

Xenophobic Violence and the African Continental Free Trade Area: Examining Threats to Regional Integration and the Realisation of Agenda 2063

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Abstract: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents one of Africa's most ambitious integration projects, designed to promote intra-African trade, economic cooperation, free movement of goods and services, and the broader aspirations of the African Union's Agenda 2063. However, the persistent occurrence of xenophobic violence in several African countries poses a significant threat to the successful implementation of this continental initiative. This paper examines how xenophobic attacks undermine regional integration by disrupting cross-border trade, discouraging labor mobility, weakening investor confidence, and eroding the spirit of Pan-Africanism upon which AfCFTA is founded. Using a qualitative and analytical approach, the study draws on secondary data from scholarly literature, African Union policy documents, reports of regional organizations, and documented cases of xenophobic violence, particularly in South Africa and other African states. The paper argues that xenophobia violates the principles of African solidarity and threatens the economic, political, and social objectives of Agenda 2063 by creating insecurity and mistrust among African citizens. It concludes that achieving the goals of AfCFTA requires stronger continental mechanisms for conflict prevention, human rights protection, public enlightenment, and the promotion of inclusive governance and Pan-African values. The study contributes to contemporary discourse on African integration by highlighting xenophobic violence as a critical obstacle to sustainable regional development.

Keywords: Xenophobia, AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, Regional Integration, Pan-Africanism, Intra-African Trade.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of African unity and continental integration has remained one of the most enduring aspirations of the African continent since the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and its transformation into the African Union (AU) in 2002. The philosophy of Pan-Africanism is at the heart of this vision. It says that African people should work together, be self-reliant, work together economically, and become politically integrated in order to achieve sustainable development and global relevance. This continental ambition The adoption of Agenda 2063 consolidated this continental ambition. with the adoption of Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, a strategic development framework adopted by the African Union in 2015 to guide Africa's socio-economic and political transformation over a fifty-year period. Agenda 2063 envisions an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa where the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital serves as a foundation for inclusive development,

democratic governance, and shared prosperity (African Union, 2015).

A major institutional mechanism established to translate this vision into reality is the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The AfCFTA Agreement, which entered into force on 30 May 2019, is regarded as one of the most significant economic integration initiatives in Africa's post-independence history. It seeks to establish a single continental market for goods and services, facilitate investment, enhance industrialisation, eliminate trade barriers, and promote the movement of business people across member states. By connecting African economies into a unified market, AfCFTA is expected to increase intra-African trade, strengthen regional value chains, generate employment opportunities, and improve Africa's competitiveness within the global trading system (African Union, 2018). The agreement also represents a practical instrument for achieving several aspirations of Agenda 2063, particularly those relating to regional integration,

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economic transformation, and sustainable development (Aniche, 2023).

The establishment of AfCFTA reflects a recognition that Africa's economic fragmentation has historically limited development despite the continent's enormous human and natural resources. For decades, African economies have traded more extensively with markets outside the continent than with neighbouring African countries, largely because of colonial trade structures, inadequate transport infrastructure, tariff and non-tariff barriers, weak industrial capacity, and restrictive border regimes. AfCFTA was therefore conceived as a framework for reversing this pattern by encouraging continental production networks, expanding market access, and reducing dependence on external markets. The agreement promises significant opportunities for small and medium enterprises, women traders, youth entrepreneurs, and investors by creating a larger and more integrated African marketplace (African Union, 2018; Aniche, 2023).

However, economic integration cannot be sustained solely through trade agreements and institutional frameworks. Successful regional integration depends equally on peaceful coexistence, social trust, human security, and the willingness of African societies to embrace continental citizenship. The ideals of AfCFTA assume that African citizens can live, work, trade, and invest across borders without discrimination or violence. This expectation corresponds with Aspiration 2 of Agenda 2063, which emphasises an integrated continent founded on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance (African Union, 2015). Consequently, any form of violence directed against African migrants constitutes not only a humanitarian concern but also a direct challenge to the continent's integration agenda.

Xenophobic violence has emerged as one of the most serious obstacles to achieving these aspirations. Xenophobia refers to fear, prejudice, hostility, or violence directed against individuals because they are perceived as foreigners or outsiders. Within the African context, xenophobia is particularly paradoxical because it frequently targets fellow Africans who migrate across borders in search of employment, education, business opportunities, or safety. Instead of reinforcing Pan-African solidarity, xenophobic violence reflects growing tensions surrounding citizenship, identity, economic competition, and access to public resources. Adeola (2020) argues that xenophobia undermines the African Union's commitment to human mobility, regional cooperation, and the protection of migrants' rights across the continent.

South Africa provides the most prominent example of recurring xenophobic violence in Africa. Since the democratic transition in 1994, the country has experienced repeated outbreaks of violence against

African migrants from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Somalia, Ethiopia, Malawi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The attacks recorded in 2008, 2015, 2019, and subsequent years resulted in deaths, injuries, widespread displacement, destruction of businesses, and diplomatic tensions with other African states. Gordon (2020) notes that xenophobic violence in South Africa has evolved into recurring hate crimes characterised by organised attacks against migrants and their economic activities, exposing weaknesses in state responses and social cohesion.

Scholars have identified numerous factors responsible for xenophobic violence in Africa. These include unemployment, poverty, inequality, inadequate service delivery, political manipulation, nationalism, identity politics, and competition over economic opportunities within informal and formal sectors. Kerr, Durrheim, and Dixon (2019) argue that xenophobic violence in South Africa is deeply connected to discourses of belonging and liberation, where migrants are portrayed as competitors for scarce resources and as outsiders who threaten national identity. Such narratives reinforce exclusionary attitudes that contradict the principles of African unity and regional cooperation.

Other African countries have also reported xenophobic sentiments, where migrants face discrimination, harassment, forced evictions, and restrictions on economic participation. These developments demonstrate that xenophobia is not merely a domestic security issue but a continental challenge with implications for migration governance, diplomacy, and regional integration. Ochonu (2020) conceptualises this phenomenon as Afrophobia, highlighting the contradiction between Africa's Pan-African rhetoric and the violent exclusion of fellow Africans from the continent. According to the author, Afrophobic violence weakens the moral foundation of continental integration by replacing solidarity with suspicion and exclusion.

The implications of xenophobic violence extend directly to the implementation of AfCFTA. The agreement depends on increased cross-border mobility of traders, entrepreneurs, professionals, transport operators, and investors. Xenophobic attacks disrupt commercial activities, destroy investments, interrupt supply chains, discourage labour mobility, and reduce confidence in regional markets. Informal cross-border traders—many of whom contribute significantly to intra-African commerce—become particularly vulnerable when violence and discrimination threaten their safety and livelihoods. Such insecurity undermines the objectives of AfCFTA by discouraging participation in continental trade and weakening confidence in regional economic institutions (Aniche, 2023; Gordon, 2020).

Furthermore, Agenda 2063 identifies peace, security, democratic governance, human rights, youth empowerment, and inclusive development as

interconnected aspirations that must be achieved simultaneously. Xenophobic violence threatens these aspirations by fostering insecurity, weakening social cohesion, damaging diplomatic relations among African states, and eroding citizens' confidence in continental institutions. The African Union has consistently promoted initiatives such as the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and the "Silencing the Guns" initiative to strengthen mobility and peace across the continent. Nevertheless, recurring xenophobic attacks demonstrate a significant gap between continental policy commitments and realities experienced by African migrants.

Despite the growing body of literature on AfCFTA and xenophobic violence, much of the existing scholarship has examined these issues separately. Studies on AfCFTA have largely focused on trade liberalisation, industrial development, institutional implementation, and economic opportunities, while research on xenophobia has concentrated primarily on its causes, manifestations, and human rights implications, particularly in South Africa (Aniche, 2023; Gordon, 2020; Kerr *et al.*, 2019).

Comparatively limited attention Scholars have given comparatively limited attention to how xenophobic violence threatens AfCFTA's operational success given to the ways xenophobic violence threatens the operational success of AfCFTA and undermines the broader aspirations of Agenda 2063. This gap is significant because continental economic integration cannot succeed where fear, discrimination, and violence discourage Africans from engaging in cross-border trade and mobility.

The persistence of xenophobic violence therefore presents a fundamental contradiction to Africa's integration agenda. While AfCFTA promotes openness, cooperation, and continental citizenship, xenophobia reinforces exclusion, mistrust, and fragmentation. If left unaddressed, xenophobic violence may weaken intra-African trade, discourage investment, reduce labour mobility, generate diplomatic conflicts, and ultimately hinder the realisation of Agenda 2063's vision of an integrated and prosperous Africa.

