

Angolans express mixed views on migration, but majority have considered moving abroad

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 955 | Carlos Pacatolo and David Boio

Summary

Over the past 30 years, Angola has experienced three waves of emigration. The first occurred in 1976 at the start of the civil war following the proclamation of national independence (Barreto, 2014). The second started in 1992, when post-election conflict led thousands of Angolans to seek refuge and better living conditions abroad. The third wave began about six years ago as a result of the country's deep economic crisis, again driving citizens to leave in search of opportunities.

Portugal has been the main destination for Angolan emigrants (Teixeira, 2021). Recent figures published by Novo Jornal (2024) indicate that the Angolan community in Portugal more than tripled between 2017 and 2023, rising from 16,854 to 55,589 residents, making it the second-largest foreign community in the country, surpassed only by Brazil.

This outflow of citizens, especially young people who are typically urban and educated, represents a loss of human capital needed for the country's economic and political development. A 2021 study shows that although emigrants' main motivation is to help their families, many Angolans in Portugal don't send remittances due to economic instability in the destination country, and this means that their families' economic situation often worsens after they leave (Teixeira, 2021).

Angola is also a major receiving country for immigrants and refugees. By the early 2020s, Angola hosted more than 650,000 international migrants and more than 55,000 refugees, mostly from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Integral Human Development, 2022; Statista, 2025).

Afrobarometer survey findings show that Angolans hold mixed views on migration. Citizens are divided on the question of free cross-border movement and in their assessments of the impact of immigrants. Majorities want their government to reduce or eliminate entry by foreign job seekers and refugees.

Meanwhile, a majority of Angolans say they have considered emigrating, most often for jobs and a better standard of living. Young, urban, and highly educated citizens are especially likely to contemplate moving abroad.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, led by Oviliongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Angolans between 27 March and 19 April 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Angola in 2019 and 2022.

Key findings

- Angolans are divided on the question of free cross-border movement within the region: 41% say Southern Africans should be free to move across borders to work and live, while 38% believe that the government should restrict the movement of people and goods.
 - Only 13% of Angolans say they have heard of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
 - Almost half (46%) of respondents say that in practice, crossing international borders in Southern Africa is “difficult” or “very difficult.” Only 20% think it's easy.
- Angolans are also split on the impact of immigrants on their economy: Four in 10 (40%) say they make a positive contribution, while an equal proportion (40%) believe they have a negative impact.
- Seven in 10 citizens (71%) express no reservations about living next door to immigrants or foreign workers.
- Similarly, about two-thirds (65%) express tolerant attitudes toward refugees.
- Even so, a majority (56%) of Angolans say the government should reduce the number of foreign job seekers it allows to enter the country or eliminate such immigration altogether.
 - An even stronger majority (65%) favour reducing or eliminating entry by refugees.
- A majority (57%) of Angolans say they have given at least “a little” consideration to moving to another country, including 38% who have thought about it “a lot.”
 - Among groups that are particularly likely to have considered emigration are urban residents (70%), the most educated (72%-74%), youth (66%), and employed citizens (66%).

- Among those who have considered emigration, the most frequently cited reasons are economic: finding work opportunities (37%) and escaping economic hardship (34%).
- The most popular destinations among potential emigrants are Europe (39%), North America (21%), and South Africa (10%).

Freedom of movement and the AfCFTA

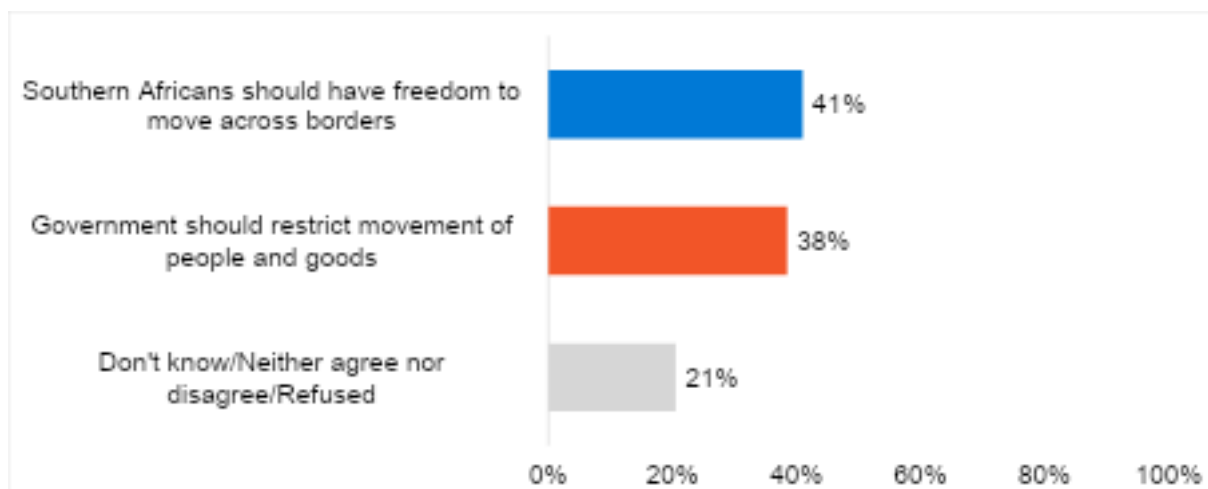
Free cross-border movement is a central aspect of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons (2005) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), both designed to stimulate trade and strengthen economic ties between member countries.

