

Consequences of Trump’s 2025 Immigration Policy on African Families: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

In 2025, the reinstated and expanded immigration policies under President Donald J. Trump reshaped global mobility and family life. The new restrictions—popularly called the “2025 Travel Ban”—targeted nineteen countries and tightened vetting for additional nationalities, many of them in Africa. These actions intersected with changes to refugee processing and funding, as well as evolving consular guidance, prompting concerns about family separation, humanitarian protection, and community well-being. This systematic review synthesises evidence published between January 20 and November 2025 on the consequences of these policies for African families in the United States and across transnational settings. Following PRISMA guidance, we searched Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, HeinOnline, ProQuest, and Google Scholar and consulted institutional repositories (U.S. Department of State visa statistics, USCIS, UNHCR, Refugee Council USA, American Immigration Council) and major newswires (Reuters, AP) reporting primary policy documents and data. Sixty-four items met the inclusion criteria. The evidence converges on five consequence domains: (1) delays and denials in family reunification; (2) psychological distress and identity anxiety within affected households; (3) economic disruptions, including reduced mobility and income uncertainty; (4) contraction and delay in refugee pathways, with knock-on effects for kinship networks; and (5) broader transnational disillusionment and deterrence effects. While the precise magnitude of the effects varies by country and visa class, triangulated data and consistent qualitative accounts indicate substantial, policy-linked harms for African families. Implications include the need for transparent waiver processes, equitable vetting standards, targeted psychosocial support, and policy safeguards that prioritise family unity.

Keywords: *Trump immigration policy in 2025, African families, travel ban, PRISMA, family reunification, refugee resettlement, psychosocial impact, visa policy*

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1. Introduction

Immigration policy is more than a legal gatekeeper; it is a system that shapes household structures, intergenerational ties, and families' daily mental health. In 2025, the Trump administration reinstated and increased entrance restrictions through a presidential decree, which was believed to affect nineteen countries, with full prohibitions for twelve and limited access for seven. The details of the policy, including when it began, how broad it was, and who

was exempt (e.g., lawful permanent residents, diplomats, and dual nationals), were clearly outlined.

The nonprofit sector groups responded by conducting cascade-consequence evaluations. The American Immigration Council (August 2025) summarised the potential effects of family reunification and legitimate travel for individuals already residing in the United States. The Brennan Centre (August 2025) questioned the policy's national-security rationale and demonstrated that contemporary validation systems already include rigorous identity screening. The Refugee Council USA (June 2025) cautioned that family reunions for displaced individuals may be halted, potentially creating humanitarian risks.

In parallel, court actions and institutional reporting documented the legal and administrative dynamics of implementation (AP News; U.S. Department of State visa statistics pages). African families are essential to this discourse. In many African immigrant communities, family-driven settlement, intellectual relocation, and refugee resettlement bring kin together across boundaries. Policy changes that limit travel or grant visas have a cumulative impact on care scheduling, money transfers, and interpersonal stability. However, scholarship and institutional reporting for the specific 2025 window were scattered across legal analyses, policy briefs, statistical bulletins, and credible news reports. This review systematically assembles the record and interprets it through a family systems and structural constraints lens. Objectives: (a) identify the 2025 policy components most salient for African households; (b) synthesise reported consequences for family unity, psychological well-being, economic security, and refugee pathways; and (c) distil implications for clinicians, service organisations, and policymakers.

2. Methods

Design. We conducted a systematic review consistent with PRISMA 2020. Given the policy's recency and the mix of evidence types, we included peer-reviewed articles, government documents, court filings and orders, and high-quality NGO/institutional reports that provided empirical data, program statistics, or verifiable policy details. Commentary without verifiable claims was excluded.

Time frame. We restricted inclusion to materials published between January 20, 2025 (Inauguration Day), and November 2025.

Data sources. Academic databases searched included Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, PsycINFO, HeinOnline, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, and Google Scholar. Institutional sources included the U.S. Department of State Visa Statistics (monthly immigrant and nonimmigrant issuances), USCIS data tables, UNHCR data portals and fact sheets, Refugee Council USA fact sheets, the American Immigration Council, and the Brennan Center for Justice. Because several primary policy facts first appeared via wire services with embedded documents, we also captured Reuters and AP News reports that linked to or summarized primary materials.

Search strings. Example Boolean: ("Trump" AND travel AND ban AND 2025 AND (Africa OR African OR Nigeria OR Eritrea OR Sudan OR Somalia OR Libya OR Chad OR Congo OR Togo OR Sierra Leone)) AND (family OR reunification OR refugee OR asylum OR visa OR consular OR psychological OR mental OR remittance). We limited the language to English. Reference lists of featured articles were manually searched for supplementary sources.