Against this background, this study examines xenophobic violence as a major threat to the African Continental Free Trade Area and the realisation of Agenda 2063. The study is guided by the following objectives: to examine the nature and causes of xenophobic violence within the African context; to analyse the objectives of AfCFTA and its role in promoting regional integration under Agenda 2063; to investigate the effects of xenophobic violence on intra-African trade, migration, investment, and labour mobility; to evaluate the implications of xenophobic violence for the implementation of Agenda 2063; and to recommend strategies for strengthening Pan-African

solidarity and regional integration. Correspondingly, the study addresses the following research questions: What are the major causes and characteristics of xenophobic violence in Africa? How does AfCFTA promote regional integration and the aspirations of Agenda 2063? In what ways does xenophobic violence affect intra-African trade, migration, investment, and labour mobility? What implications does xenophobic violence have for the successful implementation of Agenda 2063? What measures can African institutions and member states adopt to reduce xenophobia and strengthen continental integration?

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research approach based on the analysis of peer-reviewed academic literature, African Union policy documents, AfCFTA legal instruments, and credible reports on migration, regional integration, and xenophobic violence. The study is significant because it contributes to contemporary debates on African integration by demonstrating that the success of AfCFTA depends not only on economic policies and institutional reforms but also on addressing xenophobic violence as a critical human security and regional governance challenge. By linking xenophobia with continental economic integration and Agenda 2063, the paper provides scholarly and policy insights into the socio-political conditions necessary for achieving a peaceful, integrated, and economically resilient Africa.

XENOPHOBIA, AfCFTA, AND THE FRAMEWORK OF AGENDA 2063

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) represents the most ambitious continental economic integration project in Africa's history, while Agenda 2063 provides the broader political, economic, and developmental blueprint for achieving an integrated and prosperous Africa. Both initiatives are grounded in the ideals of Pan-Africanism, which envision a continent united through shared identity, cooperation, and collective prosperity. However, the persistence of xenophobic violence across several African states has increasingly challenged these aspirations by fostering hostility towards structural governance failures; communities often redirect their anger towards fellow Africans and undermine regional mobility, trade, and social cohesion. This chapter reviews scholarly literature on xenophobia, Pan-Africanism, regional integration, AfCFTA, and Agenda 2063. It further examines theoretical perspectives that explain both the promise of African integration and the persistence of xenophobic violence within African societies.

Xenophobia: Concept, Nature, and Dimensions in Africa

Xenophobia generally refers to fear, prejudice, hostility, or violence directed against individuals because they are perceived as foreigners or outsiders. The term originates from the Greek words 'xenos' (foreigner) and 'phobos' (fear), but contemporary scholarship views

xenophobia as a broader social and political phenomenon involving discrimination, exclusion, and violence against non-citizens or migrants. Within the African context, xenophobia assumes a unique character because the victims are predominantly Africans migrating to other African countries rather than migrants from outside the continent.

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) conceptualises xenophobia as attitudes, prejudices, and behaviours that reject or exclude individuals perceived as foreign to the national community. Similarly, the African Union recognises xenophobia as a violation of human rights and a threat to continental integration, as it undermines the freedom of movement and peaceful coexistence among African citizens. Xenophobia, therefore, extends beyond individual prejudice to include institutional discrimination, hate speech, economic exclusion, political mobilisation, and organised violence against migrants.

Scholars distinguish xenophobia from racism and ethnic discrimination. Racism is primarily based on perceived racial differences, while ethnic discrimination targets people belonging to different ethnic groups within the same country. Xenophobia, by contrast, is directed against individuals identified as foreign nationals irrespective of shared race or ethnicity. In Africa, this distinction is significant because xenophobic attacks frequently occur between Black Africans who share similar racial identities but possess different national citizenships.

Adeola (2020) argues that xenophobia in Africa has evolved into a governance challenge because it affects migration policy, regional diplomacy, human rights protection, and economic integration. Rather than viewing migrants as contributors to development, xenophobic narratives often portray them as competitors for employment, housing, healthcare, education, and informal business opportunities. Such narratives create fertile conditions for discrimination and violence against migrant communities.

The nature of xenophobia in Africa may be categorised into several dimensions. The first is economic xenophobia, where migrants are blamed for unemployment, wage reductions, and competition in informal markets. The second is political xenophobia, where political actors mobilise anti-immigrant sentiments to gain electoral support or divert attention from governance failures. The third is social xenophobia, manifested through stereotypes, hate speech, exclusion from communities, and discrimination in public services. Finally, violent xenophobia involves physical attacks, killings, destruction of businesses, looting of property, forced displacement, and targeted intimidation of migrant populations.

South Africa remains the most documented example of violent xenophobia in Africa. The attacks of May 2008 resulted in the deaths of more than sixty people, the displacement of approximately 100,000 migrants, and widespread destruction of homes and businesses owned by African migrants. Subsequent attacks occurred in 2015, 2019, and later years in provinces including Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, targeting Nigerian, Zimbabwean, Somali, Ethiopian, Mozambican, and Congolese migrants. Businesses owned by migrants were looted or burned, while thousands sought refuge in temporary camps.

The attacks generated diplomatic tensions between South Africa and several African countries. Nigeria recalled its ambassador for consultations in 2019 after attacks on Nigerian-owned businesses and retaliatory protests occurred against South African commercial interests in Lagos and Abuja. These incidents illustrated how xenophobic violence transcends domestic politics and affects interstate relations within Africa.

Beyond South Africa, xenophobic sentiments have appeared in Ghana, Angola, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Libya, where migrants have faced expulsions, harassment, arbitrary arrests, or restrictions on economic activities. The expulsion of West African migrants from Angola in 2018 and tensions surrounding foreign traders in Ghana's retail sector demonstrate that xenophobia manifests differently across African regions but consistently threatens regional cooperation.

Causes of Xenophobic Violence in African Societies

The causes of xenophobic violence in Africa. Xenophobic violence in Africa arises from a complex interplay of multidimensional causes, extending beyond mere economic competition. and cannot be reduced to economic competition alone. Existing literature identifies structural, political, historical, social, and psychological factors that interact to produce hostility towards migrants.

Economic Competition and Relative Deprivation

One of the most frequently cited explanations for xenophobic violence is competition over scarce economic resources. High unemployment, poverty, inequality, inadequate housing, and limited public services create conditions where migrants become convenient scapegoats for broader socio-economic frustrations.

South Africa illustrates this relationship clearly. Despite being Africa's most industrialised economy, the country continues to experience exceptionally high unemployment and persistent socio-economic inequalities inherited from apartheid. Migrants often participate in informal businesses, construction, domestic work, transportation, and small-scale retail sectors. Local perceptions that migrants accept lower

wages or dominate informal markets contribute to resentment in economically marginalised communities.

Relative deprivation theory explains this phenomenon by suggesting that individuals become hostile when they perceive others as unfairly benefiting from limited opportunities. Rather than directing frustrations towards structural governance failures, communities often redirect anger towards visible migrant populations.

Nationalism and Citizenship Politics

National identity plays an important role in shaping xenophobic attitudes. In several African states, citizenship has become associated with exclusive access to economic opportunities and state resources. Political narratives that distinguish between "citizens" and "foreigners" reinforce exclusionary identities.

Kerr, Durrheim, and Dixon (2019) argue that xenophobic violence in South Africa is deeply embedded in liberation discourse, where some citizens perceive migrants as beneficiaries of freedoms achieved through South Africans' anti-apartheid struggle. Consequently, migrants are portrayed as outsiders who have not contributed to national liberation yet compete for its economic benefits.

Political Manipulation and Governance Failure

Political leaders sometimes exploit anti-immigrant sentiments to redirect public dissatisfaction away from governance failures. During periods of economic hardship, corruption scandals, or electoral competition, migrants become convenient targets within populist political rhetoric.

Scholars argue that weak governance contributes indirectly to xenophobia because failures in service delivery, housing provision, policing, and employment policies increase competition among vulnerable populations. Where governments fail to address structural inequalities, migrants become symbolic representations of broader socio-economic crises.

Historical and Colonial Legacies

Colonialism fragmented African societies through artificial borders that divided ethnic groups and institutionalised territorial identities. Although Pan-Africanism sought to overcome colonial divisions, colonial boundaries continue to shape citizenship laws, migration policies, and national identities.

The persistence of colonial borders has created tensions between continental identity and national sovereignty. Migrants crossing borders often encounter bureaucratic restrictions and social hostility despite historical cultural connections that predate colonial state formation.

