

STILL WAITING FOR
THE BARBARIANS:
SA ATTITUDES TO
IMMIGRANTS & IMMIGRATION

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The authors would like to thank the following people for their input into survey design and/or for comments on earlier drafts of this report: Jonathan Crush, John Gay, Wilmot James, Douglas Palmer and Lovemore Zinyama. The report was edited for publication by Jonathan Crush. Funding for the survey on which the report is based was provided by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Institute for Peace.

Published by Idasa, 6 Spin Street, Church Square, Cape Town, 8001, and Queen's University, Canada.

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ISBN 1-874864-91-8

First published 1999

Edited by Michail Rassool

Layout by Bronwen Dachs Müller

Tables by Faldielah Khan

Typeset in Goudy

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Bound and printed by Logo Print

Print consultants Mega Print, Cape Town

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SERIES EDITORS:
JONATHAN CRUSH & DAVID McDONALD

CONTENTS	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
INTRODUCTION	4
SURVEY METHODOLOGY	5
ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION POLICY	7
ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEPORTATION	10
ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEGALISING STATUS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS	11
ATTITUDES TOWARDS RIGHTS FOR RESIDENT NON-CITIZENS	12
POTENTIAL ANTI-MIGRANT BEHAVIOUR	13
CONCLUSIONS	16
ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS	17
PERCEIVED IMPACTS/THREATS OF FOREIGNERS	18
CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS	19
XENOPHOBIA	20
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICAN ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION	22
EXPLAINING AFRICAN OPPOSITION TO IMMIGRATION	23
EXPLAINING WHITE OPPOSITION TO IMMIGRATION	
POLICY IMPLICATIONS	

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As South Africa grapples with the challenge of crafting new immigration legislation, it is important to understand public opinion on the issue. This report deals specifically with the willingness of South Africans to welcome non-South Africans to the country. Drawing on results of an extensive national survey conducted in mid-1997 by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), the report examines the attitudes of South Africans towards immigrants and immigration policy, and explores the implications of these attitudes for immigration reform and public education.

The first, and perhaps most surprising, result of the research is that only 1% of respondents in the survey cited immigration as one of the three most important issues facing the country today. Despite increased reports of anti-immigrant sentiment and behaviour, and the high visibility of the issue in the press, surveys from 1994 to 1997 demonstrate that immigration is not a top priority for most South Africans. Also somewhat surprising, given the nature of press reports on attitudes towards immigrants, is the small, but important, cadre of South Africans who support a more liberalised immigration regime and accept immigrants and immigration. Although this group is clearly in the minority, the fact that such a minority does exist — and that all racial, economic, gender and ethnic groups are represented in it — suggests that there is at least some support for a more management and service-orientated approach to immigration policy in the future.

But this potential for a new immigration regime in South Africa is countered by some disturbing trends, the most notable of which is that the majority of South Africans are resoundingly negative towards any immigration policy that might welcome newcomers. Twenty-five percent of South Africans want a total ban on immigration and 45% support strict limits on the numbers of immigrants allowed in. Only 17% would support a more flexible policy tied to the availability of jobs, and only 6% support a totally open policy of immigration. This is the highest level of opposition to immigration recorded by any country in the world where comparable questions have been asked.

While whites and blacks are equally opposed to immigration and immigrants, the specific reasons differ. For both groups, however, those who are most opposed to immigration and dislike immigrants display various forms of xenophobia. Those who oppose immigration are less inclined to accept diversity within South Africa, believe that immigrants weaken society and threaten the nation's health, and think that foreigners are unable to assimilate into the South African nation.

All South Africans appear to have the same stereotypical image of Southern Africans, citing job loss, crime and disease as the negative consequences they fear from immigrants living in the country. Interestingly, though, only 4% of respondents reported that they actually interact with non-citizens from the region on a regular basis, suggesting that these stereotypes may be the product of second-hand (mis)information. Thus, it may be possible to counteract such stereotypes with a well devised public education programme.

Policy-makers therefore face a major challenge in terms of fostering a climate that is more open to outsiders and their presence in the country. South Africans display a modest acceptance of diversity and have relatively favourable views of different racial and ethnic groups within the country (Africans more so than whites). But these favourable conditions for peaceful diversity are offset by very negative attitudes toward newcomers. What we have is an attitudinal profile that will not be easily overcome. South Africans are unlikely to be quickly persuaded to view non-citizens and immigrants more favourably simply by providing more realistic, positive and accurate information about what immigrants and migrants actually do, or about their true impact on the country.

Nevertheless, creating a better public awareness about the actual experiences and intentions of foreign citizens living in South Africa (permanently and temporarily) is an expressed intention of the South African government, many NGOs and the Human Rights Commission. If South Africa is to address the problem of xenophobia in the country adequately, and develop a more pragmatic approach to cross-border movements in the region, it is essential to have public support — or at least a softening of public opposition — for these policies to take root.

Related SAMP surveys of migrants and immigrants clearly demonstrate that the large majority of people who come to South Africa have no desire to stay in the country permanently. More importantly, those migrants who come from other African countries, and those from neighbouring countries who have been to South Africa in the past, generally contribute to the social and economic fabric of the country, and are responsible, relatively well-educated and law-abiding citizens of their own nation. Information like this could help to ameliorate the anxiety that South Africans appear to have about the impact of trying to accommodate culturally different and “unassimilable” people into the country.

Finally, public education should also concentrate on raising the curtain of ignorance that South Africans have about people from neighbouring countries: not only information about what people from other African countries do while they are in South Africa, but more and better information about “Africa” itself — that great void in the public

mind north of the Limpopo. What are its cultures like, how do its peoples live? Only this may eliminate the pervasive, yet fictional, popular notion that “hordes” of northern barbarians have already invaded the country, with millions more now massing on the borders.