Inclusion criteria. (1) publication date in scope; (2) empirical, legal, administrative, or statistical content tied to 2025 immigration actions; (3) African nationals or families as a focal

group or clearly included subset; (4) outcomes related to family unity, mental health, economic and labour effects, refugee and asylum processing, or education; (5) accessible full text.

Exclusion criteria. (a) Pre-2025 policy cycles; (b) opinion pieces without data; (c) items that omit African families or family-relevant outcomes; (d) duplicate versions of the same data release.

Screening and selection: Two-stage screening (titles/abstracts, then full text) reduced an initial corpus to an inclusion set of sixty-four items. We documented counts at each stage and retained a PRISMA-style flow summary for the manuscript.

Quality appraisal. We used JBI assessment triggers for peer-reviewed papers to ensure consistency of objectives, methodology, sources of information, and constraints. We employed AACODS (Authority, Accuracy, Coverage, Objectivity, Date, Significance) to assess outside the literature beyond traditional publishing. Items with unclear provenance or unverifiable claims were excluded.

We extracted and synthesised the data. We extracted policy scope, population focus, outcomes, methods, and key findings into a structured matrix. Given heterogeneity, we used qualitative thematic synthesis and integrated relevant quantitative indicators narratively (e.g., visa issuance tables, resettlement dashboards).

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram (Summary of Study Selection Process)

Identification

Records identified through database and repository searches (n = 421)



Duplicates removed (n = 96)

Records after deduplication (n = 325)



Screening

Titles and abstracts screened (n = 325)



Records excluded at screening stage (n = 143)



Eligibility

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 182)



Full-text articles excluded (n = 118)



Included

Studies included in the final synthesis (n = 64)

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram illustrating the study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion process. A total of 421 records were identified across databases and repositories. After removal of 96 duplicates, 325 records were screened by title and abstract. Of these, 182 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, resulting in the exclusion of 118 studies. Sixty-four studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final synthesis.

3. Results

Overview. The sixty-four included items collectively describe a policy environment defined by (a) a June 2025 proclamation imposing complete entry bans on twelve countries and partial restrictions on seven (Reuters; AP; Council on Foreign Relations explainer); (b) contemporaneous administrative actions affecting refugee resettlement funding and scheduling (Reuters, January 2025; federal court rulings limiting aspects of implementation, AP); and (c) guidance and statistics from the Department of State and UNHCR. Within this environment, five consequence domains emerged for African families.

3.1 Family reunification and separation: Reports and analyses anticipate and document delays or denials in family-based immigrant visas where nationals fall under the proclamation's scope. This situation unequivocally eliminates genuine permanent residents and dual citizens. It was, however, posited that this exemption does not warrant the screening modifications and national restrictions that exacerbate confusion for dependants seeking admission. Numerous civil rights advocates note that intensified restrictions stemming from erratic embassy procedures impede applicants' planning for expected family reunions (American Immigration Council, 2025; RCUSA, 2025).

3.2 Psychological and identity-related stress arises: Across community reporting and clinical commentary, affected families describe heightened anxiety, disrupted attachment for children separated from parents, and anticipatory stress when travel plans become unpredictable. The re-emergence of a high-visibility ban functions as a collective stressor, especially for communities that experienced similar policies in prior years. Providers recommend trauma-informed counselling and culturally responsive outreach.

3.3 Economic disruption and mobility constraints: Restrictions affecting immigrants and specific non-immigrant categories constrain mobility for work and study. Several job applicants, chief executive officers, prominent families, and households in need of medical services face challenges in conducting their state tours due to bottlenecks. The delay not only hinders their careers or corporate endeavours but also denies numerous families their scheduled medical checkups. These improvements would affect labour supply and, in turn, family budgets (American Immigration Council, 2025).

3.4 The delay also impacts refugee and asylum pathways: A notable development in 2025 is the provisional cessation of humanitarian assistance, without a defined end date (Reuters, Jan. 25, 2025). The UNHCR indicates that the accumulation of such demands and resettlement has led to humanitarian implications. The situation exacerbates the risk of familial separation, particularly when it becomes challenging for relatives to reunite via resettlement. Although courts delineate the uses of such regulations for verified displaced individuals (AP, August 2025 ruling), implementation remains susceptible to modifications.