Stereotyping, Hate Speech, and Media Representation

Negative stereotypes contribute significantly to xenophobic violence. Migrants are frequently accused of criminality, drug trafficking, prostitution, job theft, or spreading diseases without empirical evidence. Media reporting and social media misinformation often amplify these stereotypes.

During the 2019 xenophobic attacks in South Africa, inflammatory social media campaigns portrayed migrants as responsible for crime and unemployment. Such narratives increased public hostility and facilitated collective violence against migrant communities.

Weak Regional Migration Governance

The African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons remains ratified by relatively few member states, limiting its continental implementation despite its importance for Agenda 2063. Limited coordination among immigration authorities, inadequate protection for migrants, and weak enforcement of regional protocols contribute to migrants' vulnerability.

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Pan-Africanism as the Ideological Foundation of African Integration

Pan-Africanism is both a political philosophy and a continental movement advocating unity, solidarity, and collective advancement among Africans worldwide. Emerging during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through intellectuals and activists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and George Padmore, Pan-Africanism challenged colonial domination, racial oppression, and political fragmentation.

The philosophy evolved from anti-colonial liberation into a broader framework for continental development and integration. It emphasises African ownership of development, collective security, economic cooperation, cultural renaissance, and shared identity.

Agenda 2063 explicitly identifies Pan-Africanism as the ideological foundation for Africa's future development trajectory. The framework seeks to revive continental solidarity while promoting political unity, economic integration, cultural identity, democratic governance, and peaceful coexistence. The African Union states that Agenda 2063 is a concrete manifestation of the Pan-African drive for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress, and collective prosperity.

Pan-Africanism therefore provides legitimacy for initiatives including AfCFTA, the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), the African Passport, the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, and continental infrastructure programmes.

Scholars increasingly distinguish between symbolic Pan-Africanism and institutional Pan-Africanism. Symbolic Pan-Africanism promotes shared identity and solidarity, while institutional Pan-Africanism translates these ideals into continental policies and institutions. According to recent scholarship in African Affairs, Pan-Africanism functions simultaneously as an inspirational vision and as a legitimising framework for African Union integration policies.

However, critics argue that institutional Pan-Africanism often faces implementation deficits due to limited political commitment, resource constraints, and competing national interests.

Regional Integration in Africa: Concept and Evolution

Regional integration refers to the process through which neighbouring states cooperate politically, economically, socially, and legally to achieve shared developmental objectives. It involves reducing barriers between states while establishing common institutions, policies, and markets.

African regional integration predates AfCFTA. The Lagos Plan of Action (1980) encouraged economic cooperation through regional communities. The Abuja Treaty (1991) established the African Economic Community and envisioned a gradual transition from Regional Economic Communities (RECs) towards a continental common market and eventually an economic union.

Eight regional economic communities recognised by the African Union became the building blocks for continental integration:

Regional Economic Community	Sub-region	Integration Achievements
ECOWAS	West Africa	Free movement protocol, common passport, customs cooperation.
SADC	Southern Africa	Trade liberalisation and infrastructure cooperation.
EAC	East Africa	Customs union, common market, monetary union roadmap.
COMESA	Eastern and Southern Africa	Free trade area and investment cooperation.
ECCAS	Central Africa	Economic cooperation and peace initiatives.
AMU	North Africa	Regional economic coordination.
IGAD	Horn of Africa	Conflict resolution, trade, migration cooperation.
CEN-SAD	Sahel-Saharan Region	Economic and security cooperation.

These regional blocs provided institutional experience later incorporated into AfCFTA.

Regional integration in Africa has gradually expanded from trade cooperation towards infrastructure development, migration governance, peacebuilding, and continental citizenship. Nevertheless, overlapping memberships, policy inconsistencies, infrastructure deficits, insecurity, and protectionist policies continue to slow integration.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA): Objectives, Principles, and Institutional Framework

The African Continental Free Trade Area is a legally binding agreement establishing a continent-wide free trade area among African Union member states. It became operational in 2021 following ratification by the required number of member states.

Objectives of AfCFTA

The agreement pursues several strategic objectives.

Objective	Explanation
Expand intra-African trade	Reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers to increase trade among African countries.
Create a single continental market	Integrate national markets into one African marketplace for goods and services.
Promote industrialisation	Develop regional value chains and manufacturing capacity.
Facilitate investment	Create predictable continental investment rules.
Improve competitiveness	Strengthen Africa's bargaining position in global trade.
Support sustainable development	Promote inclusive growth, employment, and poverty reduction.

AfCFTA is expected to substantially increase intra-African trade by removing tariffs on the majority of goods traded within Africa and reducing non-tariff barriers.

Core Principles of AfCFTA

The agreement is guided by several foundational principles:

- Sovereign equality of member states.
- Gradual liberalisation of trade.

- Variable geometry allowing different implementation speeds.
- Transparency and cooperation.
- Most-Favoured Nation treatment among members.
- National treatment for imported goods.
- Special and differential treatment for least-developed countries.

- Consensus-based decision-making.

These principles seek to balance continental integration with national developmental realities.

Institutional Structure of AfCFTA

AfCFTA possesses a multilayered governance framework.

Institution	Responsibility
Assembly of Heads of State and Government	Highest decision-making authority.
Council of Ministers	Provides political oversight and implementation guidance.
Committee of Senior Trade Officials	Coordinates technical implementation.
AfCFTA Secretariat (Accra, Ghana)	Administrative coordination and monitoring.
Dispute Settlement Body	Resolves trade disputes among member states.

The Secretariat coordinates implementation while member states domesticate AfCFTA provisions through national legislation.

AfCFTA and Free Movement

AfCFTA complements—not replaces—the African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. Although trade liberalisation can occur without complete free movement, successful continental markets require mobility for traders, investors, professionals, transport operators, and entrepreneurs.

Aniche (2023) argues that AfCFTA should be understood within a broader continental integration architecture that includes free movement, infrastructure development, and institutional harmonisation under Agenda 2063.

Agenda 2063: Vision, Aspirations, and Continental Framework

Agenda 2063 is Africa's fifty-year strategic development blueprint adopted during the African Union's Golden Jubilee celebrations.

The framework emerged after African leaders concluded that political independence alone was insufficient without economic transformation, peace, governance reforms, technological development, and continental integration.

The African Union describes Agenda 2063 as Africa's master plan for inclusive and sustainable development and identifies it as the principal framework through which Pan-African ideals will be implemented.

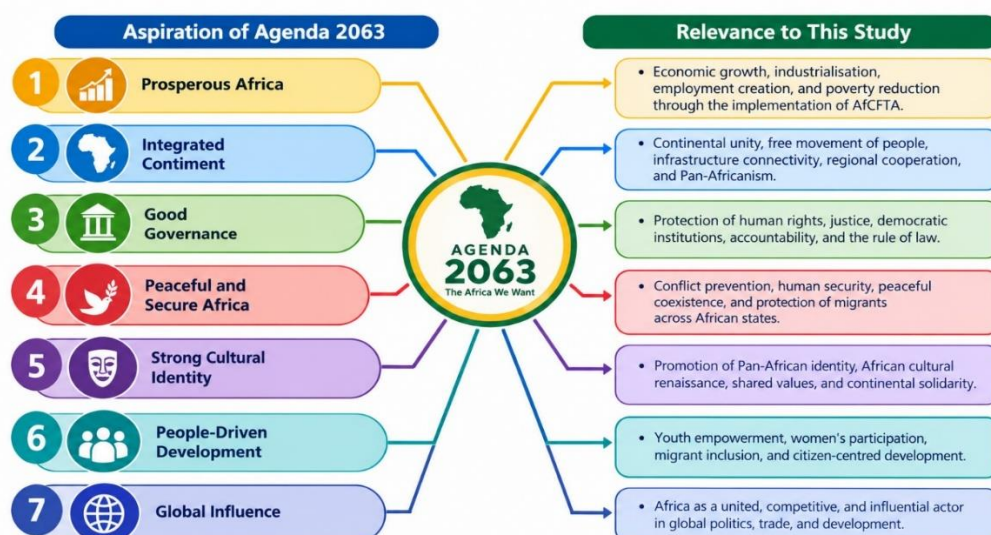


Figure 1: Agenda 2063 Aspirations and Their Relevance to the Study

Source: Adapted from the African Union's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want (African Union, 2015). For this study, Aspirations 2 (Integrated Continent), 3 (Good Governance), 4 (Peaceful and Secure Africa), and 5 (Strong Cultural Identity) are particularly relevant because xenophobic violence directly threatens continental unity, human rights, peace, and the shared Pan-African identity required for the effective implementation of AfCFTA and Agenda 2063.