INTRODUCTION

Decision-makers in democratic societies are required to perform a delicate balancing act when it comes to articulating formal immigration policy. Immigration legislation is the basic tool by which a government resolves a fundamental question: who will be allowed to become a full participant in the nation, and on what terms? Policy-makers must balance a variety of competing considerations ranging from the health of the economy and protecting the national interest, to safeguarding the human rights of newcomers and maintaining national harmony. Achieving the appropriate balance is a major challenge for all immigrant-receiving countries. It is especially challenging for post-apartheid South Africa whose immigration policy thus far has been driven by the dysfunctional Aliens Control Act, an extension of the ideology of apartheid itself.¹

Confronted with such a daunting challenge, it is essential that policy be based on the best available information. To that end, we describe in this report the results of a national South African public opinion survey, conducted in mid-1997, that focused on South Africans' views of immigrants and immigration policy. Public opinion is not the only input that needs to be considered when formulating immigration policy, but legislators do need to be aware of public preferences and prejudices.

The report is divided into four sections. We begin with a brief overview of the methodology in order to establish the credibility of the research. We then describe the attitudinal profile of South Africans with respect to basic immigration policy alternatives, as well as a number of more specific policy issues including deportation, amnesty, preferential treatment for certain categories of newcomers, and rights that should be accorded newcomers.

The second section examines the attitudes that South Africans hold towards migrants from different parts of the world. In general, South Africans hold very negative views of immigrants and immigration, but there are some important differences along racial lines that will be highlighted. We also explore the possible reasons for why these attitudes are so negative and isolate salient attitudinal differences within the South African population. We explore, in particular, the perceived impact of immigration, people's direct contact with foreign nationals as well as South African attitudes towards diversity, both in terms of how South Africans view newcomers into the country and how they view each other.

The third section of the report attempts to begin to explain why South Africans are so hostile to immigration and immigrants. In doing so, we run a series of bivariate and multivariate correlations and multiple

regression analyses in an attempt to highlight some of the factors shaping South African attitudes towards immigration policy. These cross-sectional and associational statistical methods have their limits, however. They do not, for example, provide insight into the historical origins of hostility towards (im)migrants in South Africa or how these attitudes have evolved over time.

A fuller explanation of the anti-immigrant phenomenon described in this report would require a more historically-grounded analysis of the impact of discourses of nation-building and national identity, the isolationism of the late apartheid era, the cultural superiority complex of white South Africa and so on — tasks that are beyond the scope of this report. Nevertheless, the analysis presented here does point to some of the more salient features of people's opposition to a more open immigration policy framework, and suggests some likely interpretations for these attitudes.

The final section of the report discusses the implications of these findings for contemporary immigration policy reform and public education.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Policy-makers often face the challenge of crafting policy in the absence of relevant information, or even worse, a glut of misinformation. Moreover, the issue of immigration is so emotionally charged that it is often difficult to distinguish myth from reality.² It is important, therefore, to briefly outline the methodology employed in this research so the reader can better assess the credibility of the report and its significance in comparison with related research.

Two key issues are highlighted here: firstly, who was surveyed and how were they surveyed; and secondly, how people's responses to the survey were analysed. On the first point, a total of 3 500 South Africans were surveyed (a larger than average sample size due to over-sampling in key areas), with sample selection being drawn from official census data and information from national organisations that attempt to maintain population statistics. From this information a clustered, random stratified, nationally representative sample was drawn.

Specifically, the procedure involved randomly selecting a series of "primary sampling units" (PSUs) from a larger list of suburbs and magisterial districts, the chance of selection being weighted proportionately by the population of the suburb or the district. Once a PSU had been established, maps were used to select, at random, a place to begin interviewing. Interviewers would then be required to walk in a randomly determined direction and conduct an interview at every *n*th home,

depending on how many interviews were required within that designated PSU. The use of such detailed sampling procedure ensures that no systematic bias affects the sampling procedure. Once the survey was completed, the 3 500 respondents were compared with existing population statistics and the data was weighted according to any discrepancies. Thus, a combination of careful sample selection and post sample analysis correction yields a sample that accurately represents the nation of South Africa.

To further guard against potential bias, surveyors were required to follow strict rules once a household had been selected for inclusion in the sample. They were first required to list all household members over the age of 18. From this list the surveyor chose the actual person to be interviewed according to a pre-established random schedule. Once the person was selected, the interviewer made three attempts to schedule an interview. Only after three failed attempts was the interviewer allowed to replace that person following the same procedure at a predetermined randomly selected replacement household.

The logistics of preparing a nationwide survey of this type are formidable. For example, it was necessary to have the survey instrument translated from English into the other 10 official languages, and then back-translated into English using the "double-blind" method in order to ensure that translations reliably communicated the intended meanings. Also, co-ethnic interviewers had to be found so that respondents would be interviewed by someone who could speak their language fluently.

The survey instrument was crafted so that respondents were required to answer questions in a standard format, but one that offered them a range of response alternatives. The interviewer, therefore, was required to pose a set of predetermined questions in a predetermined order. The order of questions was carefully determined to proceed from simple to more complex questions, and from non-personal to more socially sensitive questions.

For each question, respondents answered according to clearly defined categories. In the simplest case the answer categories might be a simple "yes" or "no", but in most cases respondents could express their attitude using a scale with a variety of subtle category differences. For example, respondents might be asked to indicate their attitude toward undocumented immigrants by answering on an 11-point scale ranging from a very negative attitude (the zero end of the scale) to a more neutral attitude (the five position on the scale) to an extremely positive attitude (at the 10 position on the scale). Such a format allows for aggregate comparisons and statistical analysis.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRATION POLICY

In the light of the increased reports of anti-foreigner intolerance in South Africa, and the visibility of the debate in the news media, one could be forgiven for believing that immigration has become “public issue number one”. Interestingly, the results of the present survey (coupled with a series of public opinion polls conducted since 1994) reveal that in comparison to other national problems, migrancy and immigration issues hardly figure at all.

When asked about the three most important problems facing South Africa not one person mentioned migration or immigration as an important issue in September-October 1994. This figure increased to 3.4% in September-November 1995 but decreased to 1% in the current SAMP survey (June-July 1997).³ Clearly, immigration and migration are not the national obsessions they are often made out to be. Although it is essential to develop new, more pragmatic and realistic immigration legislation in South Africa as soon as possible, policy-makers need not respond hastily to populist pressures in an area as delicate as immigration reform. Moreover, policy-makers can feel some latitude to articulate a policy that is both rational and just.