But Afrobarometer survey findings show that Angolans are divided on the issue of the free movement of people and goods in Southern Africa. About four in 10 respondents (41%) say that people in the region should be free to cross international borders for trade or work, while 38% think the Angolan government should limit cross-border movement to protect its citizens and economic interests. One in five (21%) do not take a clear position, highlighting a section of the population that may be uninformed or indifferent to the debate (Figure 1).

Moreover, only 13% of Angolans indicate that they have heard of the AfCFTA, while an overwhelming majority (77%) are unaware of the initiative (Figure 2). This low level of awareness may reflect a lack of public information campaigns about the AfCFTA as well as a tendency to consider regional and continental policies as distant or irrelevant to the general public.

While analysts emphasise that regional integration can generate significant economic benefits, including the creation of job opportunities and the strengthening of local economies (Naidu, 2008), Angolans' views on free movement highlight that public policies that balance the economic potential of integration with social and security concerns will be crucial to the success of integration initiatives (Adepoju, 2006).

Figure 1: Free movement of Southern Africans | Angola | 2024

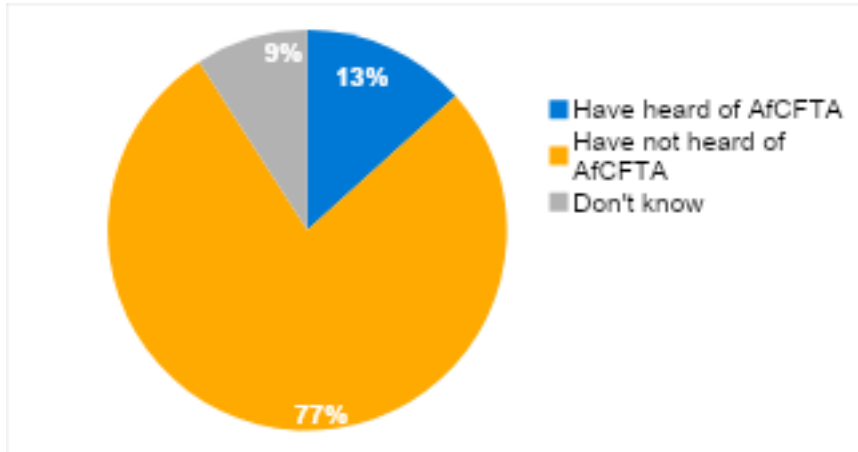


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: People living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.

Statement 2: In order to protect their own citizens, the Angolan government should limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.

Figure 2: Heard of the AfCFTA? | Angola | 2024



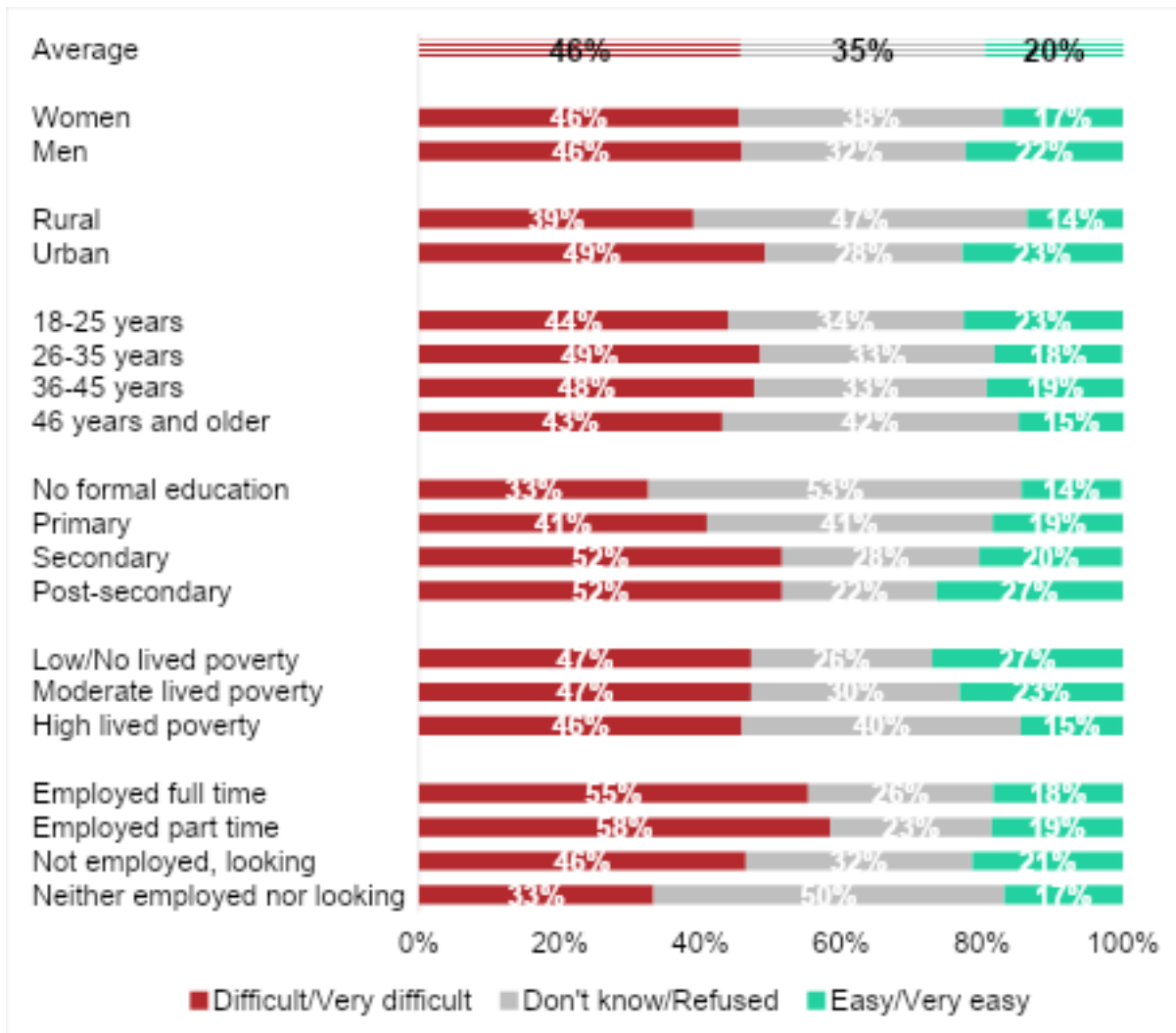
Respondents were asked: Have you heard about the African Continental Free Trade Area, also known as AfCFTA?

