



Refugee Digest 104

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Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

Over the past months, the threat of violence against foreign nationals has spiked significantly. Along with this, the levels of impunity of those perpetrating such acts has also risen. Misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories and rumours have also created immeasurable fear, anxiety, financial loss and the undermining of social cohesion and South Africa's democratic culture.

Ground Up, in a July article, stated and summed it up thus: "Yet the events leading up to 30th June 2026 showed how quickly organised vigilantism can escalate when the state fails to act decisively. Although the date had no basis in law, it created widespread fear and disrupted livelihoods. It exposed a dangerous reality – how private actors were able to assume powers that should be reserved for the state."

<https://groundup.org.za/article/the-state-spent-r600-million-containing-the-30-june-xenophobia-crisis-it-could-have-stopped-it-for-free-by-enforcing-the-law/>

In the months post 30th June, there has also been considerable scrutiny of the organisations at the forefront of these xenophobic attacks. It is also important to note some of the more substantial facts which have added to the framing of the various analysis of these events, and especially the claims of the xenophobic movements. The following articles interrogate aspects of March on March, the most visible and voluble of all the current anti-immigrant organisations.

<https://amabhungane.org/analysis-march-and-march-and-the-shadow-of-2021/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-06-25-xenophobic-unrest-a-crisis-co-written-by-march-and-march-and-sas-political-class/>

The SA National Joint Operational and Intelligence Service noted that 900 people were arrested on 30th June in an estimated 120 marches across the country. The arrests involved public violence, robbery, immigration violations, and harbouring undocumented individuals. The Western Cape recorded the highest number of arrests (215), followed by the Eastern Cape (208) and Gauteng (154).

<https://www.facebook.com/SAPoliceService/posts/read-natjoints-media-briefing-on-30-june-demonstrations-speaker-notesdeputy-nati/1451298767021759/>

<https://www.moneyweb.co.za/news/south-africa/more-than-900-arrested-during-30-june-anti-immigration-protests/>

Acting Police Minister Firoz Cachalia confirmed that over R600 million from existing budgets and redirected funds was allocated to boost police operational readiness across all nine provinces as they increased protection for citizens, safety for businesses and ensuring that all rights were guaranteed. There was mixed reaction to this redirection of funds.

<https://www.facebook.com/SABCNews/posts/acting-police-minister-firoz-cachalia-has-revealed-that-r600-million-has-been-re/1425995652897235/>

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2026-06-22-saps-launches-r600m-operation-to-counter-anti-immigrant-unrest-ahead-of-30-june-deadline/>

It should be noted that there were strong differences of opinion amongst political parties over the amount of taxpayers' money spent on policing and security at the time of the planned protests on 30th June, 2026.

<https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/mps-divided-over-r600m-security-expenditure-for-30-june-protests/>

Over 53 000 foreign nationals were processed and returned during the government's migration management campaign following the tensions immediately before and after 30th June. The vast majority of those deported or repatriated were from Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, alongside smaller numbers from Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, and Kenya.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgj2prd4p8o>

Some news outlets have come up with their own research and have concluded that a much higher number of people were deported, left the country unnoticed, or were repatriated. They claim that the total of 53 000 takes into account only those who departed 'officially' and not the thousands who left without being legally processed in the months before 30th June as the pressure and tension mounted.

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/more-than-53000-immigrants-have-been-deported-or-repatriated-by-south-africa-in-a-crackdown>

<https://apnews.com/article/immigration-migrants-immigrants-africa-deported-repatriated-a708b48293d6b5c70a6e320f8defdd9e>

The Department of Home Affairs gives an insight into the cost of deportations. It should be borne in mind that statistics show that many deportees return within a short time span. South Africa spent R175.1 million deporting 111 464 foreign nationals over the past two financial years, Home Affairs Minister Dr Leon Schreiber revealed in a Parliamentary question-and-answer session. Zimbabweans, Ethiopians and Congolese were among those deported.

<https://www.facebook.com/61553657637260/posts/south-africa-spends-r175-million-on-deportationssouth-africa-spent-r1751-million/122296784354121921/>

Meanwhile, a South African judge has barred deportations of undocumented foreign nationals, while the UN has called for vigilante groups in the country to be banned, and the African Union (AU) has formally been urged to act on the ongoing illegal immigrant sentiment in SA to preserve solidarity on the continent. The Gauteng High Court (Johannesburg) has been inundated with urgent applications from undocumented foreign nationals challenging their deportations, a surge Judge Mandlenkosi Motha described as the 'aftershock' of March and March's *Abahambe* (they must leave) campaign.

<https://legalbrief.co.za/story/judge-halts-deportations-slams-refugee-process-2/>

This article in the *Daily Maverick* speaks to most of the points raised in the earlier briefs and asks the question as to what has actually changed after all the marching, slogan-chanting and toxic vitriol on social media, and activism in public spaces. In particular, the piece articulates an important way of understanding the government's response: "The state did hear the noise, but it heard it the way states typically do: late, defensively, and in the language of enforcement rather than policy."

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2026-07-10-after-the-june-30-deadline-what-did-sas-anti-immigration-marches-actually-achieve/>

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