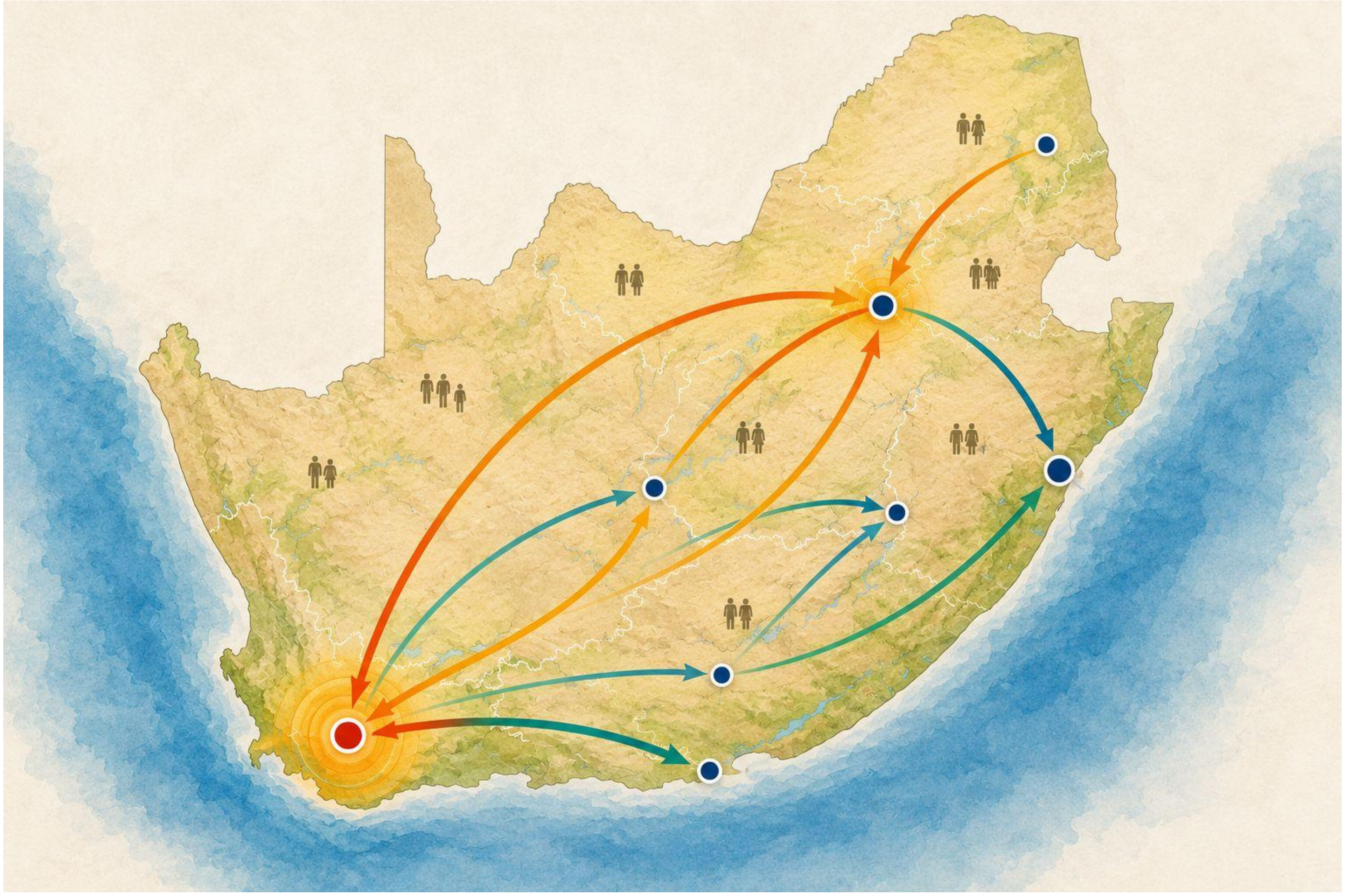


Why South Africa's Inter-City Migration Patterns Are Reshaping the Moving Industry

South Africans have long moved between provinces in search of better opportunities, but the scale of internal migration over the past two decades has fundamentally reshaped the country's population. Between 2011 and 2021, Gauteng gained almost 1.9 million residents through internal migration alone, more than the entire population of the Northern Cape. Over the same period, the Western Cape welcomed roughly 646,500 new residents, while the Eastern Cape recorded a net loss of approximately 603,000 people to other provinces.

These are not forecasts but completed census figures from Statistics South Africa. They reveal a long-term shift towards a handful of economic centres, with people consistently leaving provinces that offer fewer employment opportunities. For the removals industry, these migration patterns are more than demographic trends. They determine where demand exists, how transport networks are planned, and which long-distance routes require the greatest investment.

South Africa’s Biggest Internal Migration Corridors

Gauteng remains South Africa's primary destination for internal migrants. According to Stats SA's 2025 mid-year population estimates, Gauteng is now home to approximately 16.1 million people, representing 25.5% of the national population despite occupying just 1.5% of the country's land area. The Western Cape continues to attract the country's second-largest share of internal migrants, while KwaZulu-Natal's population growth has been driven largely by natural increase rather than migration.

