

Slaves without shackles: Life as an African migrant worker in South Africa

Mafa P

University of Limpopo, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, South Africa

Makhubele JC

University of Limpopo, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, South Africa

Kwakwa MM

University of Limpopo, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, South Africa

Matlakala FK

University of Limpopo, Faculty of Humanities, School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Work, South Africa

Abstract

Migration presents people with an opportunity to improve their social and economic circumstances. In Africa, most people seeking to better their financial trajectories choose South Africa as their destination country. This study aimed to describe the experiences of African migrant workers employed in the agriculture, construction domestic, and hospitality labour sectors in South Africa. A qualitative study approach was utilised, with a focus group and individual interviews as data collection methods. The focus group comprised of five participants while four migrants were interviewed individually to solicit their experiences in the labour sector. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Socio-political factors in the sending regions propel human mobility in search of better economic outcomes. Majority of the migrants find work under unregulated conditions due to their lack of proper documentation. This condition predisposes them to various unfair labour practices by unscrupulous employers who strive to maximise their profits by seeking cheap labour. Migrant workers' human rights need to be respected by employers and protected by the central government.

Keywords: African; migrants; labour; exploitation; working conditions.

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