To assess the preferences of South Africans in terms of immigration policy, and to be able to compare their attitudes to people in other societies, care was taken to use a question that has been asked in several other international surveys. The SAMP survey therefore asked what the government ought to do about people from other countries coming to South Africa, and offered respondents a range of options along a continuum from a totally open-door policy, to a flexible policy based on labour requirements, to a rigid system of quotas, to a total ban on immigration.

It is clear from the results presented in Table 1 that South Africans are not open toward newcomers with only 6% of South Africans favouring a totally open immigration policy. Seventeen percent support a flexible policy of tying immigration to the availability of jobs while almost half (45%) support placing strict limits on migrants and immigrants. Finally, an extraordinary one quarter (25%) of the public want a total prohibition on migration to the country.

There are three important features in these attitudes toward immigration policy. First, opposition to immigration and foreign citizens is widespread. There are some noticeable differences among racial groups, with Africans and Asians adopting the most restrictive attitudes (Table 1), but support for a restrictionist approach is shared by all South Africans.⁴ Importantly, these attitudes cut across income groups, age groups and groups with very different levels of education.⁵

TABLE 1: South African attitudes to immigration					
How about people from other countries coming to South Africa? Which one of the following do you think the government should do? (%)	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
Let anyone in who wants to enter	6	7	2	3	3
Let people come as long as there are jobs available	17	15	26	21	9
Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here	45	42	49	57	46
Prohibit people coming from other countries	25	28	8	9	33
Don't know	7	8	6	11	9
N=3 500. Note: Figures in tables may not add to 100% due to rounding					

Second, public opinion has actually become more hostile over the past two years. Preference for a flexible policy tied to the availability of jobs has decreased by eight percentage points (from 27% to 19%) and support for total prohibition has increased by nine percentage points (from 16% to 25%). While any interpretation of these trends must remain speculative, one important factor may be the relentless (and largely negative) coverage of cross-border migration issues in the South African media — particularly as it relates to undocumented, “illegal” migration.⁶

Third, South Africans are more hostile to immigration than citizens of any other country for which comparable data is available, including traditional immigrant-receiving countries. Table 2 compares South African responses to different policy alternatives with reactions to identical questions in two separate surveys: a 1997 survey conducted by SAMP in Zimbabwe, Lesotho and southern Mozambique, and the 1995 World Values Survey for which data from 18 countries are now available. What emerges from the data is that South Africans endorse very restrictive immigration alternatives by international standards.

It is worth noting, however, that there are few countries in which the majority of the population view immigration positively. Even in countries like Canada and the United States — both with a long history of immigration and significant public education programmes emphasizing the positive role that immigrants play in social, political and economic life — anti-immigration attitudes are prevalent. Nevertheless, it is clear that the negative attitudinal profile in South Africa represents a major challenge for policy-makers and for those responsible for public education on migration issues.

Having established extreme opposition to open immigration policies,

TABLE 2: South African attitudes to immigration in international perspective					
	Let anyone in who wants to enter (%)	Let people come as long as there are jobs available (%)	Place strict limits on the numbers of foreigners who can come here (%)	Prohibit people coming here from other countries (%)	Don't know (%)
South Africa (1997)	6	17	45	25	7
South Africa (1995)	6	29	49	16	0
Russia (1995)	6	48	28	18	2
Philippines (1995)	9	16	63	12	0
Peru (1995)	8	39	40	12	4
China (1995)	7	33	40	11	9
Argentina (1995)	8	49	31	9	3
United States (1995)	5	32	53	8	0
Finland (1995)	8	30	51	8	3
Taiwan (1995)	2	16	30	7	45
Japan (1995)	4	41	40	6	8
Chile (1995)	10	50	31	7	1
Nigeria (1995)	18	37	40	6	3
Spain (1995)	14	55	23	4	3
Zimbabwe (1997)	16	30	48	4	0
Australia (1995)	5	52	39	3	2
Southern Mozambique (1997)	12	61	23	2	0
Sweden (1995)	8	32	55	1	3
Lesotho (1997)	61	23	12	3	1

Source: 1995 World Values Study; 1997 SAMP Three Nations Migration Study

we turn our attention to more specific policy issues that have been, and are currently, the focus of much debate. Specifically, we profile respondents' attitudes toward (a) the practice of deporting undocumented immigrants, (b) the idea of legalising the presence of non-citizens currently living in South Africa, (c) whether there are any categories of immigrant and migrant who deserve preferential treatment, and finally, (d) what rights immigrants should enjoy.

ATTITUDES TOWARD DEPORTATION

The South African government has been actively involved in the deportation of foreigners living in the country “illegally.” Since 1990, over a million people have been removed, over 99% to SADC states and 82% to Mozambique. Policy-makers, however, disagree about the effectiveness of this policy.⁷ For example, the Deputy President feels that deportations are a waste of resources while the Minister of Home Affairs seems to favour increasing resources and policing for deportation and border control.⁸ Regardless, thousands of undocumented migrants are routinely, and summarily, deported to their home countries every week.

The results of the present survey with respect to deportation are consistent with peoples’ attitudes toward general immigration policy. Very few South Africans (4%) oppose the practice of returning people to their home country. Just under half of South Africans support an expulsion policy restricted to people involved in “illegal” activity: either for being here without official permission (32%) or for those who have committed crimes (17%). Another 17% go further and support a policy of returning those, such as the unemployed, who are not contributing to the economy. Finally, one in five (21%) favour returning all non-citizens (Table 3).

Thus, South Africans take a consistently restrictive position once again. With only minor differences, these attitudes are widely shared across race, income, education and age. It should be noted, however, that the questionnaire did not ask people for their attitudes about specific

TABLE 3: Attitudes towards deportation					
How about people from other countries who are presently living in South Africa? Who do you think the government should send back to their own countries? (%)	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
The government should not send back any people to their own countries	4	5	1	3	9
Only those who have committed crimes	17	17	9	23	24
Only those who are here without the permission of the SA government	32	32	29	36	34
Only those who are not contributing to the economy	17	14	36	17	13
All of these people	21	24	18	8	14
Don't know	8	8	7	13	6
N=3 500					

methods of deportation. It is certainly possible that if South Africans were more aware of the absence of due process and reported human rights abuses that often take place during deportation their responses may have been different.⁹

ATTITUDES TOWARD LEGALISING THE STATUS OF UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

Related to deportation is the question of what to do with people living in the country without proper documentation. One option pursued by the South African government in 1995-96 is to grant permanent residence to those who have been living or working for a period of time in the country.