Flagship Projects Supporting Integration

Agenda 2063 includes flagship programmes intended to accelerate integration:

Flagship Programme	Purpose
African Continental Free Trade Area	Create a continental single market.
Single African Air Transport Market	Liberalise African aviation.
Integrated High-Speed Rail Network	Improve continental connectivity.
African Passport and Free Movement	Facilitate visa-free travel across Africa.
Silencing the Guns Initiative	Promote peace and conflict prevention.
Pan-African E-Network	Improve digital connectivity.

These flagship projects demonstrate that AfCFTA functions within a broader integration ecosystem rather than as an isolated trade agreement.

The AfCFTA operates within the framework of Agenda 2063.

Scholars generally agree that AfCFTA operationalises the economic integration aspirations of Agenda 2063. Rather than being an independent trade agreement, it is embedded within the AU's long-term continental development strategy.

Aniche (2023) proposes an Afro-realist perspective, arguing that AfCFTA's success depends on

balancing optimism about integration with realism regarding political, institutional, and socio-economic constraints. According to this perspective, AfCFTA possesses enormous developmental potential but requires effective implementation, institutional coordination, political commitment, and conflict management to achieve Agenda 2063's aspirations.

The relationship between AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 can be understood through four interconnected dimensions that demonstrate how the continental trade agreement supports the broader objectives of Africa's long-term development and integration agenda.

Agenda 2063 Goal	AfCFTA Contribution
Economic Transformation	Continental market integration, manufacturing, value chains.
Regional Integration	Trade liberalisation and market harmonisation.
Infrastructure Connectivity	Supports transport corridors and logistics networks.
Human Mobility	Facilitates movement of business persons and professionals.

However, xenophobic violence threatens each of these dimensions by discouraging mobility, weakening trust, disrupting commerce, and undermining Pan-African identity.

Xenophobia as a Threat to AfCFTA and Agenda 2063

The literature increasingly identifies xenophobia as a structural obstacle to continental integration rather than merely a domestic security problem.

Threat to Free Movement of Persons

AfCFTA requires mobility for traders, entrepreneurs, transport workers, investors, and professionals. Xenophobic violence creates fear that discourages migration and cross-border business activities.

For example, Somali-owned retail shops in South Africa's townships experienced repeated attacks between 2008 and 2022, forcing many entrepreneurs to relocate or abandon businesses despite contributing significantly to local economies.

Threat to Intra-African Trade

Informal cross-border trade contributes billions of dollars annually to African economies and employs

millions of Africans, especially women. Xenophobic violence disrupts supply chains and destroys commercial investments.

Nigerian-owned businesses targeted during South Africa's 2019 attacks included supermarkets, restaurants, telecommunications outlets, and retail stores. The destruction affected bilateral commercial relations and investor confidence.

Threat to Pan-African Identity

Agenda 2063 promotes a shared African identity. Xenophobic violence instead reinforces exclusive nationalism and citizenship-based exclusion.

Scholars argue that Afrophobia weakens Pan-African consciousness because it transforms fellow Africans into perceived economic and social enemies rather than development partners.

Threat to Peace and Human Security

Agenda 2063's "Silencing the Guns" initiative seeks peaceful conflict prevention across Africa. Xenophobic violence contributes to insecurity, displacement, diplomatic disputes, and retaliatory violence.

The African Union has repeatedly condemned xenophobic attacks because they threaten continental peacebuilding objectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Regional Integration Theory and Social Identity Theory because they collectively explain the institutional aspirations of AfCFTA and the socio-psychological drivers of xenophobic violence.

Regional Integration Theory

Regional integration theory explains how sovereign states voluntarily cooperate politically and economically to achieve shared objectives through common institutions, policies, and markets. The theory was developed largely through the works of Ernst Haas and later integration scholars examining European regionalism, but it has been adapted to African regional integration.

Neo-functionalism argues that cooperation in one sector creates pressure for integration in related sectors through a process known as "spillover." Applied to Africa, economic integration through AfCFTA should encourage cooperation in infrastructure, migration, investment, labor mobility, security, and governance.

Liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes that integration succeeds when member states perceive mutual economic benefits and maintain political commitment to implementing agreements.

African regional integration differs from European integration because its Pan-African ideology, post-colonial development objectives, and shared historical experiences also drive African regional integration, distinguishing it from European integration. African regional integration is driven by Pan-African ideology, post-colonial development objectives, and shared historical experiences. The Abuja Treaty and Agenda 2063 therefore combine economic integration with political solidarity and developmental transformation.

The theory is relevant because AfCFTA seeks to transform fragmented national markets into an integrated continental economy. Xenophobic violence interrupts this integration process by weakening cooperation among member states and reducing confidence in continental mobility.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, explains how individuals categorize themselves into social groups and develop positive identities based on group membership.

The theory identifies three major processes:

1. Social categorization—people classify others into "ingroup" and "outgroup."
2. Social identification—individuals adopt identities associated with their group.
3. Social comparison—groups compare themselves with outsiders, often producing prejudice or discrimination.

Within African societies, national citizenship frequently becomes the dominant ingroup identity, while migrants become the outgroup. Economic hardship, political rhetoric, and historical grievances intensify these boundaries.

Social Identity Theory explains why communities experiencing poverty or unemployment may perceive migrants as threats despite shared African identity. It also explains how stereotypes and misinformation contribute to collective violence.

The theory is particularly relevant because it reveals the contradiction between continental Pan-African identity promoted by Agenda 2063 and exclusive national identities driving xenophobic violence.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that xenophobia negatively affects migration governance, regional integration, and continental development.

Gordon (2020) found that xenophobic hate crimes in South Africa have become recurrent rather than exceptional events, exposing migrants to persistent insecurity and weakening social cohesion.

Kerr et al. (2019) concluded that xenophobic violence Kerr et al. (2019) found that narratives of citizenship, liberation politics, and exclusionary nationalism, rather than purely economic competition, sustain xenophobic violence. by narratives of citizenship, liberation politics, and exclusionary nationalism, rather than purely economic competition. Kerr et al. (2019) concluded that xenophobic violence is sustained by narratives of citizenship, liberation politics, and exclusionary nationalism, rather than by purely economic competition. Kerr et al. (2019) found that narratives of citizenship, liberation politics, and exclusionary nationalism, rather than purely economic competition, sustain xenophobic violence.

Adeola (2020) argued that the African Union requires stronger institutional mechanisms for preventing xenophobia through human rights enforcement, migration governance, and civic education.

Aniche (2023) demonstrated that AfCFTA possesses strong potential for achieving Agenda 2063 but warned that institutional weaknesses, political

commitment deficits, and socio-political challenges—including insecurity—could undermine implementation.

Collectively, these studies reveal an important research gap. While substantial literature exists on AfCFTA and xenophobia independently, fewer studies examine how xenophobic violence directly threatens the implementation of AfCFTA and the realization of Agenda 2063 through its effects on mobility, trade, investment, diplomacy, and Pan-African identity. This chapter therefore establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundation for analyzing xenophobic violence as a major obstacle to continental integration in subsequent sections of the study.

XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE AS A THREAT TO REGIONAL INTEGRATION

Regional integration in Africa is founded on the assumption that African states and their citizens can cooperate across borders through trade, migration, investment, and shared political institutions. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) embodies this assumption by promoting the free movement of goods, services, capital, and business individuals as a pathway to economic transformation under Agenda 2063. However, the persistence of xenophobic violence across parts of the continent exposes a profound contradiction between Africa's integration agenda and the lived realities of African migrants. Xenophobic violence undermines social trust, weakens economic cooperation, disrupts cross-border commerce, and creates diplomatic tensions that threaten the operationalisation of AfCFTA. This chapter analyses major incidents of xenophobic violence in Africa, with particular emphasis on South Africa, while examining their implications for migration, trade, labour mobility, tourism, diplomatic relations, and continental integration.

Xenophobic Violence and the Crisis of African Regional Integration

The African Union defines regional integration as a multidimensional process involving economic cooperation, political coordination, social inclusion, and the free movement of African citizens across national boundaries. Agenda 2063 identifies continental integration as one of its central aspirations, envisioning "an integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance" (African Union, 2015). Similarly, the AfCFTA Agreement seeks to eliminate tariff and non-tariff barriers while creating a single continental market capable of increasing intra-African trade and strengthening regional value chains (African Union, 2018).