In practice, nearly half (46%) of Angolans consider it “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross borders to work or trade, while only 20% say it’s easy (Figure 3). More than one-third (35%) say they “don’t know” or refused to answer the question.

Demographic groups that are particularly likely to say it is difficult to cross borders include urban residents (49%) and citizens with secondary or post-secondary education (52%), who may be more aware of the legal and bureaucratic requirements needed to cross borders, as well as those with full-time or part-time employment (55% and 58%, respectively). The perception of difficulty is fairly uniform across levels of lived poverty,¹ suggesting that difficulties in crossing borders affect all economic strata.

Figure 3: Difficulty in cross-border movement | by demographic group | Angola | 2024

¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Lekalake (2025).



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in Southern Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

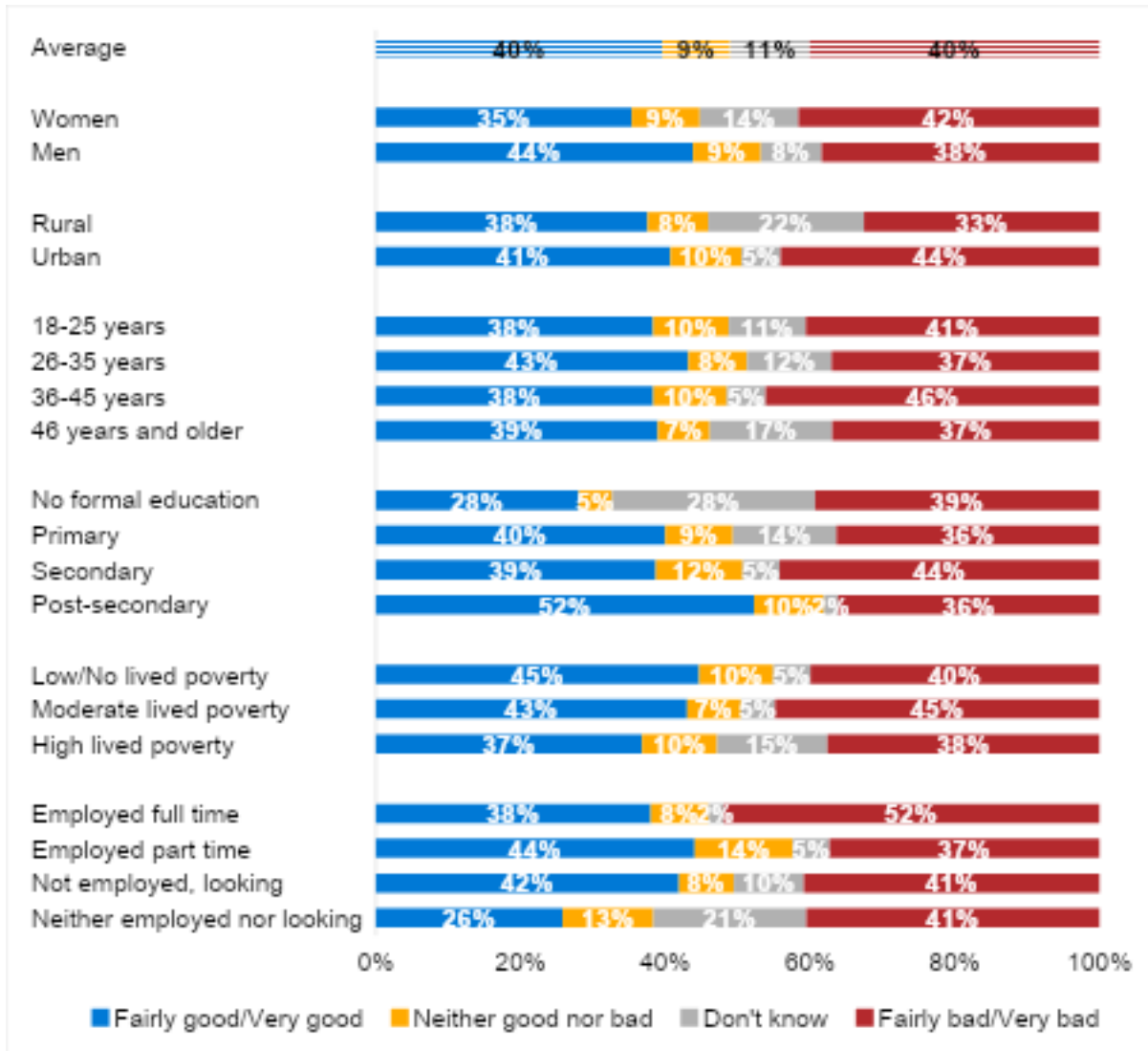
Attitudes toward migrants

Angolans are also divided in their assessments of whether immigration is beneficial or harmful to their country's economy. Four in 10 citizens (40%) describe the economic impact of immigrants as "fairly good" or "very good," but the same proportion (40%) think it is bad (Figure 4).

More men than women have a positive perception of the impact of immigration (44% vs. 35%). Favourable assessments increase with respondents' education level, ranging from 28% among those with no formal schooling to 52% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