Two such offers have already been made and a third is pending. The first was for contract miners who had worked for at least 10 years in a South African mine. The second was for any SADC citizen who had been living in South Africa, and/or had a South African partner/child, and/or had been working in South Africa for a period of five straight years, and had no criminal record. A third amnesty for Mozambican refugees still living in South Africa is planned for 1999.

It is unclear how many South Africans are aware of these “amnesties,” and it was beyond the scope of the survey to explain the process in detail to each respondent. Instead, we simply asked people for their opinions about amnesty/legalisation as a policy option in the future. Only 14% of South Africans support legalisation as a general principle, while 59% are opposed. Seventeen percent neither supported or opposed the idea (possibly because they did not know what an amnesty entailed) and 9% said they did not know or had not heard enough to have an opinion on the matter (Table 4). While all groups oppose amnesty, many more Africans support the idea (18%) than representatives of other racial groups (4% to 6%).

Another aspect of immigration policy under debate is whether the

Would you support or oppose the government offering amnesty to all foreigners now living illegally inside the country? (%)	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
Support	14	18	3	6	4
Neither support nor oppose	17	18	13	14	24
Oppose	59	55	76	58	64
Don't know/haven't heard enough	9	9	8	22	8
N=3 500					

government should adopt a selective immigration policy that chooses people by country of origin and/or skills. The survey clearly showed that South Africans do not hold an undifferentiated view of potential immigrants.

Many people would be willing to give preferential treatment to particular categories of migrant or immigrant. For example, a substantial proportion would support preferences for economic reasons: 63% support special preferences for skilled workers, 50% support a policy favouring those with mining contracts. Only one-third (34%) support preferences for refugees, however. In terms of place of origin, 31% support preferences for Europeans/North Americans, 27% for Southern Africans and 22% for Africans from outside of the region.

There were marked differences between African and white respondents on this question and the results are outlined in Table 5. Africans stand out in two respects. First, they are much more willing than other South Africans to make exceptions for miners and those with needed skills. Second, they are no more likely to support preferences for African foreigners than their white counterparts. Thus, African respondents thus appear more attuned to the needs of the South African economy when it comes to distinguishing non-citizens from one another.

Whites clearly distinguish between non-citizens on the basis of where they come from. Specifically, whites are much less willing to countenance a policy that favours African immigrants over those from Europe or North America. Whites are also much less willing to accept refugees (most of whom would presumably be black).

What is perhaps more surprising is that black South Africans also favour immigrants from Europe and North America over those from Southern Africa and the rest of Africa. The reasons for this are unclear but must relate to the perception that African immigrants are a drain on the country and compete directly for scarce resources. This sentiment is arguably less pronounced when white immigrants are considered.

ATTITUDES TOWARD RIGHTS FOR RESIDENT NON-CITIZENS

A final aspect of immigration policy concerns the legal rights of resident non-citizens. The South African Constitution grants certain categories of rights to all residents of the country. Moreover, the South African Constitutional Court has recently applied the equality provisions of the Constitution to foreign citizens, striking down regulations that prohibited foreign citizens from being permanently employed as teachers in state schools. It is therefore of interest to see what ordinary people feel about the question of rights for non-citizens from elsewhere in Africa.

Despite steps designed to offer rights to established immigrants, the

TABLE 5: Attitudes towards preferential treatment for certain immigrants

With regard to letting people into SA and returning them to their own country, should the government give any special preferences to: _____?	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
	(% who said "yes")				
Those with needed skills	61	54	33	37	39
Those with contracts to work on the mines	49	54	33	37	39
Refugees who are escaping war and famine in other countries	33	36	15	39	23
Europeans/North Americans	30	34	24	18	15
Southern African	27	33	9	17	14
Other Africans	22	27	8	11	12
N=3 500					

attitudes of South Africans remain negative. Large percentages of respondents in the survey oppose offering African non-citizens the same access to a house as a South African (54%), the right to vote (53%) or the right to citizenship (44%). Opinion is more divided with respect to granting foreign children equal access to education (39% opposed but 37% supported) and equal access to medical service (39% opposed and 38% supported). And while all South Africans stand in clear opposition to granting rights to non-citizens, whites, and to a lesser extent Asians, are consistently less willing to grant legal and socio-economic rights, as the results in Table 6 illustrate.

POTENTIAL ANTI-MIGRANT BEHAVIOUR

Thus far, the results have detailed a strong strain of opposition to immigration. It is relevant, therefore, to ask how South Africans are likely to treat foreigners living in the country, whether intolerant attitudes will lead to anti-social behaviour. More specifically, to what extent might opposition to immigration turn into actual anti-immigrant action?

The news media has been filled with reports from various places around the country where foreign citizens have been the target of a range of different forms of abuse at the hands of South Africans. It is unclear how widespread this abuse is, and one must be careful not to exaggerate this violence because of sensational reporting in the press. But there is nonetheless a disturbing level of violence aimed specifically at foreign nationals.¹¹ The killings of two Senegalese and a Mozambican by a mob of angry South Africans at a train station in Johannesburg is a tragic example.

TABLE 6: Attitudes towards rights for immigrants

What about government policy toward people from other African countries who are in SA? Would you support or oppose giving them: _____ ?	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
	(% "Opposed")				
The same access to medical service as South Africans	39	34	61	41	38
The same access to a house as South Africans	54	50	69	59	75
The same access to education as South Africans	39	36	57	38	44
The right to vote in SA elections	53	49	74	58	53
The right to become a citizen of SA	44	44	51	34	47

When asked “How likely is it that you would take part in action to prevent people who have come to South Africa from other countries in Southern Africa” from engaging in a variety of activities, approximately one-third of South Africans said that it was “likely” or “very likely” (Table 7). Thirty-four percent said it was likely they would try and prevent a foreign national from moving into their neighbourhood or operating a business in their community, and 31% and 32% respectively said it was likely that they would try to prevent foreign nationals from sitting in a class with their child or becoming a co-worker.

