



Xenophobic Discrimination is a Regular Reality in South Africa

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Johannesburg, South Africa – Recent incidents of xenophobic violence and discrimination in South Africa have attracted considerable media attention and prompted widespread condemnation at [national](#), [African Union](#), and [United Nations](#) levels. Yet this episodic visibility obscures a more uncomfortable truth: xenophobic discrimination in South Africa is not a series of isolated incidents. It is a regular, widespread and ongoing reality.

Data from [Xenowatch](#), an initiative of the [African Centre for Migration and Society](#), lays this reality bare. It shows that xenophobic discrimination, which refers to acts of exclusion, hostility, or violence directed at individuals or groups as a result of being foreign nationals or outsiders, has become a regular and increasingly unremarkable feature of post-apartheid South Africa's socio-political landscape. The data indicates that incidents have been regularly recorded since 1994. For example, between 2022 and 2025, 406 verified incidents were recorded. This translates into an average of 103 xenophobic discrimination incidents per year. In 2025 alone, 151 incidents were recorded. Xenophobic discrimination is reality across the country; in all South Africa's nine provinces, with Gauteng, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape being the worst affected.

Acts of xenophobic discrimination include violence, denied access to public services, eviction, extortion, harassment, selective enforcement of by-laws, threats, unlawful arrests and detentions, verbal abuse, hate speech, and intimidation. These practices rarely attract media attention but cumulatively produce chronic insecurity. They result in deaths, injuries, displacements, looting and destruction of property and livelihood assets, limited access to essential services such as health care, etc. Visit [Xenowatch](#) for details and interactive data and analysis.

This persistent and widespread xenophobic discrimination is rooted in a long history of institutional and social migrant exclusion. Past and current political and public discourse constructs migrants as hyper-visible and demonised figures held responsible for stalled national progress and persistent socio-economic crises, including unemployment, inequality, and crime. The real story, therefore, is not the latest incidents but the long-standing normalisation of migration exclusion. As witnessed in the past, public condemnation, while symbolically important, does not disrupt entrenched xenophobic practices. Recognising xenophobic discrimination as a regular, ongoing reality, rather than a series of isolated incidents, would be an important next step towards a more meaningful response, grounded in the consistent enforcement of the rule of law and the equal protection of rights for all country's residents, both citizens and non-citizens.

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