The poorest citizens are least likely to see immigration as economically beneficial (37%), while negative perceptions are highest among respondents with full-time jobs (52%), both perhaps reflecting concerns about competition in a challenging economic environment.

Figure 4: Economic impact of immigration | by demographic group | Angola
 | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Would you say it is generally bad or good for Angola's economy if people from other countries come here to live and work for several years?*

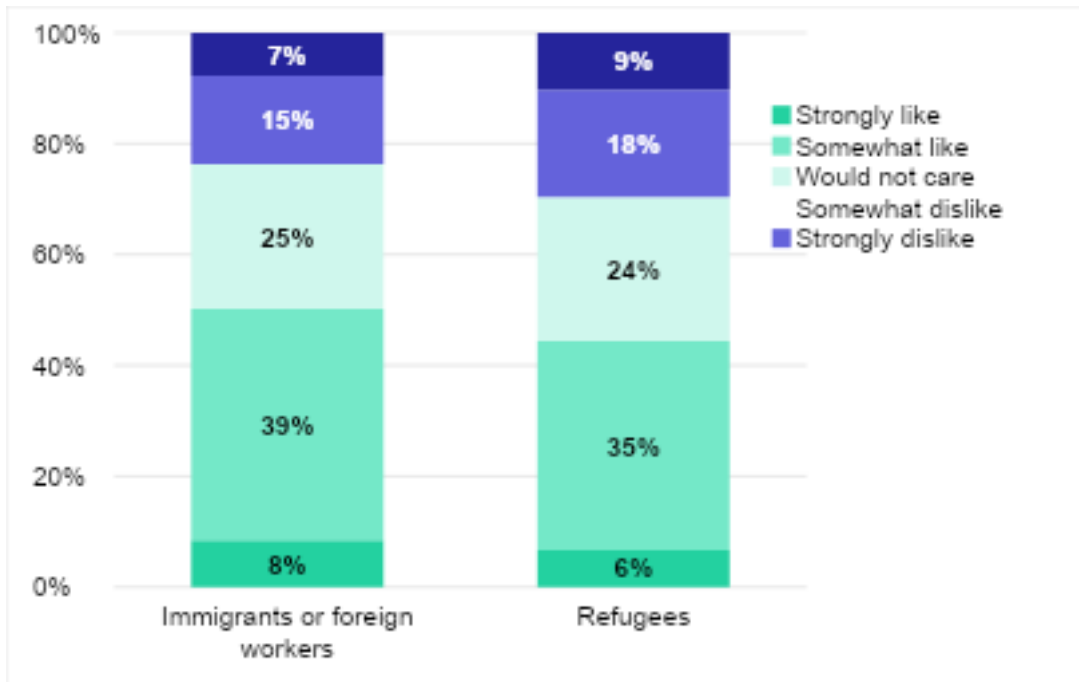
Despite some concerns about the impact of immigration, a majority of Angolans express tolerance toward immigrants: Seven in 10 (71%) say they would like it “a lot” (8%) or “somewhat” (39%) or “would not care” (25%) if they had immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours.² (Figure 5). About one in five (22%) say they would dislike living next door to immigrants.

When it comes to refugees, about two-thirds (65%) express tolerance, while 27% say they would dislike having refugees as neighbours.

² Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories (e.g. 8% “would like it a lot” and 39% “would like it somewhat” and 25% “would not care” sum to 71%).

Slightly more positive attitudes toward immigrants than toward refugees may reflect different perceptions of the likely economic contributions by foreign workers compared to refugees, who may be seen as more dependent on assistance.

