



# Migrant Labour

A migrant worker is a person who either migrates within their home country or outside it to pursue work.

The 1913 Native Land Act assisted in eroding family values as it gave birth to the migrant labour system that damaged the African family structure. The migrant labour system in apartheid South Africa, provided abundant cheap African labour for white-owned mines and farms and, at the same time, enforced racial segregation of land. Male migrants employed by white-owned businesses were prohibited from living permanently in cities and towns designated for whites only. Hundreds of thousands of African men lived in crowded single-sex hostels near their jobs and were not allowed to bring their wives and children. This resulted in fatherless homes as fathers moved to the cities working in low-paying jobs, returning home once a year, if they could afford to. This left children to grow up to be men and women with no sense of belonging and with no role models to emulate.

This hostel system also had adverse effects on the health and well-being of its occupants. Too many people living together in small spaces with inadequate ventilation increased the spread of diseases, and contributed to the spread of tuberculosis and HIV-related diseases. Living circumstances caused stress and strain in the vicious cycle for survival. Taverns were easily accessible for workers to spend their money to relieve the frustrations of their appalling conditions. This resulted in them spending the money rather than sending the money home.

Hostel life estranged the husband from his family. Single mothers were left behind to support their children with the pittance earned through unskilled domestic labour.

Adapted from: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/grade-8-term-2-mineral-revolution-south-africa>