



Refugee Digest 100

April 2026

Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

The political landscape continues to be dogged by very public narratives, actions and violence with regard to foreign nationals. We keep being warned that this is part of a tension which is geared towards the local elections towards the end of the year.

Over the past few days, hopes were raised amongst ZEP holders and Lesotho citizens that a new dispensation was at hand. In one case, the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs in an interview seemed to intimate that the ZEP holders could apply for permanent residence in South Africa and that, pending certain conditions, this would be granted on a case-by-case basis. Much excitement followed, but it was eventually walked back and the *status quo* remains. This is the interview with the Deputy Minister:

<https://www.tiktok.com/@newzroom405/video/7628145683723439380>

And this is the rebuttal:

<https://www.amcham.co.za/news/zep-holders-beware-there-no-shortcut-permanent-residence-south-africa>

For several days a strong rumour persisted that the governments of South Africa and Lesotho had reached an agreement that Lesotho citizens could now cross the border between the two countries using only a valid Lesotho ID, and no longer needed an accompanying passport. This has also been rebutted; South Africa has said that conversations around this possibility are still not finalised.

<https://groundup.org.za/article/lesotho-and-south-africa-agree-on-amnesty-for/>

<https://defenceweb.co.za/border-security-2/south-africa-and-lesotho-agree-that-ids-are-enough-to-cross-the-border/>

The rebuttal:

<https://www.facebook.com/ArriveAlive.co.za/posts/home-affairs-dismisses-false-reports-on-passport-free-travel-for-lesotho-nationals/1369586425196905/>

As a footnote to the ZEP saga, it should be noted that Operation Dudula served legal papers towards the end of March alleging that the Minister either lacked the legal authority to grant the extension or had followed incorrect procedures. They argue that the ZEP system unfairly strains South African resources and contributes to social pressures. This is thus both an ongoing judicial matter and an emotive, contested political issue.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXD8okFzylE>

On 6th April, Cabinet approved the Revised Draft White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection. This will now be turned into a Bill and proceed to Parliament. The public consultations yielded many divergent views, especially on controversial topics such as the 'first safe country' principle.

<https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-leon-schreiber-welcomes-cabinet-approval-revised-white-paper>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z2GI76Ypsta>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S1MwdY7-VJw>

During the middle of April, several marches and protests took place across the country, both for and against the ongoing presence of migrants in South Africa. This has been noted as part of the rise in xenophobia. One spin-off of these highly visible actions was the convening of a TV panel discussion which raised some key issues, such as the economic situation in the country and the politicisation of immigration.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbDgbuf-ay4>

It is not very often that South African diplomats get summoned to their host countries' foreign offices to receive official objections flowing from xenophobic attacks against their citizens in South Africa. Ghana recently did so, but it should be noted that when this does occur it is not necessarily a *démarche*.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/south-africa-promises-crackdown-xenophobic-attacks-after-ghana-protests-2026-04-24/>

Another possible positive outcome is the promise made by DIRCO Minister Lamola that the government has plans in place to convene the ambassadors of those countries whose nationals have been the targets of xenophobic lawlessness.

<https://www.facebook.com/TimesLIVE/posts/sa-government-to-meet-african-ambassadors-to-discuss-xenophobic-attacks/1392962912877145/>

It was heartening to note that, in the same period as the many anti-immigration protests were taking place, there were also protests against xenophobia and the brutalisation of foreigners, along with a call to implement a more inclusive society, welcoming the contributions of foreign nationals and warning others not to ascribe all South Africa's problems to foreign nationals.

<https://groundup.org.za/article/stop-scapegoating-immigrants-say-freedom-month-marchers/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKjU5LINE6g>

Alas, it is nonetheless true that, despite these very small positive signs, the xenophobic activities continue.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBGVum4iX7k>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbDgbuf-ay4>

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DXb097DDZFX/>

It is worth noting that, at the same time as Deputy Minister Nzuza made his comments that sparked the confusion around the possible change of status of ZEP holders, Spain hastened a process helping almost 500 000 migrants to regularise their stay in Spain for at least five years with a segue into more permanent forms of residence. This shows that bold initiatives can be taken if there is the will to do so – even in the current climate against the regularisation of migrants' status.

<https://ecre.org/spain-government-approves-plan-to-regularise-500000-undocumented-people-%E2%80%95-government-expresses-opposition-to-offshore-migration-centres-urges-support-for-its-alternative-approach-to-migrati/>

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