Figure 5: Tolerance toward foreign workers and refugees | Angola | 2024



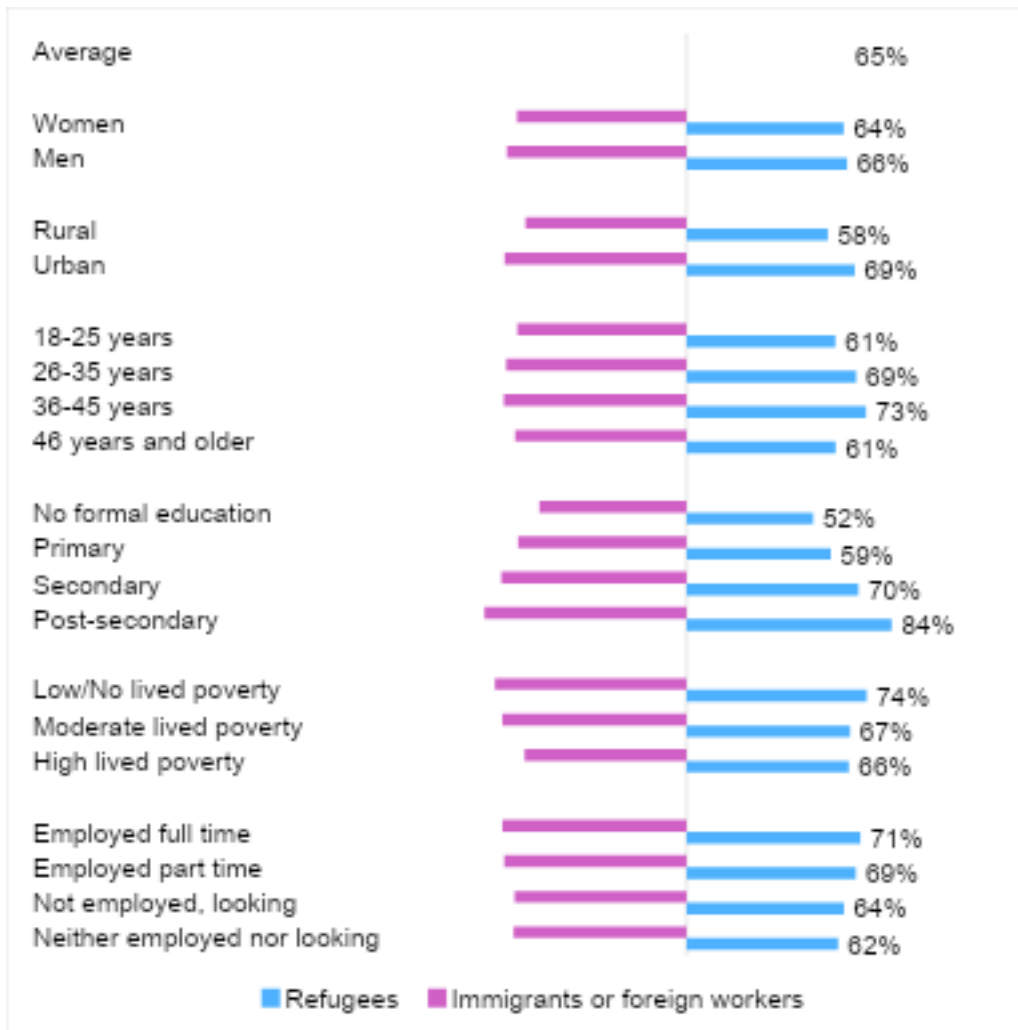
Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbors, dislike it, or not care: Immigrants or foreign workers? Refugees from other countries who are fleeing political violence or persecution.

More men (73%) than women (69%) express tolerant attitudes toward immigrants or foreign workers (Figure 6). In rural areas, acceptance is lower for both immigrants (66%, vs. 74% in urban areas) and refugees (58%, vs. 69%), possibly due to less exposure to these groups.

Tolerance for both groups increases significantly with respondents' level of education and material well-being.

Citizens with full-time or part-time jobs express greater tolerance for immigrants and refugees than those who are unemployed or out of the labour market.

Figure 6: Tolerance toward foreign workers and refugees | by demographic group | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Immigrants or foreign workers? Refugees from other countries who are fleeing political violence or persecution. (% who say “would strongly like,” “would somewhat like,” or “would not care”)

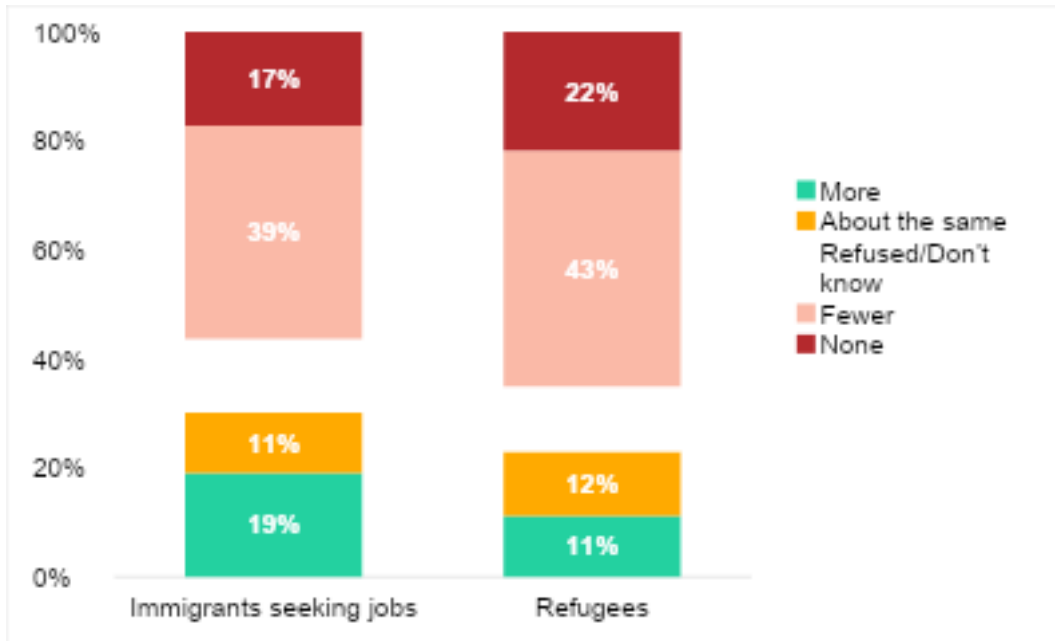
Despite these largely tolerant attitudes toward immigrants and refugees, survey findings show that many Angolans are reluctant to let foreigners into their country: A majority (56%) say the government should reduce the number of job seekers it allows to enter (39%) or eliminate such immigration altogether (17%) (Figure 7).