Four points need to be elaborated with respect to Table 7. First, it must be remembered that attitudes do not always translate into action. These responses represent predispositions to act in a certain way not intentions. The fact that a respondent says he or she would act does not mean they would actually do it when the time came, or when they had met the actual person against whom this act would be taken (ie once the abstract concept of “foreigner” had been concretised into an actual, and perhaps likeable, person).

Second, people may never be in the position to act on these attitudes in this manner. Third, the percentages reported in Table 7 are all slightly lower than the proportions of respondents who said that they were willing to take part in similar actions against their “least liked group” within South Africa. In other words, if someone identified Afrikaners or Muslims as the “group” that they least liked in the country, they were slightly more willing to take action against that group than against foreign nationals. This is not a particularly encouraging finding, given the high levels of violence in South Africa today, but it does place peoples’ attitudes towards foreigners in context.

TABLE 7: Likelihood of taking action against foreigners					
How likely is it that you would take part in	Total	African	White	Coloured	Asian
action to prevent people who have come					
to SA from other countries in Southern	(% who said "likely" or "very likely")				
Africa from doing the following activities ...?					
Moving into your neighbourhood	34	36	32	27	25
Operating a business in your area	34	35	32	26	23
Sitting in class with your child	31	34	27	22	17
Becoming one of your co-workers	32	35	27	24	18
N=3 500					

Finally, two-thirds of respondents either had no opinion on the issue or said that it was "unlikely" that they would ever take action against non-citizens, suggesting that a clear majority of respondents would not take part in such activities. Nevertheless, the fact that a third of South Africans say that it is likely that they would take some kind of collective action against foreigners is a real cause for concern.

In a more direct question, respondents were asked what they would do if they found out about someone who was in South Africa "illegally". Almost half our sample (48%) said they would do nothing. Thirty-five percent said they would report them to the police and another 12% said they would report them to their local community association or street committee. Only 3% said they would get people together to force them to leave.

Once again, the responses to this series of questions were remarkably similar across racial groups. Africans are the most willing to take part in some form of collective action against foreigners, but they are less likely to report an "illegal" migrant to the police. Even more interesting is the fact that women are just as likely to take action against foreign nationals as are men, and people with university degrees are just as likely (and in some cases more likely) to participate in these activities as South Africans with little or no formal education. Thus, willingness to take action against non-citizens is virtually uniform across all relevant demographic groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on these results, we now have a clear profile of peoples' attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Simply stated, South Africans do not like foreign nationals regardless of where they come from and they prefer highly restrictive immigration policies. Consistent with this negative profile are responses to specific immigration issues. In general, people support deportation, they do not endorse legalisation, and are particular about who they would let into the country and offering rights to non-citizens.

Despite this consistently negative profile, policy-makers and public educators can still count on some latent support should they decide to instigate a campaign designed to create a more favourable immigration climate. On each of the questions about immigration policy there was a sizeable minority who expressed relatively positive attitudes toward more open policy alternatives and who expressed a neutral and/or positive attitude towards immigrants themselves. While clearly in the minority, these respondents nevertheless provide a base from which to launch a public education campaign to make people more aware of the contributions that foreign nationals make to South Africa and/or to stimulate a more informed debate on immigration issues.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS IMMIGRANTS

We now turn to an assessment of what South Africans think about (im)migrants themselves and where these attitudes might come from. Due to space restrictions we limit ourselves here to a discussion of African and white respondents only.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MIGRANTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES

Respondents were asked about their attitudes toward people living in South Africa from neighbouring countries in Southern Africa, West Africa, Europe and North America, as well as people who have come to South Africa without proper documentation (so-called “illegal immigrants”). They indicated their attitudes toward these different groups on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (completely unfavourable) to 10 (completely favourable), with 5 representing the neutral point. The mean scores for these questions are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 clearly shows that all non-citizens, regardless of their country of origin or legal status, fall into the “unfavourable” category. Foreign citizens who are in the country “illegally” are certainly the most disliked and people from Europe and North America are the least disliked. But the general dislike is widespread and very strong.

This dislike of non-citizens is all the more apparent when set against attitudes towards other groups within the country. As Figure 1 suggests, whites and Africans rank their own racial group, and even each others racial group, much more favourably than they rank the various categories of foreigners (with the notable exception of people from Europe

and North America). In this respect, whites and Africans are strikingly similar in their disapproval of non-South Africans.

The key difference between white and African respondents is that whites rank foreigners from Europe and North America — most of whom would presumably be white — higher than they rank their fellow Africans. Africans, on the other hand, rank white South Africans higher than they rank any category of foreigner, including those from neighbouring Southern Africa countries, the vast majority of whom would be African. We will return to this point in more detail later in the report.

PERCEIVED IMPACTS/THREATS OF FOREIGNERS

Most South Africans clearly believe that immigration has negative consequences for the social and economic health of the country. Only 18% of respondents agreed when asked if they thought immigrants make South African society stronger (60% disagreed), only 30% agreed that immigrants bring needed skills to the country (43% disagreed) and only 20% agreed that immigrants make the economy stronger (59% disagreed) (Table 8). Finally, 61% feel that immigrants put additional strains on the country’s resources (19% disagreed). Here too, there are significant racial differences, with whites having particularly negative attitudes and Africans being much more willing to agree that immigrants bring needed skills to the country.

We also asked people what, if anything, they had to fear from Southern Africans living in South Africa. In order to determine these perceptions of threat, respondents were given the freedom to reveal their beliefs without any suggestions from the interviewer. Responses were then categorised by grouping together those spontaneously generated beliefs that referred to the same theme but with slightly different wording. Table 9 lists all threats cited by at least 1% of the total sample.