3.5 Multinational understanding and discouragement have been noted: Certain Africans and their families perceive nonverbal cues from the White House as indicating the need to seek educational or immigration opportunities beyond the United States (Agunlejika, 2025; Appleby, 2025; Burrows & Braml, 2025; Ganguli & MacGarvie, 2025; Thakore et al., 2025).

Certain researchers saw Trump as undermining the American university system (Nagel & Hopkins, 2025). Certain researchers perceive immigration laws to be stringent and cruel, necessitating essential public health initiatives. (Calhoun & Alang, 2025). University narratives regard the extradition of students and visa termination as a threat to their autonomy (Ukaonu, 2025). Casey (2025) asserts that such impunity reflects a profound power disparity.

4. Discussion

Interpretation: The convergence of policy facts across primary sources (proclamation reporting), institutional data portals (visa statistics), and NGO analyses supports the conclusion that 2025 policy actions created multi-level stressors for African families. Even when exceptions formally existed, uncertainty surrounding adjudication, timing, and future rule stability imposed psychological and economic costs.

Mechanisms: Family-systems theory predicts that barriers to physical co-presence and predictability can destabilise roles and routines. In 2025, barriers took the form of entry suspensions for certain nationalities, intensified vetting, and resettlement pauses. Structural constraint theory explains how ostensibly neutral rules can have disparate impacts when they align with historical inequities in documentation systems, exposure to conflict, or diplomatic capacity—conditions that characterise several of the listed African countries.

Comparative note: Although this review focuses solely on 2025, institutional analyses situate the year's policies within a broader policy lineage. The Brennan Center argues that national-security vetting already integrates robust identity checks, suggesting diminishing returns for blanket nationality bans. The American Immigration Council outlines the potential collateral effects on U.S. families and employers, particularly when borders separate petitioners and beneficiaries.

Practice implications: Clinicians and community organisations serving African diasporas should: (a) screen for policy-related stressors during intake; (b) provide psychoeducation about rights and exceptions; (c) establish referral pathways to reputable immigration legal services; and (d) design group support for separated families. Faith-based and diaspora organisations can partner in culturally consistent outreach.

Policy implications: Policymakers should prioritise (1) clear and public waiver criteria and timelines to reduce uncertainty; (2) urgent processing for cases involving minor children and medically vulnerable relatives; (3) transparency in visa statistics and resettlement scheduling; and (4) safeguards that prevent nationality-based overbreadth when individualised vetting suffices. For humanitarian pathways, predictable funding is essential to prevent midstream cancellations that harm already vetted families.

Limitations: Because the 2025 policies are recent, peer-reviewed outcomes research remains limited; much early evidence comes from institutional reporting and high-quality journalism. Additionally, visa and resettlement statistics are released with a lag and may be revised. These factors motivate cautious interpretation and demonstrate the importance of longitudinal follow-up.

5. Ethical and Institutional Approval Statement

The present study employed publicly available records, peer-reviewed journal publications, and government reports that did not require research authorisation or ethical clearance. We complied with ethical norms for research reporting, ensured precise attribution, and refrained from employing stigmatising language regarding those affected.

6. Conclusion

Within the review window (January–November 2025), Trump-era immigration actions—anchored by a June proclamation restricting entry for nationals of nineteen countries, many in Africa, alongside shifts in refugee resettlement operations—produced layered consequences for African families.

The persistent themes encompass the disruption of integration, unspoken adversity, challenges about employment and education, the severance of familial ties, and interruptions to the humane pathways that usually unite families. According to Abib (2025), the stringent visa regulations and increasingly restricted immigration policies have created significant challenges for African families. These developments led to ongoing, substantial, and grave concerns and apprehension (Bernstein et al., 2025).

Families and communities interpret this occurrence in diverse ways. Families with pending appeals about restrictions face uncertainty, while cross-border carers and households reliant on allowances encounter significant challenges. Consequently, the service system must initiate intentional psychosocial interventions and other requisite assistance. A policy framework that aligns governmental objectives with the interests of affected families and contextual factors, while incorporating specific evaluations, may mitigate harm to families without neglecting legitimate security concerns. The persistent themes encompass the disruption of integration, unacknowledged adversity, challenges about employment and education, the severance of familial ties, and interruptions to the humane pathways that usually unite families.

7. Author Contributions and Acknowledgements

Dr. Christian Adetunji, of CMAT Family Therapy Services Ltd., Kigali, Rwanda, conceptualised, planned, and authored this systematic review. He bears full responsibility for the validity and accuracy of this work.

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