Similarly, 65% favour reducing (43%) or eliminating (22%) entry by refugees.

Only small minorities would welcome a greater number of prospective workers (19%) and asylum seekers (11%), while about one in 10 believe current levels of either category are acceptable.

Somewhat higher levels of acceptance for foreign job seekers than for refugees may be linked to a perception that foreign workers contribute more directly to the economy, while refugees may be more likely to be seen as an economic or social burden.

Figure 7: How many immigrants and refugees should be allowed into the country?
 | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked:

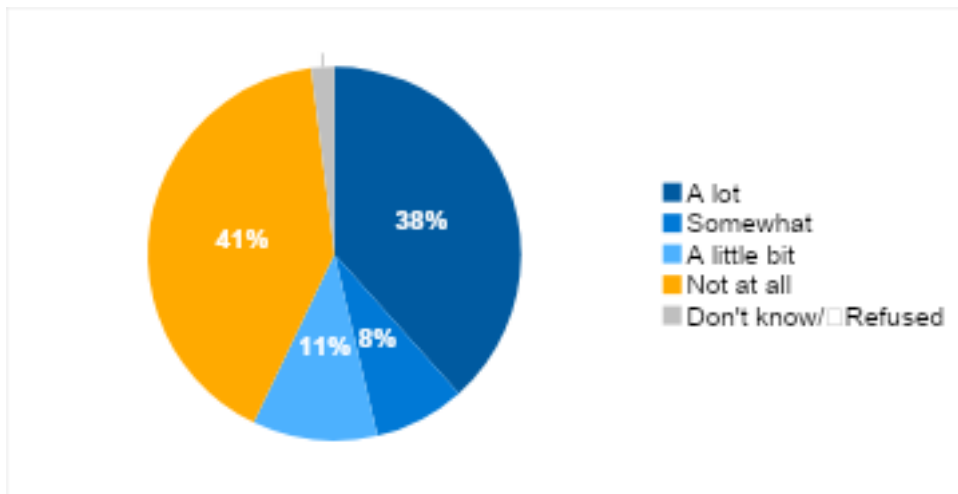
Do you think Angola should allow more or fewer job seekers from other countries to come to live and work in this country?

Do you think Angola should allow more or fewer refugees from other countries to come and live in this country?

Looking abroad: Angolans' attitudes toward emigration

Turning from immigration to emigration, a majority (57%) of Angolans say they have considered moving to another country "a lot" (38%), "somewhat" (8%), or "a little bit" (11%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Considered emigrating | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?

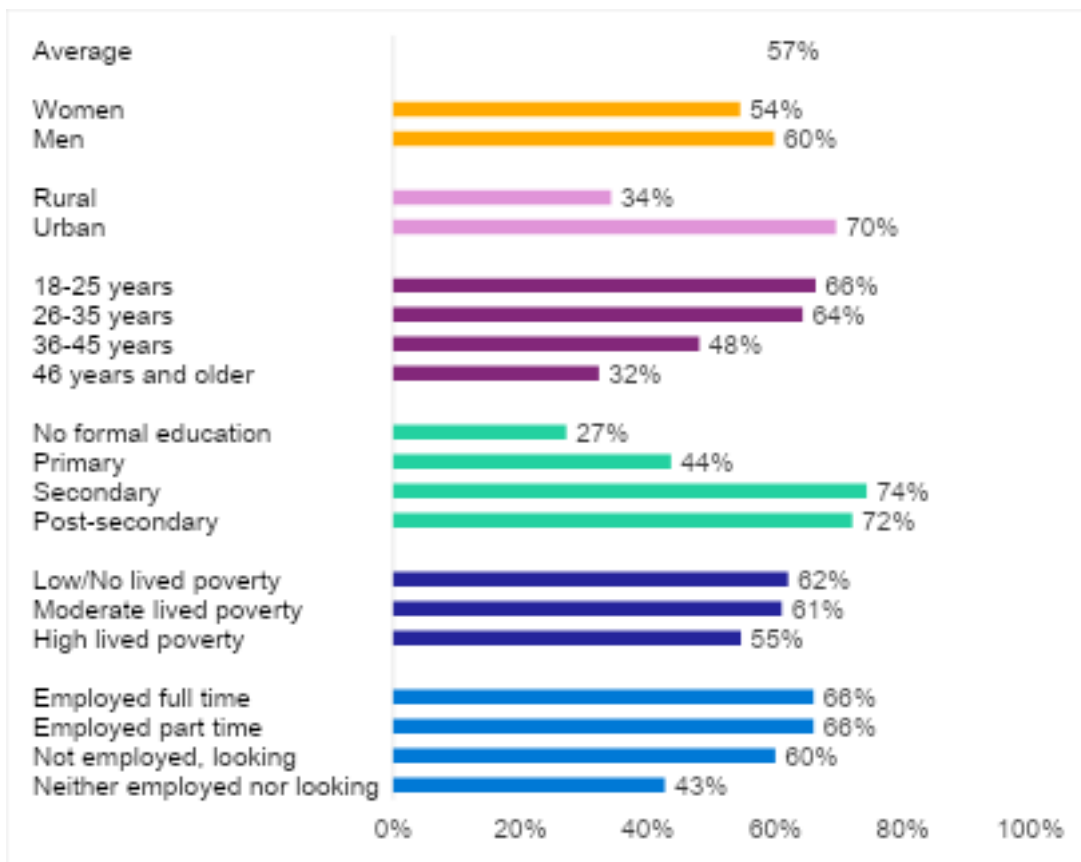
Men (60%) are more likely to consider emigration than women (54%) (Figure 9). But a far greater gap separates cities, where fully seven in 10 residents say they have given at least “a little” thought to emigration, from rural areas, where thoughts of emigration are only half as common (34%).