However, integration requires more than legal agreements. It depends on mutual trust, security, and acceptance of African migrants within host societies. Xenophobic violence directly undermines these conditions by creating fear and insecurity among migrants, discouraging cross-border mobility, and weakening confidence in regional institutions. Gordon (2020) argues that xenophobic violence in South Africa has evolved into recurring hate crimes that threaten both migrants' security and broader social cohesion. Rather than isolated criminal acts, these attacks reflect structural tensions surrounding citizenship, belonging, and access to economic opportunities.

The contradiction between AfCFTA's integration objectives and recurring xenophobic attacks reveals an important implementation challenge. While continental institutions promote openness and cooperation, nationalist exclusion and anti-immigrant violence continue to shape everyday experiences of African migrants. This disconnect raises questions about the sustainability of regional integration when continental citizenship remains contested at the national level.

Major Incidents of Xenophobic Violence in Africa

Although xenophobic sentiments have appeared in several African countries, South Africa remains the most extensively documented case because of the frequency, intensity, and continental implications of attacks against African migrants. Nevertheless, other African countries have also experienced forms of xenophobic violence, expulsion, discrimination, and hostility towards foreign nationals.

Xenophobic Violence in South Africa

South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 transformed the country into one of Africa's principal destinations for migrants seeking employment, education, business opportunities, and political refuge. Migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, Malawi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other African countries settled in South African cities because of relatively advanced infrastructure and economic opportunities. However, the post-apartheid period has also witnessed recurring outbreaks of xenophobic violence.

The 2008 Xenophobic Attacks

The May 2008 attacks represent the first nationwide outbreak of xenophobic violence in democratic South Africa.



Beginning in Alexandra Township in Johannesburg, violence rapidly spread across Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Western Cape, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, and the North West provinces. More than sixty people were killed, hundreds injured, thousands displaced, and migrant-owned homes and businesses destroyed.

Victims included migrants from Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. The attacks targeted informal traders, shop owners, street vendors, construction workers, and low-income migrants living in townships. The violence exposed deep

frustrations associated with unemployment, inequality, housing shortages, and inadequate service delivery in poor communities.

Scholars argue that the attacks demonstrated how socio-economic grievances were redirected towards migrants rather than structural governance failures. Gordon (2020) describes the 2008 attacks as the beginning of a recurring cycle of xenophobic hate crimes in post-apartheid South Africa.

The 2015 Durban and Johannesburg Attacks





Another major wave of violence erupted in April 2015 following inflammatory public statements about foreign nationals. Migrants from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Somalia, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo became targets of attacks in Durban before violence spread to Johannesburg.

Thousands of migrants sought protection in temporary shelters established by humanitarian agencies. Businesses owned by Somali and Ethiopian traders were targeted by looters, disrupting transport routes that

served migrant communities, while transport routes serving migrant communities were disrupted.

The attacks generated strong reactions across Africa. Governments including Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Mozambique condemned the violence and demanded stronger protections for their citizens living in South Africa.

The 2019 Xenophobic Attacks



The September 2019 attacks had particularly significant regional consequences because they affected diplomatic relations and commercial interests between Africa's largest economies.

Violence in Johannesburg and Pretoria targeted businesses owned by Nigerians, Ethiopians, Somalis, Congolese, and Zimbabweans. Numerous shops, restaurants, supermarkets, and retail outlets were destroyed.

Nigeria responded by recalling its High Commissioner for consultations and boycotting the World Economic Forum on Africa hosted in Cape Town. Protests erupted in Lagos and Abuja, where demonstrators attacked branches of South African companies, including MTN and Shoprite, illustrating how domestic xenophobic violence produced bilateral diplomatic tensions across borders. Ogunnubi and Aja

(2022) argue that these events revealed the paradox of citizen diplomacy within Africa's two regional powers, where Pan-African rhetoric coexists with recurring anti-African violence.

Operation Dudula and Continuing Anti-Migrant Violence



Since 2021, anti-migrant mobilisation has increasingly occurred through organised movements such as Operation Dudula, which campaigns against undocumented migrants and foreign-owned businesses.

Human rights organisations have documented intimidation, forced closure of migrant businesses, harassment of workers, and community patrols targeting African migrants. Although presented as community activism against undocumented migration, scholars argue that such campaigns reinforce xenophobic stereotypes and legitimise discrimination against foreign nationals.

Xenophobic Incidents Beyond South Africa

Although South Africa receives the greatest scholarly attention, xenophobic hostility has occurred elsewhere in Africa.

Angola

In 2018, Angolan authorities expelled hundreds of thousands of migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo during security operations targeting undocumented miners.



The expulsions generated humanitarian concerns and strained relations between Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The incident illustrated how migration governance can become securitised during economic crises.

Ghana

Ghana has experienced tensions involving foreign traders operating within its retail sector.



Implementation of Ghana's Investment Promotion Act led to periodic closure of shops owned by Nigerian and other West African traders, generating protests from ECOWAS member states.

Although less violent than South African attacks, these restrictions created disputes over regional trade commitments and freedom of establishment within ECOWAS.

Libya



Libya has become a major transit country where migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa experience violence, detention, exploitation, and racial discrimination.

The African Union has repeatedly condemned abuses against African migrants in Libya, describing them as violations of human rights and continental solidarity.

These examples demonstrate that xenophobia manifests through violence, expulsions, discrimination, restrictive economic policies, and institutional exclusion across different African contexts.

Xenophobic Violence and Intra-African Migration

Migration is central to African development and regional integration. Millions of Africans migrate annually for employment, education, trade, agriculture, mining, healthcare, construction, and entrepreneurship.





Agenda 2063 recognises migration as a driver of development rather than merely as a security issue. The African Union Protocol on Free Movement of Persons seeks to facilitate mobility while protecting migrants' rights across member states.

Xenophobic violence undermines this vision in several important ways.

First, recurring attacks create fear among migrants and discourage movement into countries perceived as unsafe. Potential entrepreneurs, students, professionals, and traders may avoid destinations where previous attacks occurred.

Second, violence increases irregular migration because migrants avoid official systems they perceive as discriminatory or inaccessible.

Third, forced displacement interrupts livelihoods and social networks developed over many years.

Somali traders in South Africa provide a concrete example. Research has shown that Somali

entrepreneurs established extensive retail networks in townships where local supermarkets were absent. Repeated attacks forced many to relocate, abandon businesses, or operate under constant insecurity despite their contributions to local economies.

Similarly, Zimbabwean migrants working in agriculture, mining, construction, and domestic services often experience discrimination, harassment, and barriers to accessing public services during periods of xenophobic tension.

These developments undermine the labour mobility envisioned under AfCFTA by making migration increasingly risky despite continental integration policies.

Disruption of Cross-Border Commerce and Informal Trade

One of AfCFTA's principal objectives is expanding intra-African trade by reducing barriers affecting formal and informal commerce.



Informal cross-border trade constitutes a significant proportion of trade within Africa and provides livelihoods for millions of households, particularly women entrepreneurs.

Xenophobic violence disrupts commerce through several mechanisms.

Destruction of Migrant-Owned Businesses

Foreign-owned businesses frequently become direct targets during attacks.

Examples include:

- Somali grocery stores ("spaza shops") in South African townships.
- Ethiopian wholesale businesses.
- Nigerian restaurants and supermarkets.
- Zimbabwean transport businesses.
- Mozambican retail outlets.

Looting and arson destroy capital investments accumulated over many years.

Supply Chain Disruptions

- Violence interrupts the transportation of goods across borders.
- Transport operators avoid insecure routes, increasing delivery costs and delays.
- Small businesses dependent on regional supply chains experience inventory shortages and financial losses.

Decline in Investor Confidence

Repeated attacks discourage African entrepreneurs from investing in neighbouring countries.

Businesses become reluctant to expand operations into markets where assets and employees may become targets during periods of unrest.

Adenuga, Amusan, and Oyewole (2024) argue that protectionist attitudes and anti-foreigner policies weaken AfCFTA implementation by discouraging regional market participation and reinforcing economic nationalism.

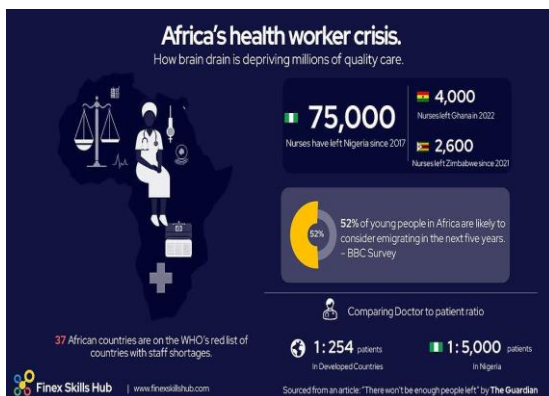
Effects on Women in Informal Trade

Women dominate informal cross-border trade in many African regions.