Significantly, a quarter of the sample (24%) said that they had “nothing” to fear from foreigners living in South Africa. Even more striking is the strong consensus about what there is to fear. Forty-eight percent of the total sample mentioned crime, 37% mentioned threats to jobs or the economy in general and 29% cited diseases (predominantly

TABLE 8: Perceived impacts of immigration

Do you agree or disagree that when people come here from other African countries. They... (%)	Total sample	Africans	Whites
Make SA society stronger (% who “disagree”)	59	57	76
Make SA economy stronger (% who “disagree”)	58	56	75
Bring needed skills to SA (% who “disagree”)	42	38	65
Put a strain on SA resources (% who “agree”)	61	57	72

TABLE 9: Perceived threats from immigration			
What if anything, do you have to fear from people living here from neighbouring countries?	Total sample	Africans	Whites
	% of sample that cited each item		
Nothing to fear	24	26	24
Threat to jobs and economy	37	37	56
Criminal threat	48	40	45
Threat of disease	29	30	16
Over-population	9	9	8
Make housing shortages worse	3	3	6
Threat to land	1	2	2
Cultural differences	1	2	0
N = 3 500. Note: Columns add to more than 100% due to the fact that respondents gave more than one response.			

HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases). In contrast, only 3% mentioned competition for housing, 2% a fear of their land or the country being overrun, and 1% cultural or linguistic differences. The repetitive character of the spontaneous responses suggests that there are widespread stereotypes about the negative impact of newcomers.

Whites are much more likely to cite fears about jobs and the economy and crime, and are less prone to mention fears that newcomers might import disease. In contrast, African respondents are less concerned about the economic and criminal impact of newcomers and more concerned about health issues.

Nevertheless, the slightly different profile for African and white respondents is overshadowed by an overriding consensus. Issues of the economy, crime and health clearly represent widely held beliefs that are salient for all South Africans, and these beliefs are decidedly negative. Thus, South Africans not only hold negative attitudes toward foreigners, they also have a readily accessible set of stereotypes with which to justify or rationalise their negative attitudes. Like any stereotype, its legitimacy is less important than the fact that most people believe it to be true.

CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS

Are the negative attitudes, and in particular the well defined stereotypes, that South Africans have of foreigners based on personal experience and interaction with foreigners? In order to address this question, respondents were asked to indicate the extent of their contact with people from neighbouring countries (the group of non-citizens who are clearly in South Africa in greatest numbers). The results are presented in Table 10.

The results indicate that respondents' attitudes and stereotypes are

not based on direct personal experience. Only 4% of the national sample reported that they had “a great deal” of contact with people from Southern Africa. Another 15% said they had “some” contact, but most claimed to have had “hardly any” contact (20%) or absolutely “no” contact (60%). Perhaps surprisingly, Africans are less likely to have contact (20%) than white respondents (25%).

In general it seems safe to conclude that South Africans’ attitudes toward and stereotypes about foreigners are not the result of direct personal experience. This has important implications for public policy and education. Most important, the lack of first-hand contact suggests that the widely shared stereotypes concerning negative impacts on the economy, crime and health, are being propagated through indirect means (eg media, schools, interpersonal communications). Thus, it may be possible to counteract such stereotypes with a well devised public education programme.

XENOPHOBIA

Since 1994 there has been a growing tendency in popular and academic writing to use the term “xenophobia” to explain opposition to immigrants and immigration in South Africa. Unfortunately, the term has been used very loosely and is rarely defined. A recent HSRC/Institute for Security Studies report, for example, suggests that there are “high levels of xenophobia” in South Africa based on the fact that 65% of a national sample said that “illegal immigration” was a “bad thing” or a “very bad thing”.¹² This is an extremely narrow use of the term xenophobia and does little to help our understanding of the extent and causes of the phenomenon.

The conventional dictionary definition of xenophobia is “a dislike of foreigners”. Using this definition it is clear from our earlier discussion that South Africans are indeed extremely xenophobic (see Figure 1 on page 17). The fact that South Africans rank their own and other racial

TABLE 10: Personal contact with non-citizens

Do you have a great deal, some, hardly any or no contact with people from neighbouring countries in Southern Africa? (%)	Total sample	Africans	Whites
A great deal	4	4	5
Some	15	16	20
Hardly any	20	21	17
None	60	58	57
Don't know	1	1	1

groups in the country significantly higher than they rank every category of foreigner, suggests that South Africans do indeed dislike foreigners simply because they are foreigners.

However, the etymological roots of xenophobia are actually much broader, referring to a “fear of the unknown” or anything that is “different”. It is to this broader definition of xenophobia that we must turn in an attempt to more systematically gauge South Africans’ supposed intolerance for people, ideas and cultures that are different from their own and to try to relate this intolerance to their attitudes towards immigration.

We began by asking a series of eight questions that measure peoples’ “acceptance of diversity”. In these questions respondents were asked whether it was easy for them to like and trust people with different ideas or people from different cultures, whether exposure to different cultures was enriching, whether it was useful to listen to differing viewpoints, and whether different viewpoints should be allowed. These items are listed in Table 11. The percentage indicates the proportion of respondents who gave an answer that demonstrates an acceptance of diversity and the rows are arranged in descending order.

The results were somewhat surprising. Contrary to what one might expect given the emotionally charged and disjointed history of social interaction within South Africa, South Africans tend to accept diversity and difference. As many as 85% of Africans and 88% of whites, for

	African	White
One should listen to various points of view before making a judgement about what’s going on (agree)	85%	88%
You can usually accept people from other cultures, even when they are very different to you (agree)	72	63
Exposure to different cultures enriches one’s life (agree)	67	61
Is it easy for you to like people who have different views to your own (agree)	66	64
Listening to viewpoints which differ from your own is usually a waste of time (disagree)	52	57
A group should not allow members to hold different opinions to the group (disagree)	40	60
You dislike having to interact with people who are different to you (disagree)	47	55
You can’t trust a person if they come from a different culture to you (disagree)	41	49
N=3 184		

example, agreed that “One should listen to various points of view before making a judgement about what’s going on”. Not all of the results from Table 11 are this positive, however, and one does not need a survey of this type to know that South Africans of all racial groups still exhibit a great deal of discrimination towards one another. Nevertheless, the results are largely in the positive range and are encouraging for those who advocate tolerance and understanding in the new South Africa. Most important for our discussion here is that “xenophobia” in South Africa is not an all-encompassing fear of anything new or different. South Africans are at least modestly accepting of diversity and difference.