Young people aged 18-25 (66%) and 26-35 (64%) are considerably more likely to consider emigration than their elders (32%-48%).

The propensity to consider emigration increases with educational level. Only 27% of Angolans with no formal schooling have considered moving to another country, compared to 44%, 74%, and 72%, respectively, of those with primary, secondary, and post-secondary education.

The poorest individuals (55%) are somewhat less likely to consider emigration than those who are economically better off (61%-62%), perhaps reflecting the reality that emigrating often requires initial financial resources. And people with full-time or part-time jobs (66%) are more inclined to think about leaving the country than the unemployed (60%) and those outside the labour market (43%).

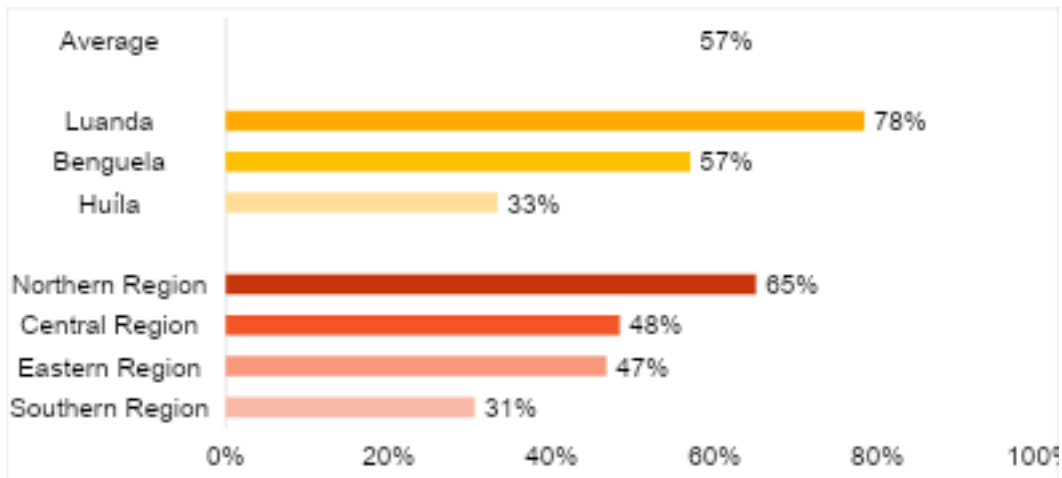
Figure 9: Considered emigrating | by demographic group | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say “a little bit,” “somewhat,” or “a lot”)

In the province of Luanda, nearly eight in 10 citizens (78%) say they have considered emigrating, suggesting that higher economic and social expectations in the nation's capital may generate greater frustration and desire to seek better living conditions abroad (Figure 10). The Southern Region (31%) and Huíla province (33%), Angola's least urbanised areas, show the lowest rates of potential emigrants, perhaps reflecting less exposure to migration networks or lower aspirations related to emigration.

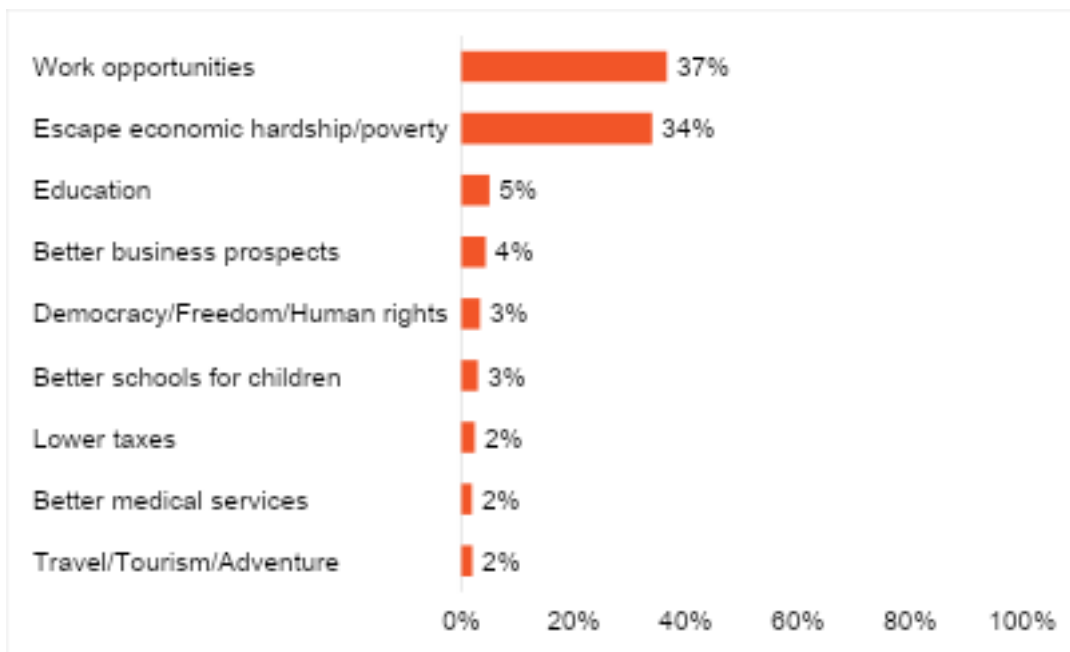
Figure 10: Considered emigrating | by location | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live? (% who say, “a little bit,” “somewhat,” or “a lot”)