- They transport agricultural produce, textiles, cosmetics, processed foods, and household goods across borders.
- Xenophobic hostility disproportionately affects these traders because they have limited legal protection, limited insurance coverage, and limited financial resilience following attacks or confiscation of goods.
- Thus, xenophobic violence undermines inclusive trade participation that AfCFTA intends to promote.

Labour Mobility and the AfCFTA Integration Agenda

Labour mobility is essential for continental economic integration because skilled and unskilled workers contribute to production, innovation, knowledge transfer, and regional value chains.



Agenda 2063 encourages mobility of professionals, researchers, students, and entrepreneurs across Africa.

Xenophobic violence creates several labour market consequences.

Reduced Professional Mobility

Healthcare workers, engineers, academics, ICT professionals, and entrepreneurs become hesitant to relocate where security risks persist.

Countries experiencing labour shortages lose opportunities to attract regional talent.

Informalisation of Migrant Labour

- Migrants increasingly enter informal sectors that lack labour protections.
- Fear of deportation or violence discourages reporting exploitation or workplace abuse.

Brain Circulation Becomes Brain Diversion

Rather than circulating skills within Africa, professionals increasingly migrate outside the continent toward Europe, North America, or the Gulf States.

This outcome contradicts Agenda 2063's objective of retaining African human capital within continental development processes.

The World Bank has consistently argued that greater labour mobility within Africa can increase productivity and reduce regional inequalities. Xenophobic violence therefore weakens one of AfCFTA's long-term developmental mechanisms.

Tourism, Human Mobility, and Continental Image

Tourism contributes significantly to employment, foreign exchange earnings, hospitality, transportation, and cultural exchange across Africa.



South Africa is among Africa's leading tourism destinations. However, xenophobic violence damages the country's reputation among African visitors.

Decline in Regional Tourism

Following major attacks, governments issued travel advisories encouraging citizens to exercise caution when travelling to South Africa.

Tour operators reported cancellations from some African markets after violent incidents received widespread media coverage.

Damage to Cultural Exchange

Student exchanges, sporting competitions, religious pilgrimages, conferences, and cultural festivals experience reduced participation during periods of diplomatic tension.

Impact on Continental Branding

Agenda 2063 promotes Africa as a destination for investment and tourism.

Images of burning migrant businesses and attacks against fellow Africans undermine this continental narrative and weaken Africa's international image.

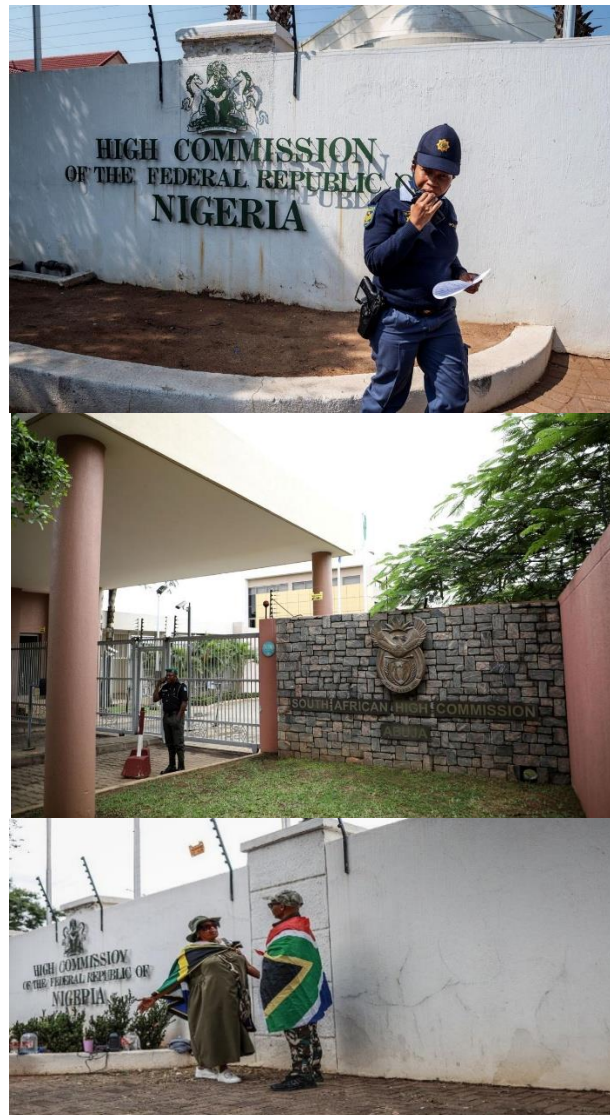
Tourism therefore becomes both an economic and symbolic casualty of xenophobic violence.

Diplomatic Consequences of Xenophobic Violence

Xenophobic violence has repeatedly generated diplomatic crises between African states.

Nigeria–South Africa Diplomatic Tensions

The relationship between Nigeria and South Africa provides the clearest illustration.



Following the 2019 attacks:

- Nigeria recalled its High Commissioner for consultations.
- Nigeria boycotted the World Economic Forum on Africa.
- South African diplomatic missions increased security.
- Bilateral meetings focused heavily on migrant protection.

Ogunnubi and Aja (2022) argue that xenophobia created a paradox in relations between Africa's two regional powers because diplomatic cooperation continued despite recurring public hostility.

Retaliatory Actions

- Violence triggered retaliatory protests in Nigeria, where South African businesses temporarily suspended operations.

- Commercial interests became vulnerable to public anger generated by attacks occurring outside Nigeria.

Regional Diplomatic Responses

Governments including Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo publicly condemned xenophobic attacks.

The African Union Chairperson repeatedly called for investigations and protection of migrants.

These responses illustrate how domestic violence becomes a continental diplomatic issue affecting interstate cooperation.

Citizen Diplomacy Under Strain

Citizen diplomacy emphasizes positive people-to-people relations alongside official diplomacy.

Xenophobic violence weakens this approach because mistrust develops between ordinary citizens despite continued governmental cooperation.

Xenophobia, Social Trust, and Pan-African Solidarity

Trust is a foundational requirement for regional integration.



AfCFTA assumes cooperation among governments, businesses, workers, and communities.

- Xenophobic violence erodes trust through several pathways.

Weakening Continental Citizenship

- Migrants increasingly identify national citizenship as protection rather than Pan-African identity.
- National identity becomes stronger than continental belonging.

Decline in African Solidarity

- Countries affected by attacks question the commitment of host governments to Pan-African values.
- Citizens perceive continental institutions as ineffective when attacks recur without accountability.

Rise of Economic Nationalism

- Communities increasingly advocate "locals first" approaches to employment, retail trade, and housing.
- Such protectionist attitudes directly contradict AfCFTA's integration philosophy.
- Ochonu (2020) argues that Afrophobia represents a crisis of Pan-Africanism because exclusion of fellow Africans undermines the ideological foundation of continental unity.

Xenophobic Violence and Security Challenges for AfCFTA

- AfCFTA implementation requires predictable security environments for commerce and investment.



Xenophobic violence introduces multiple security risks.

Security Challenge	Implication for AfCFTA
Community violence	Destruction of businesses and commercial infrastructure.
Forced displacement	Loss of labour and entrepreneurial capacity.
Border insecurity	Reduced confidence in cross-border movement.
Political instability	Weak implementation of regional agreements.
Economic nationalism	Protectionist resistance to continental markets.

The African Union's Silencing the Guns initiative recognises peace and security as prerequisites for sustainable integration.

Recurring xenophobic violence demonstrates that internal social conflicts remain significant threats to continental economic integration.

Implications for the Operational Goals of AfCFTA

The operational success of AfCFTA depends on the interaction of trade liberalisation with social stability and political cooperation.

Xenophobic violence threatens AfCFTA in five major respects.

- First, it discourages the free movement of traders, entrepreneurs, and professionals essential for continental commerce.
- Second, it disrupts regional supply chains through destruction of businesses and transportation networks.
- Third, it reduces investor confidence by increasing perceptions of political and social risk within regional markets.

- Fourth, it weakens diplomatic cooperation among member states by generating bilateral disputes and retaliatory responses.

Finally, it undermines the Pan-African identity necessary for sustaining long-term continental integration under Agenda 2063.