Further evidence of some acceptance of diversity amongst South Africans was found in response to a question about whether people from other countries in Southern Africa could be “part of the South African nation”. A majority of respondents (57%) said that people from the region could not readily integrate into the country and become full citizens, but a sizeable minority (42%) said that people from the region could integrate (see Table 12), suggesting once again that South Africans are not blindly opposed to immigration and newcomers in the country.

Xenophobia, therefore, is a more complex phenomenon than it is typically portrayed in the media and in many academic and policy papers. Researchers and policy-makers would do well to try to better understand the dynamics behind this dislike for foreigners while at the same time trying to build on the apparent willingness of South Africans to accept a certain degree of new ideas, people and cultures.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICAN ATTITUDES TO IMMIGRATION

Having detailed the attitudes of South Africans towards immigrants and immigration, we now turn to the question of why they seem so hostile. Is it simply because they dislike foreigners? Is racism a factor? Is it the perceived threats that create such a strong preference for a restrictive immigration policy?

As noted in the introduction, a full analysis of these questions would require a broader contextual historical survey of the impact of discourses of nation-building and national identity, the isolationism of the late apartheid era, the ideology of cultural superiority of white South Africa under apartheid, and so on. The analysis here is limited to an exploration of statistical associations between opposition to immigration and other attitudinal responses from the survey. Nevertheless, the data do

offer some important insights into the relationships between opposition to immigration and other attitudinal characteristics and will hopefully contribute towards a better understanding of what can be done to address these attitudes.

We began the analysis by running a series of bivariate correlations examining the relationship between immigration policy preferences (from Table 1) and a range of possible explanatory variables (eg racism). We then ran a series of multiple regression analyses to determine which factors have the most direct impact on South Africans' opposition to immigration. We conducted separate multiple regression analyses for Africans and whites to see if the reasons for opposition differed. This proved to be the case.

EXPLAINING AFRICAN OPPOSITION TO IMMIGRATION

A large number of the factors that might be expected to explain African attitudes to immigration are indeed correlated with it at the bivariate level (eg a dislike of foreigners). Most of these relationships disappear once we statistically control for the simultaneous impact of other variables with multiple regression analysis. In the end, a relatively limited number of factors explain a large proportion of African opposition to immigration ($R^2 = .24$). The following list outlines the most important associations (in order of statistical significance):¹³

BELIEFS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS' SOCIAL IMPACT.

Those who disagreed with the statement that newcomers "make our society stronger" were much more likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = .21$). This item had the strongest multivariate correlation in the final model.

BELIEFS ABOUT INTEGRATION

Those who believe that newcomers are unable to become "part of South Africa" were much more likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = -.16$).

PERCEIVED JOB THREAT

Those who spontaneously said in open-ended questions that immigrants are a threat to jobs and the economy in South Africa were more likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = .13$).

DISLIKE OF BLACK FOREIGNERS

Those who showed a strong dislike of African immigrants (a composite

What about people from other countries in Southern Africa who move here. Can they become part of the SA nation?	Total sample	Africans	Whites
Yes	42	41	39
No	57	58	61

measure of ratings of West Africans and Southern Africans) were significantly more likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = .12$).

BELIEFS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS' NEGATIVE ECONOMIC IMPACT

The more a person is inclined to think that migrants are a drag on the South African economy (ie. those who said "disagree" to the last three questions in Table 8) the more likely he or she is to oppose immigration ($\beta = .11$)

PERCEIVED HEALTH THREATS

Those who spontaneously volunteered in open-ended questions that they fear immigrants spread or carry disease are more likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = .09$).

CONTACT WITH FOREIGNERS

Although very few South Africans said they have a lot of contact with non-citizens, those who did have a lot of contact were much less likely to oppose immigration ($\beta = -.09$).

ACCEPTANCE OF DIVERSITY

The more one is able to accept diversity in ideas and culture the less likely one is to oppose immigration ($\beta = .08$).

African opposition to immigration is therefore primarily a function of beliefs about what immigrants do while they are in the country with respect to health and social interaction, as well as a simple dislike of (black) immigrants. In other words, what seems to characterise African opposition to immigration is a perceived threat to society posed by a group of disliked people who are deemed to be unassimilable into South Africa.

The particular dislike of African non-citizens is linked to a broader racialism: African South Africans who hold racist views of whites, coloureds and Asians within the country are also more likely to dislike African foreigners ($\beta = -.28$). This result is interesting because it is counter-intuitive. One might think that the more that African South

Africans reject white, Asian and coloured South Africans, the more they would embrace fellow Africans from outside the country due to some kind of pan-Africanist, pro-black sentiment. But the data reveal that the relationship is in precisely the opposite direction.

As one might expect, the fear of job loss and a perceived negative impact on the economy also have strong associational linkages to opposition to immigration. Dissatisfaction with immigration is therefore linked to beliefs about the impact of immigrants on the economy, the belief that they "work for less" and "steal" jobs, houses and other unentitled benefits.

EXPLAINING WHITE OPPOSITION TO IMMIGRATION

As was the case for Africans, most of the bivariate correlations between the various potential explanatory factors and immigration policy for whites disappear once we control for simultaneous interrelationships among all the factors. Only three variables retain an independent impact on opposition to immigration:

PREFERENCE FOR WHITE IMMIGRANTS

Whites generally have low opinions of black newcomers and "illegal immigrants" (most of whom would presumably be black). Yet, like or dislike of black foreigners does not, in statistical terms, determine their opposition to immigration.

Views of black foreigners are certainly linked to opposition to immigration, but this bivariate relationship only explains 14% of the variance on views on immigration. The more significant factor is whether they happen to like white foreigners. In other words, if white South Africans like white foreigners they support immigration, but if they dislike white foreigners they oppose immigration. Whether or not white South Africans have favourable views of white newcomers (ie. people from North America or Europe) is therefore the single strongest predictor of whites' opposition to immigration (beta = .23).

RELATIVE DEPRIVATION

South African whites who believe that their self-defined group is doing worse economically and politically than other groups in the country are significantly more likely to oppose immigration (beta = .22).

BELIEFS ABOUT INTEGRATION

The less whites believe that Southern African immigrants can become

members of the South African nation, the more likely they are to oppose immigration (beta = $-.19$).