Among those who have considered emigration, by far the most frequently cited reasons are economic: to pursue better work opportunities (37%) or to escape economic hardship or poverty (34%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Reasons for emigration | among respondents who have considered emigrating | Angola | 2024

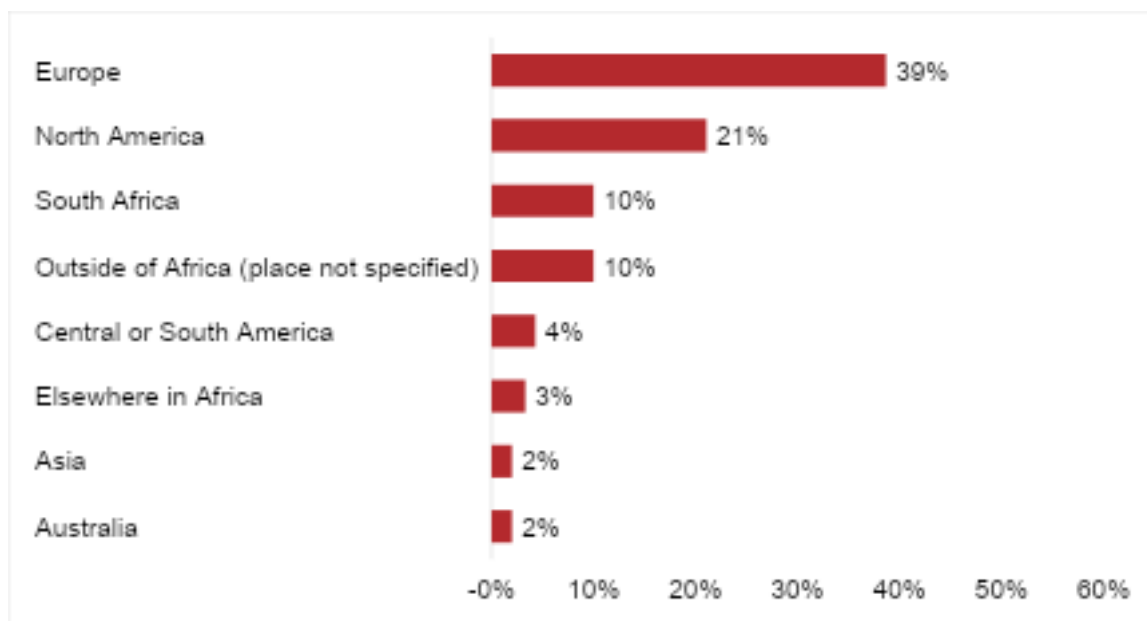


Respondents who say they have considered emigrating were asked: There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Angola? (Respondents who say they have not considered emigrating are excluded.)

Which destinations would Angolans prefer to emigrate to? Europe (39%) ranks at the top among Angolans who have considered emigrating, probably reflecting historical and cultural ties with Portugal along with perceptions of economic, educational, and social conditions in European countries (Figure 12). North America (the United States and Canada) comes second (21%).

About one in eight potential emigrants say they would stay on the African continent, most with an eye on South Africa (10%), a nearby regional economic hub and a favoured destination for health care and education.

Figure 12: Preferred destination for emigration | Angola | 2024



Respondents who say they have considered emigrating were asked: *If you were to move to another country, where would you be most likely to go? (Respondents who say they have not considered emigrating are excluded.)*

Conclusion

The results of the survey reveal that emigration is a significant concern for Angolans, driven mainly by economic factors. The majority of citizens considering leaving the country are looking for better job opportunities and a higher standard of living, with urban and highly educated young people being the most likely to consider emigration. This indicates a potential loss of human capital essential for Angola's economic and political development.

At the same time, the research shows that the difficulty of crossing borders and low awareness of initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can limit opportunities for mobility within the region itself. Furthermore, although a majority of Angolans express tolerance towards immigrants and refugees, many wish to restrict their entry, reflecting economic and social concerns.

Given these findings, the government and policymakers can act strategically to reduce migratory pressures. Targeted investments in quality education, job creation and improved infrastructure can contribute to retaining talent, especially among the most qualified urban youth. In addition, reducing regional disparities, with a focus on the South and rural areas, can promote greater socio-economic balance and strengthen local communities.

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