

## Are South Africans on the move?

*Emigration is a frequent topic among white South Africans. But is mass emigration taking place? If so, where are the people going? These are the questions Scott Firsing asks in this article.*

A Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) **report** released in July shows 95,158 whites of the estimated 4.53-million in the country have left South Africa since 2011. This contributed to a slight decrease in the overall white population compared to the **2011 census data** that showed 4.59-million white people in South Africa, amounting to 8.9% of the country's population at that time. 36% of those were English speakers and 61% were Afrikaans.

Population group	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	% of total population	Number	% of total population	Number	% of total population
African	21 653 500	80,6	22 574 500	80,4	44 228 000	80,5
Coloured	2 334 800	8,7	2 498 100	8,9	4 832 900	8,8
Indian/Asian	688 100	2,6	673 900	2,4	1 362 000	2,5
White	2 201 900	8,2	2 332 200	8,3	4 534 000	8,3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26 878 300</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>28 078 700</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>54 956 900</b>	<b>100,0</b>

*Source: Statistics South Africa Report, July 2015*

The same 2015 Stats SA report shows Africans comprising of 80.5% (44.228 million) of the South African population, a 1.3% (3.228 million) increase from the 2011 figures of 79.2% (41.00 million). Coloureds comprise of 8.8% (4 832 900) of the population in 2015, compared to 8.9% (4 615 401). Lastly, Indians and Asians are estimated to be 2.5% (1 362 000) of the population, meaning no percentage change, 2.5%, but with slightly higher numbers (1 286 930).

Whether African, coloured, white, Indian or Asian, many South African citizens and permanent residents are fed up with the plethora of problems facing the country, including electricity outages, increasing **violent crime**, **massive unemployment**, frequent violent **labour strikes**, rampant **corruption** and a general atmosphere of **lawlessness**. I was one of them and after living in South Africa since 2005, my South African wife, our two young daughters and I recently decided to relocate to the US.

Now teaching at a university in America, I told my class about hundreds of discussions I have had about emigration with friends, real estate agents and colleagues from all walks of life. I threw in some survey data. First National Bank's latest estate agent **survey** reports an average of 3.8% of total selling is now due to emigration.

My two brothers-in-law, one skilled in engineering and the other in information technology security, have left South Africa for Australia and England. I explained that two of my close friends are leaving with their families this week for Australia and England. In fact dozens of my friends and family members have left or are leaving.

My wife's family is white and of British descent. A number of my close South African friends have a similar background. The majority has emigrated to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US. A small number are working in other countries such as Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.



## White emigration from South Africa

Period	Number of people
1986-2000	304112
2001-2005	133782
2006-2011	112046
2011-2015	95185
2015-2019	?

Source: Statistics SA

### 'Big five' immigration destinations

- There has been a recent drop in South African 'settler arrivals' to Australia. Between July 2014 and May 2015 (no June data), 2,384 South Africans entered Australia with plans to settle permanently. This is consistent with the July 2013-June 2014 numbers, which show 2,533 South Africans entering. But the last two years show a substantial decrease from the 3,274 South African settlers that arrived between the same months in 2012-13.
- Canadian immigration statistics show a consistent pattern of South Africans emigrating there. In 2005, 988 South Africans emigrated to Canada. In 2014, this number was 1,001. In the years in between, there are small fluctuations between 900 and 1,300 South Africans arriving each year.
- New Zealand is a different story. There has been a sharp increase in South Africans emigrating over recent years. In the year ending July 2013, 1,191 South Africans arrived to stay. This increased to 1,519 in 2014 and to 2,036 in 2015.
- The US paints an interesting picture, with tremendous long-term growth. Between 1980 and 1989, 15,505 South Africans were granted permanent residency. This rose from 21,964 for 1990-99 to 32,221 between 2000 and 2009. More recently, there have been high but consistent figures of between 2,700 and 3,000 South Africans moving to the US each year (2,705 in 2010, 2,754 in 2011, 2,960 in 2012 and 2,693 in 2013).
- Due to ancestry, a number of white South Africans having dual citizenship, and a change in immigration attitude and policy, South African emigration to the UK is a little more complex. A high of 9,385 South Africans emigrated to the UK in 2004. This dropped to 7,532 in 2010 to 3,213 in 2014.

There are some interesting facts within these UK data sets. For example, 2012 saw a notable difference with South Africans ranked second for permission to stay permanently.

According to 2011 UK census data, the total number of South Africans living in the UK rose to 191,000 in the period between 2001 and 2011. This equates to 3% of the UK's foreign-born population or the seventh-most-reported country of origin for non-UK-born usual residents. This is a total increase of 60,000 South Africans compared to the 2001 census.

There has been a dramatic decline in the total immigration to the UK. The government granted 104,690 people the right to stay permanently in the year ending June 2015, compared to 241,586 in the year ending September 2010.

Examining these five countries' most recent data, it becomes clear that between 10,000-20,000 South Africans emigrate to those specific countries each year. There is a large increase in South Africans emigrating to New Zealand. There is a consistent number of South Africans immigrating to North America.

But there has been a sharp decrease in numbers emigrating to the UK and a slight decrease to Australia, although it appears the latter has stabilised to around 2,500 South Africans per year. Nevertheless, closer examination of factors like government immigration policies including skills required and comparisons to a country's economic data will prove extremely useful. ^

## South Africans might say they are leaving, but will they actually leave?

We cannot see into the future but we do have data to show more South Africans are at least planning to emigrate. Inquiries to Australia have grown **seven-fold** since May last year. Chris Watters, a lawyer working on immigration and emigration issues, **recently said**: “Until the end of last year (2014), we would get an emigration inquiry about once every two weeks. Now we are fielding about nine or 10 emigration inquiries a day.”

One issue raised by my friends and family still in South Africa is the cost of emigration. For example, to apply to migrate to Australia without the assistance of an emigration company under one of their regional migration schemes, bringing along your spouse and two kids **costs R70,000 cash** (US\$5,318). This does not guarantee your visa will be rewarded.

There are still so many questions rather than answers. Expect 2016 studies analysing 2015 emigration data to show a clearer picture of the situation.

### Looking to the future

More comprehensive research into South African migration needs to be done. Is it only white South Africans leaving or planning to leave? What are their skills? What about the issue of dual citizenship?

Why are so many migrants still coming to South Africa? What is the economic and societal impact of this emigration and immigration? What are we to make of the claims by the **Homecoming Revolution** that more skilled professionals are coming to South Africa than are leaving?

My hypothesis is that my generation, particularly South Africans with young children with specific skills and/or monetary resources, are not willing to wait around to see if the situation in South Africa improves. It's too risky. In some cases South Africans don't care if the grass is greener on the other side. They just want out.

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**The views expressed in this post are those of the authors and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.**

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