

South Africans living overseas are starting to think twice



South Africans are slowly starting to think twice about living abroad, with a small but notable number of expats returning home.

Almost a million South Africans live abroad, but some are moving back for several reasons, with a big one being the quality of life back home.

This is the feedback from Sean Kelly, the director of Parity Wealth Managers, who noted that South Africans are starting to reassess whether staying abroad still makes sense financially.

Speaking in an interview with **702**, Kelly said there is a noticeable shift underway, with more South Africans who previously emigrated beginning to return home.

He acknowledged that it's not a mass return yet, with roughly 900,000 South Africans still living abroad in destinations like the United Kingdom, Australia, and the United States.

However, he explained that what is changing is that far more people from that base are now reassessing their lifestyle perspectives.

According to Kelly, this marks a shift in mindset. "The old immigration model was leave South Africa for opportunity," he said.

“The new model is to build opportunity globally, but live or retire where life works better financially.”

As a result, he said that South Africa is seeing a gradual return, which signals a definite change in direction of more people coming back.

A key driver behind this trend is the cost of living. “The main reason is it’s a lot cheaper to live in South Africa than some of these developed markets.”

He highlighted how many South Africans only fully appreciate this after living overseas, noting that “when people leave, they realise how good they had it in South Africa.”

Kelly also noted that the difference in purchasing power is significant, and that “your money effectively goes twice as far in South Africa,” allowing for better housing, more space, and a higher standard of living.

South African expats are bringing their international skills with them



Sean Kelly, the director of Parity Wealth Managers.

He also pointed to the affordability of services and healthcare. “South Africa offers high-quality private medical care,” he said.

He added that even with medical aid, it is still significantly more affordable than private healthcare in the UK or the US.

This makes returning home “a very rational decision” for many weighing up whether to remain in a high-cost environment.

Kelly also said that the returnees are diverse, including young professionals, families, and retirees.

Younger professionals are drawn by flexibility, with “30 to 40% doing some form of remote or hybrid work, meaning they are no longer tied to living overseas.”

Families are motivated by practicality, as schooling and other needs are up to 40% cheaper in South Africa.

Retirees benefit financially the most, as savings built up in stronger currencies allow them to enjoy significantly higher living standards back home.

Kelly noted the decision to return is both financial and lifestyle-driven, with many deciding that South Africa offers better overall value despite the factors that initially pushed them to leave.

A recent report compiled by the TEFL Academy showed a similar pattern, with professionals in particular starting to make a move home.

The TEFL Academy’s Reverse Emigration Among South Africans report noted that a growing number of skilled South Africans are returning home after building careers overseas.

The report highlighted that many are spending a few years abroad to gain experience and save money before coming back with new skills, global networks and a different perspective.

Survey respondents indicated that living abroad increased their confidence and adaptability, with an average score of 4.41 out of 5.

Half of the respondents also strongly agreed that their international experience had given them a global perspective that is now a valuable professional asset in South Africa.