April 2026

Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

The sustained anti-foreigner protests that again accompanied the enrolment of undocumented or foreign born children at public schools, plus the window for submissions with regard to the Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection, have again occasioned robust debate on the contentious issue of mobile people, especially undocumented people's status in South Africa and the desirability of accommodating migrant aspirations. The presence – or as some would argue, the influx – of foreigners, however it is assessed, remains in the spotlight and continues to be seen as a socially destabilising force by many. It will continue to be a contentious issue in 2026 with local elections on the horizon. Issues around mobile people have already established themselves as key concerns amongst hefty portions of the electorate.

Some examples of the robustness of the debate on these contentious issues are highlighted in these clips.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yaVwlGfAj8

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zRzQTkBMis>

On 25th March, a large procession through the streets of Durban organised by March on March and other anti-foreigner groups, joined by ActionSA, the IFP and the MKP, demanded an end to illegal migration and a return to care for the local population who suffer all sorts of deprivations, exacerbated by the support given to foreigners. The presence of political parties at the march might well be understood as an early sign of parties indicating their positions ahead of the elections.

<https://iol.co.za/mercury/news/2026-03-25-durban-protest-march-and-march-ifp-actionsa-and-mkp-demand-end-to-illegal-immigration/>

The release of the Revised Draft White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection was, as stated above, the source of very vigorous debate. The Al Jama-ah party rejected many provisions out of hand and labelled it an affront to South Africa's democracy, draconian in its provisions and Euro-centric in its formulation. It particularly rejected the 'First Safe Country' clause.

<https://www.aljama.co.za/press-release-al-jama-ah-rejects-proposed-citizenship-immigration-white-paper/>

ActionSA largely supported the revised draft White Paper but called for a 10 000-person national cap on all asylum grants and refugee recognition. It also proposed that the Refugee Reception Offices should become 'Integration and Repatriation Centres', with basic services for a set time, thus preventing asylum seekers from being in situations where they are in competition with locals for scarce resources.

<https://www.actionsa.org.za/actionsa-submits-comments-on-immigration-white-paper-to-end-abuse-of-immigration-system-and-put-citizens-first/>

In 2025 when the Draft White Paper was in discussion the DA supported it, hailing it as an end to loopholes and would allow for a firmer enforcement while still protecting rights. It has maintained this position.

<https://www.da.org.za/2025/09/immigration-amendment-bill-closes-illegal-immigration-loopholes>

It is clear that most parties support the Revised Draft White Paper with some such as ActionSA and the Patriotic Alliance pushing for a more aggressive stance towards curbing the entry of foreign nationals and reducing benefits available to all under the Constitution. Certain provisions such as the 'First Safe Country' has tremendous support amongst political parties, as has the move to the enforcement of biometrics and the digitisation of data. Several civil society formations submitted opposite views and the 'First Safe Country' emerged as one of the contested issues.

On 23rd March, Home Affairs Minister Leon Schreiber acknowledged that the investment in new technology on the border, especially around Beitbridge, was rapidly resolving many of the problems, especially congestion, and was assisting in detecting illegal crossings. He indicated that the technology would be particularly helpful over the Easter period.

<https://www.channelafrica.co.za/channelafrica/news/investment-in-tech-to-ease-beitbridge-immigration-pressure-sa-minister/>

In a very thoughtful speech on 24th March, at a Human Rights Commission seminar, Dr Naledi Pandor spoke to 12 points which should be part of any humane migration policy.

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-9cfo2BILgo>

A recent meeting between the Director-General of International Organisation for Migration (IOM), academics and senior practitioners, appealed to South Africa, through its organisations and government to actively engage in the worldwide debate on immigration issues, to learn from best practices, and to be part of contemporary scholarship as one way forward regarding these unresolved issues.

<https://www.news.uct.ac.za/article/-2026-03-18-calls-for-sa-to-enter-global-migration-debate>

From very early on after its inception, the Department of Home Affairs has been riddled with allegations of corruption. This has had a direct, negative effect on the rights and possibilities of migrant peoples. The recent interim report of the Special Investigating Unit has uncovered some shocking practices at work in the Department.

<https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/siu-probe-details-exploitation-of-immigration-system/>

<https://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-immigration-system-treated-as-marketplace-siu-reveals-corruption-at-home-affairs--2026-02-23>

It is clear that many extreme expressions of the politics of exclusion are here to stay. They are being normalised and the emerging hegemony is providing the basis for governments and local organisations to act with impunity across the globe, thus adding to the tensions and vulnerabilities that already undermine our global wellbeing.

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