Adenuga et al. (2024) contend that protectionist attitudes and xenophobic sentiments create significant implementation barriers for AfCFTA because they reinforce national economic interests over continental cooperation.

These findings support the argument that successful regional integration requires both institutional implementation and social acceptance of African mobility.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REALISATION OF AGENDA 2063

Agenda 2063 represents the African Union's long-term strategic framework for transforming the continent into an integrated, prosperous, peaceful and influential global actor. Its vision is anchored in inclusive

economic growth, continental integration, peace and security, democratic governance, social development, and the empowerment of African citizens. The framework is therefore not simply an economic development programme but a broad political and socio-economic project aimed at deepening the bonds that connect African states and their peoples. The African Union identifies seven aspirations within Agenda 2063, including a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, an integrated continent founded on Pan-Africanism, an Africa characterised by good governance and respect for human rights, a peaceful and secure continent, and an Africa whose development is people-driven and dependent on the potential of women and youth (African Union, n.d.). Against this background, xenophobic violence represents a significant contradiction to the normative and developmental ambitions of Agenda 2063 because it reproduces exclusion precisely where the continental project requires greater mobility, solidarity, cooperation and shared citizenship.

The implications of xenophobic violence for Agenda 2063 are particularly significant because the realisation of the continental agenda depends on the interaction between economic and human integration. Economic agreements cannot achieve their full developmental potential where African citizens experience hostility, discrimination and insecurity when they move across national borders. Paolo, Adu-Gyamfi, and Arthur (2022) argue that xenophobia generates discourses of "othering", creates perceptions of betrayal and retaliation between states, and redefines questions of territorial belonging. These processes have consequences that extend beyond individual attacks because they affect the political relationships and social foundations upon which regional integration depends. Xenophobia therefore constitutes not merely a domestic social problem but a continental governance and integration challenge. When citizens of one African state are treated as unwanted outsiders in another African state, the principle of African unity is weakened, while the territorial nationalism that Pan-Africanism seeks to transcend is reinforced.

Xenophobic violence directly threatens the economic transformation envisioned under Agenda 2063. The continent's economic future depends substantially upon increasing intra-African trade, developing regional value chains, facilitating investment, improving productive capacity and reducing the barriers that fragment African markets. The AfCFTA is central to this process because it seeks to establish a continental market capable of stimulating trade and economic transformation. Empirical analysis by Geda and Yimer (2023) indicates that the AfCFTA has the potential to increase intra-African exports substantially, demonstrating the economic opportunities associated with deeper continental integration. Similarly, Oloruntoba and Nshimbiri (2023) argue that the

AfCFTA provides opportunities for structural transformation through regional value chains, movement of factors of production and greater African bargaining power in international economic relations. Xenophobic violence threatens these possibilities by creating uncertainty around the movement of people, capital and commercial actors across national boundaries.

The economic consequences are particularly important for small-scale traders and informal economic actors who constitute an important component of African cross-border commerce. Moyo (2023) notes that despite their significance to socio-economic development, informal cross-border traders remain inadequately integrated into the AfCFTA's framework. Xenophobic attacks can intensify the vulnerability of these traders because their activities frequently require repeated movement across borders and direct interaction with local markets and communities. Fear of harassment, physical violence, theft or discrimination can discourage traders from entering particular markets, increase the costs associated with cross-border movement and reduce the reliability of commercial networks. Consequently, xenophobia can reproduce precisely the fragmentation that continental trade integration seeks to overcome. In this sense, the effectiveness of AfCFTA cannot be evaluated exclusively in terms of tariffs and customs procedures; it must also be considered in relation to the social and political environment within which African citizens participate in cross-border economic activities.

The relationship between xenophobia and economic development also has implications for employment and poverty reduction. Agenda 2063's first aspiration envisages an Africa characterised by inclusive growth, improved standards of living, employment creation and sustainable development, with particular attention to youth unemployment and inequality (African Union, n.d.). Xenophobic practices can work against these objectives when migrants are excluded from employment opportunities, markets, public services and other forms of economic participation. Recent scholarship on xenophobia and African socio-economic emancipation identifies employment, education, access to resources and livelihood security as areas through which xenophobic exclusion affects both migrants and host communities. Rather than creating a sustainable response to unemployment and poverty, exclusion can deepen competition, social resentment and economic insecurity. The resulting cycle is particularly damaging because economic hardship may be transformed into hostility towards migrants, while xenophobic violence simultaneously undermines economic activities that could contribute to local development.

The implications for youth empowerment are equally significant. Africa's youthful population is frequently presented as one of the continent's greatest developmental assets, and Agenda 2063 explicitly envisions an Africa in which the potential of young

people is realised. However, creating an environment characterised by mobility, employment, education, innovation, and social inclusion is essential for youth empowerment. This requires creating an environment characterised by mobility, employment, education, innovation, and social inclusion. Xenophobic violence can restrict these opportunities by producing hostile environments for young African migrants, students, entrepreneurs and workers. More broadly, when young Africans encounter discrimination from other Africans on the basis of nationality, the ideal of a shared continental identity becomes less persuasive. The danger is therefore not only economic exclusion but the development of a generation for whom African solidarity becomes an abstract political slogan rather than a lived social reality.

The question of human security further demonstrates the incompatibility between xenophobic violence and Agenda 2063. Traditional conceptions of security often concentrate on interstate conflict, terrorism and military threats, whereas human security places greater emphasis on the protection of individuals from violence, deprivation, fear and exclusion. Durokifa (2023) argues that insecurity, including xenophobia and other forms of violence, can undermine Africa's developmental aspirations under Agenda 2063. Similarly, Mushoriwa (2023) demonstrates that the achievement of Agenda 2063's fourth aspiration concerning a peaceful and secure Africa is inseparable from the broader objective of socio-economic development. Xenophobic violence should therefore be understood as a human-security concern because it exposes individuals to physical attacks, displacement, psychological insecurity and economic deprivation.

The human-security implications become particularly serious when xenophobic violence produces displacement or discourages legitimate migration. African integration depends on the movement of workers, students, entrepreneurs, traders and professionals across borders. The African Union has established the Protocol for the Free Movement of Persons. The African Union developed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons to advance this objective by facilitating mobility, residence, and establishment across the continent. The African Union developed the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons specifically to advance this objective by facilitating mobility, residence, and establishment across the continent. Adeola (2019) notes that the free movement framework aims to foster continental integration and further the goals of Agenda 2063. Hirsch (2021) similarly demonstrates the close relationship between free movement and the successful implementation of the AfCFTA, arguing that the movement of people is an important component of Africa's broader social and economic development agenda. Xenophobia consequently creates a practical contradiction: while continental institutions seek to make African borders more conducive to legitimate mobility,

violent and exclusionary practices can make those same borders socially and physically dangerous for African citizens.

The current migration policy does not fully define the issue at hand. Xenophobia also has implications for continental unity and Pan-Africanism. Agenda 2063 is explicitly grounded in the Pan-African aspiration for a united continent and recognises continental integration as a central component of Africa's future. The persistence of xenophobic attitudes challenges this ideological foundation because it places national identity above a broader conception of African belonging. Paalo et al. (2022) demonstrate that xenophobia constructs boundaries between citizens and non-citizens even where the individuals concerned share histories, cultural connections and continental identities. Such exclusion weakens the social foundation of Pan-Africanism. Political institutions may establish agreements promoting African unity, but those agreements cannot easily produce continental solidarity when citizens continue to perceive other Africans as economic, cultural or security threats.

This contradiction has implications for diplomatic relations among African states. Xenophobic attacks often generate public anger in the countries of origin of affected migrants and can result in diplomatic protests, retaliatory measures and deterioration in bilateral relations. Paalo et al. (2022) identify perceptions of betrayal and retaliation as one of the ways through which xenophobia influences regional integration. The diplomatic consequences are particularly important because regional integration requires states to cooperate on trade, migration, security and development. Persistent xenophobic incidents can introduce mistrust into these relationships and make governments more reluctant to pursue ambitious forms of integration. Thus, a violent incident occurring within one country can acquire a broader continental significance when the nationality of those affected becomes the basis for diplomatic and political reactions.

The role of regional economic communities is also important in this context. Regional integration in Africa did not begin with the AfCFTA; it has historically been advanced through organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the East African Community (EAC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA). These institutions have developed mechanisms for trade, mobility and political cooperation. Yet xenophobic violence can weaken the practical operation of these regional frameworks by creating a gap between formal commitments to free movement and the experiences of migrants at the community level. The experience of the African Union's Free Movement of Persons Protocol demonstrates that formal commitments to continental mobility continue to

encounter significant implementation challenges (Hirsch, 2021). Consequently, combating xenophobia must be regarded as part of the broader implementation agenda of African regional institutions rather than as an isolated human-rights concern.