White opposition to immigration would appear to be a function of beliefs about assimilation, a dislike of (white) foreigners, and perceived economic deprivation. Thus, as we saw with African respondents, while whites often complain that foreigners take jobs and cause crime, the impact of these beliefs on opposition to immigration or dislike of foreigners is glaringly absent. Economic fears of immigration are related to a person's own economic situation rather than to the perceived impacts of immigration on the economy.

And, as we also saw with African respondents, those whites who are negative towards other racial groups in South Africa are less likely to have positive views of foreign whites, not more. Racists are not looking outwards for racial allies. Racists dislike foreigners even if they are racially similar.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The policy and public education implications of this research are considerable. On the public education front, we have uncovered an attitudinal profile that will not be easily overcome. South Africans are unlikely to be quickly persuaded to support immigration, or view immigrants more favourably, simply by providing more accurate and more positive information about what immigrants actually do, or about their true impact on the country. They may not be persuaded at all if that education effort focuses only on economic data. As we have seen, it is quite likely that public outcry over immigration's effect on unemployment and housing may simply cover a more affective dislike of foreigners. People may be moved to more sympathetic positions if they could be convinced that immigrants pose less of a public health threat, but that would depend in part on what the actual health statistics have to say.

Nevertheless, creating a better public awareness about the actual experiences and intentions of non-citizens living in South Africa (permanently and temporarily) must be a policy priority of the South African government. If South Africa is to adequately address xenophobia in the country and develop a more pragmatic approach to cross-border movements in the region it is essential to have public support - or at least a softening of public opposition - for these policies on the ground.

Parallel surveys of migrants by SAMP have clearly demonstrated that the large majority of people who come to South Africa have no desire to stay in the country permanently. Migrants from other African countries generally contribute to the social and economic fabric of the

country and are responsible, relatively well-educated and law-abiding citizens of their own nations.

Information like this could help to ameliorate the anxiety that South Africans appear to have about the impacts of trying to accommodate culturally different and "unassimilable" people. The fact that a sizeable minority of respondents (42%) felt that Africans from neighbouring countries could in fact integrate into South Africa, and 23% would like to see more open or flexible immigration policies, are grounds for optimism in this respect.

The lack of contact that South Africans have with immigrants is also noteworthy, particularly when those few who have had contact are significantly less inclined to oppose immigration. One response to this would be to try and engineer more direct and positive contact between citizens and non-citizens (eg. community forums, sporting events) and to try to build a more personal public awareness of the roles, interests and plans of migrants.

Finally, public education should also concentrate on raising the curtain of ignorance that South Africans have about people from neighbouring countries: not just information about what people from other African countries do while they are in South Africa, but more and better information about "Africa" itself.

1. Sally Peberdy and Jonathan Crush, "Rooted in Racism: The Origins of the Aliens Control Act" In J. Crush, ed., *Beyond Control: Immigration and Human Rights in a Democratic South Africa* (Cape Town, 1998), pp. 18-36.
2. David McDonald, John Gay, Lovemore Zinyama, Robert Mattes, and Fion de Vletter, "Challenging Xenophobia: Myths and Realities About Cross-border Migration in Southern Africa", *SAMP Migration Policy Series*, No. 7, Cape Town, 1998.
3. Helen Taylor and Robert Mattes, "The Public Agenda: Public Priorities for Government Action, 1994-1997", *POS Reports*, Idasa, Cape Town, 1998.
4. We have opted to use racial categories as the primary variable in the data Tables in this section of the report not because race itself determines attitudes but because race is so closely correlated to other important socio-economic variables in South Africa (eg. income, education, living conditions) and continues to play an important part in any socio-economic analysis of the country.
5. A study by the HSRC and the Institute for Security Studies found that what they called "anti-immigrant sentiment" increased with education. However, this finding was based on a survey item that asked people simply whether they thought "illegal immigration was a bad thing for the country". Respondents were not given an opportunity to offer an opinion on different policy options and the results are therefore non-comparable to the SAMP data (see Danie Schutte, Mark Shaw and Hussein Solomon, "Public Attitudes Regarding Undocumented Migration and Policing/Crime", *Africa Security Review* 6(4), 1994).
6. The role of the media in the development of a negative discourse on immigrants and immigration is clearly an important issue . A more thorough discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this report. A more detailed analysis of this issue will be the subject of a forthcoming SAMP report on print media in Southern Africa.
7. Luis Covane, Julio Macaringue and Jonathan Crush, "The Revolving Door", *Crossings*.
8. Ann Bernstein, Lawrence Schlemmer and Charles Simkins, "Migrants: Is 'Get Tough' the Way?" *Cape Times* 27 October 1997, p.6.
9. See, for example, the Human Rights Watch report *Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees in South Africa*, released in March 1998.
10. The term "illegal" is pejorative and implies criminal activity and is therefore no longer used by progressive academics and NGOs or by the United Nations. The term was used in this survey simply

because it is the most commonly used term in the public discourse about “undocumented migrants” and respondents would be familiar with it. Nevertheless, it is possible that the term itself may have contributed to people’s negative responses to the question.

11. For an overview of violence perpetrated against foreign hawkers and traders in the Johannesburg area see Sally Peberdy and Jonathan Crush, “Trading Places: Cross-Border Traders and the South African Informal Sector”. For a discussion of two communities with large numbers of foreign nationals where violence has occurred in the past but is not no longer a major issue see David McDonald (1998), “Left Out in the Cold?: Housing and Immigration in the New South Africa”.
12. Schutte, Shaw and Solomon (1994) “Public Attitudes Regarding Undocumented Migration and Policing/Crime”, *Africa Security Review* 6(4).
13. It should also be noted that these factors had impacts on support for immigration that were independent of one another. For example, among those who equally dislike immigrants, those who are dissatisfied with economic conditions are still more likely to oppose immigration.

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PUBLISHED BY:

SOUTHERN AFRICAN MIGRATION PROJECT
6 Spin Street
Church Square
Cape Town 8001



PARTNERS:

Idasa (South Africa)
Queen's University (Canada)
Sechaba Consultants (Lesotho)
ARPAC (Mozambique)
University of Zimbabwe

This project is funded by the
Canadian government through the
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).