The African Union's response to xenophobia is, therefore, central to the realisation of Agenda 2063. The AU possesses an important normative role in promoting African unity, human rights, peace, security and regional integration. Adeola (2021) argues that the African Union has a significant institutional responsibility in preventing xenophobia because the phenomenon contradicts the organisation's objectives of promoting African unity, human rights, development and peace and security. Akinola (2019) similarly observes that the resurgence of xenophobia constitutes a threat to regional security and obstructs the broader aspiration for continental political integration, notwithstanding the AU's development of pro-migration policy frameworks. These arguments suggest that the AU response must move beyond condemnation after violent incidents towards sustained preventive mechanisms involving human rights monitoring, migration governance, public education and stronger implementation of continental instruments.

National governments equally have a critical responsibility. The existence of continental and regional frameworks cannot substitute for effective domestic institutions capable of protecting migrants and preventing violence. Xenophobic violence frequently develops within local political and socio-economic contexts involving unemployment, inequality, competition over resources, weak governance and perceptions that migrants are responsible for social problems. A sustainable response must therefore address the structural conditions that make exclusion politically attractive while ensuring that perpetrators of violence are held accountable. Durokifa (2023) stresses that insecurity can get in the way of the goals of Agenda 2063, which means that development and security should not be considered two separate areas of policy. National governments therefore need to integrate migration governance, social cohesion, employment policy and human rights protection into their development strategies.

There is also a need for governments to distinguish legitimate concerns about migration management from xenophobic political mobilisation. States have legitimate responsibilities to regulate entry, residence, employment and public services, but these responsibilities should be exercised within legal and human-rights frameworks rather than through collective blame against foreign nationals. The distinction is particularly important in the context of AfCFTA, because successful economic integration requires governments to manage the movement of people while simultaneously reducing unnecessary barriers to legitimate economic activity. The African Union's free-

movement framework reflects precisely this balance between state sovereignty and continental integration (Adeola, 2019; Hirsch, 2021).

Xenophobia also has consequences for sustainable development because it undermines the social cohesion required for long-term development interventions. Sustainable development depends not only on economic expansion but also on institutions, social trust, equality and peaceful relations among communities. Where migrants and other non-nationals are systematically excluded, development benefits may become concentrated within particular national or social groups, thereby reinforcing inequalities. This contradicts the inclusive character of Agenda 2063. The African Union's developmental framework explicitly connects prosperity with inclusion, well-being, equality, employment and social protection. Xenophobic exclusion therefore threatens sustainable development both directly, through the disruption of livelihoods and economic activities, and indirectly, through the erosion of the social relationships necessary for inclusive development.

At the continental level, the persistence of xenophobia can also weaken Africa's collective bargaining power in the international system. Agenda 2063 envisages Africa as a dynamic force in global affairs, and economic integration is expected to strengthen the continent's capacity to negotiate collectively with external actors. The AfCFTA contributes to this objective by creating a larger continental market and providing opportunities for African countries to develop regional value chains and strengthen their position in global trade negotiations (Oloruntoba & Nshimbiri, 2023). However, fragmented relations among African states reduce the political coherence necessary to translate market size into collective influence. Xenophobia, by generating diplomatic tensions and reinforcing narrow national interests, can consequently undermine the political conditions required for Africa to operate as a more unified global actor.

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to eliminate individual episodes of xenophobic violence but to address the deeper political and socio-economic structures that reproduce exclusion. Regional integration requires citizens to perceive neighbouring countries not merely as foreign territories but as parts of a broader continental community. This does not imply the disappearance of national identities; rather, it requires the development of a layered identity in which national citizenship can coexist with a wider African consciousness. Such an approach is consistent with the Pan-African foundation of Agenda 2063 and with the objectives of continental free movement and economic integration. The problem identified by Paolo et al. (2022)—the construction of African “others” through exclusionary conceptions of belonging—must therefore

be addressed through policies that promote both national inclusion and continental solidarity.

Ultimately, xenophobic violence presents a multidimensional threat to the realisation of Agenda 2063. Economically, it can disrupt trade, investment, labour mobility and informal cross-border commerce; politically, it can generate diplomatic tensions and weaken regional cooperation; socially, it undermines African solidarity and reinforces exclusionary national identities; and from a human-security perspective, it exposes migrants to violence, displacement and livelihood insecurity. These consequences are incompatible with the aspirations of a prosperous, integrated, peaceful and people-driven Africa. The successful implementation of Agenda 2063 therefore requires xenophobia to be treated as a continental development and integration problem rather than merely a domestic security issue.

Consequently, the African Union, regional economic communities, and national governments must adopt a coordinated approach that integrates legal protection, migration governance, economic inclusion, public education, accountability, and regional diplomacy. The implementation of the AfCFTA should be accompanied by stronger mechanisms for protecting cross-border traders, workers and entrepreneurs, while the free movement agenda should be advanced through practical measures that build confidence among states and citizens. At the same time, regional institutions should strengthen mechanisms for early warning, monitoring and response to xenophobic tensions before they develop into widespread violence. Such measures would reinforce the connection between economic integration and human security, ensuring that social integration accompanies continental trade liberalisation. by social integration.

The realisation of Agenda 2063 ultimately depends on whether Africans can translate the principle of continental unity into everyday social and political practices. An integrated Africa cannot be built solely through treaties, institutions and economic agreements; it must also be constructed through relationships of trust, mutual recognition and solidarity among African peoples. Xenophobic violence exposes the distance that can exist between the formal aspirations of continental integration and the lived experiences of African migrants. Addressing that contradiction is therefore indispensable to the achievement of Agenda 2063. The struggle against xenophobia should be understood as part of the broader struggle for an Africa that is economically integrated, socially inclusive, politically cooperative and secure for all its citizens.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study has established that xenophobic violence constitutes a significant obstacle to the

successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the broader aspirations of Agenda 2063. Although the AfCFTA seeks to promote intra-African trade and economic integration, its success depends on an environment in which Africans can move, trade, work and invest across national borders without discrimination or violence. Aniche (2023) emphasises the importance of the AfCFTA to the regional integration objectives of Agenda 2063, while Paalo, Adu-Gyamfi, and Arthur (2022) demonstrate that xenophobia undermines regional integration by reinforcing exclusion, othering and tensions between African states.

The study further finds that xenophobic violence has consequences beyond the immediate victims. It can disrupt cross-border trade, restrict labour and human mobility, weaken diplomatic relations and undermine trust among African societies. These consequences contradict the Pan-African vision of an integrated and politically united continent. The persistence of xenophobia also challenges the African Union's aspiration for a peaceful, secure and people-centred Africa (African Union, 2015). Consequently, combating xenophobia should be regarded as an important component of both AfCFTA implementation and the realisation of Agenda 2063.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Stronger Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** African governments should strengthen laws and institutions for preventing xenophobic violence, protecting migrants and prosecuting perpetrators. Effective enforcement is necessary to ensure that xenophobic attacks do not occur with impunity.
- 2. Civic Education on Pan-Africanism:** Governments, schools, universities and civil-society organisations should promote civic education that emphasises Pan-Africanism, African solidarity and the economic and cultural contributions of migration. Such education can help challenge stereotypes and negative perceptions of African migrants.
- 3. Improved Migration Governance:** African states should adopt more effective and rights-based migration policies that facilitate safe and orderly movement across borders. This is particularly important for traders, workers, entrepreneurs and other groups whose activities depend on cross-border mobility (Hirsch, 2021).
- 4. Regional Conflict-Prevention Mechanisms:** The African Union and regional economic communities should strengthen early-warning, mediation and conflict-prevention mechanisms for identifying and responding to xenophobic tensions before they escalate into violence.
- 5. Inclusive Economic Policies:** African governments should address unemployment, poverty and inequality while ensuring that migrants and host communities can participate

peacefully in economic activities. The implementation of AfCFTA should particularly protect cross-border traders, workers and entrepreneurs.

In conclusion, addressing xenophobia is essential to transforming the vision of Agenda 2063 into a lived reality of African unity, peaceful coexistence and shared prosperity. Continental economic integration cannot succeed fully where African citizens remain divided by fear, discrimination and violence. AfCFTA must therefore be accompanied by policies that promote both economic integration and social solidarity across the continent.

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