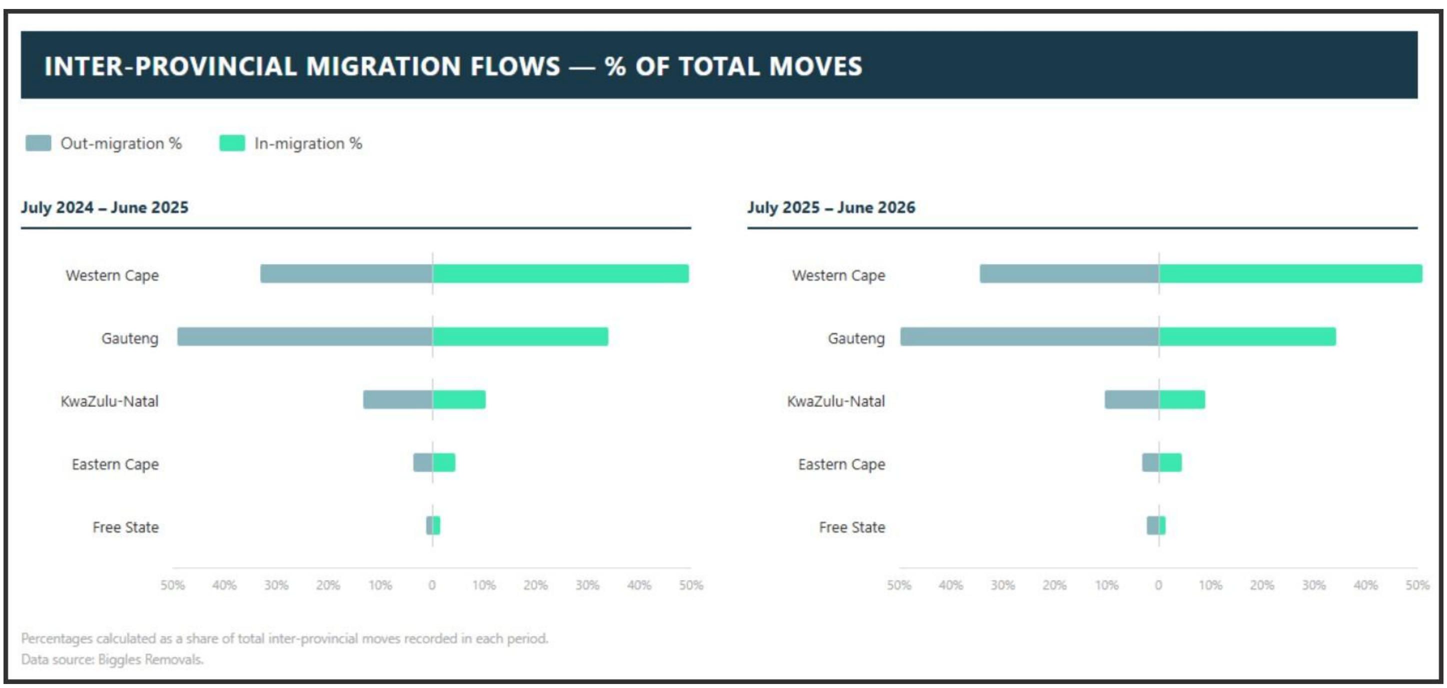
Lifetime migration data from Census 2022 reinforces this trend. Provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Limpopo have experienced sustained net population losses over several decades, reflecting the continued movement of residents towards South Africa's larger economic centres.

Although migration is measured at provincial level, much of the demand experienced by the removals industry is concentrated around South Africa's largest metropolitan areas. In practice, long-distance relocations are typically planned between cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban rather than between provinces. These city-to-city routes form the backbone of the country's long-distance moving market.

Internal booking data from Biggles Removals, covering long-distance relocations completed between July 2024 and June 2026, broadly reflects these national migration patterns while offering a practical view of how demand is distributed across South Africa's busiest long-distance routes. Rather than replacing the national picture, it helps illustrate how those migration trends translate into day-to-day moving activity.

Across Biggles' booking data, the Western Cape accounted for approximately half of all recorded inbound long-distance relocations over the two-year period, while Gauteng generated almost half of all outbound moves. Together, the two provinces accounted for the largest share of long-distance moving activity, with that overall distribution remaining remarkably consistent across both years of the study.

The booking data also highlights the Garden Route as a distinct long-distance destination. Approximately 80% of recorded relocations between Johannesburg and the Garden Route travelled southbound, compared with around 20% in the opposite direction. Rather than simply functioning as an extension of the Cape Town market, the figures suggest the region generates substantial long-distance relocation demand in its own right.



Migration patterns also differ by household. Men are more likely to relocate for employment or job transfers, while women most commonly move to join or live closer to family or a spouse. These differences shape the types of removals taking place, from single-person relocations for work to full household moves involving entire families.

The Economic Forces Behind Internal Migration

Work is the single biggest driver of internal migration in South Africa. According to Stats SA, 28.1% of internal migrants cite paid work as their primary motivation for moving, well ahead of any other category.

The underlying driver is the uneven performance of provincial economies. Demographic researchers at Wits University have described the pattern in the Eastern Cape and similar provinces as a direct consequence of shrinking local economies: small towns that can no longer sustain employment. This pushes working-age residents toward Gauteng and the Western Cape, where job markets are deeper and more diverse. Education reinforces the same trend, as many students move to major cities for tertiary studies before remaining there to begin their careers.

The picture is not entirely static, however. Biggles' booking data shows KwaZulu-Natal's share of inter-provincial relocations declined between the first and second year of the study, accounting for a smaller share of both inbound and outbound moves. Over the same period, the Western Cape's share of inbound relocations increased slightly, reinforcing its position as one of South Africa's primary long-distance destinations. Although two years of booking data is insufficient to identify long-term structural change, it does demonstrate that relocation patterns continue to respond to changing economic conditions.

How Migration Trends Are Changing the Moving Industry

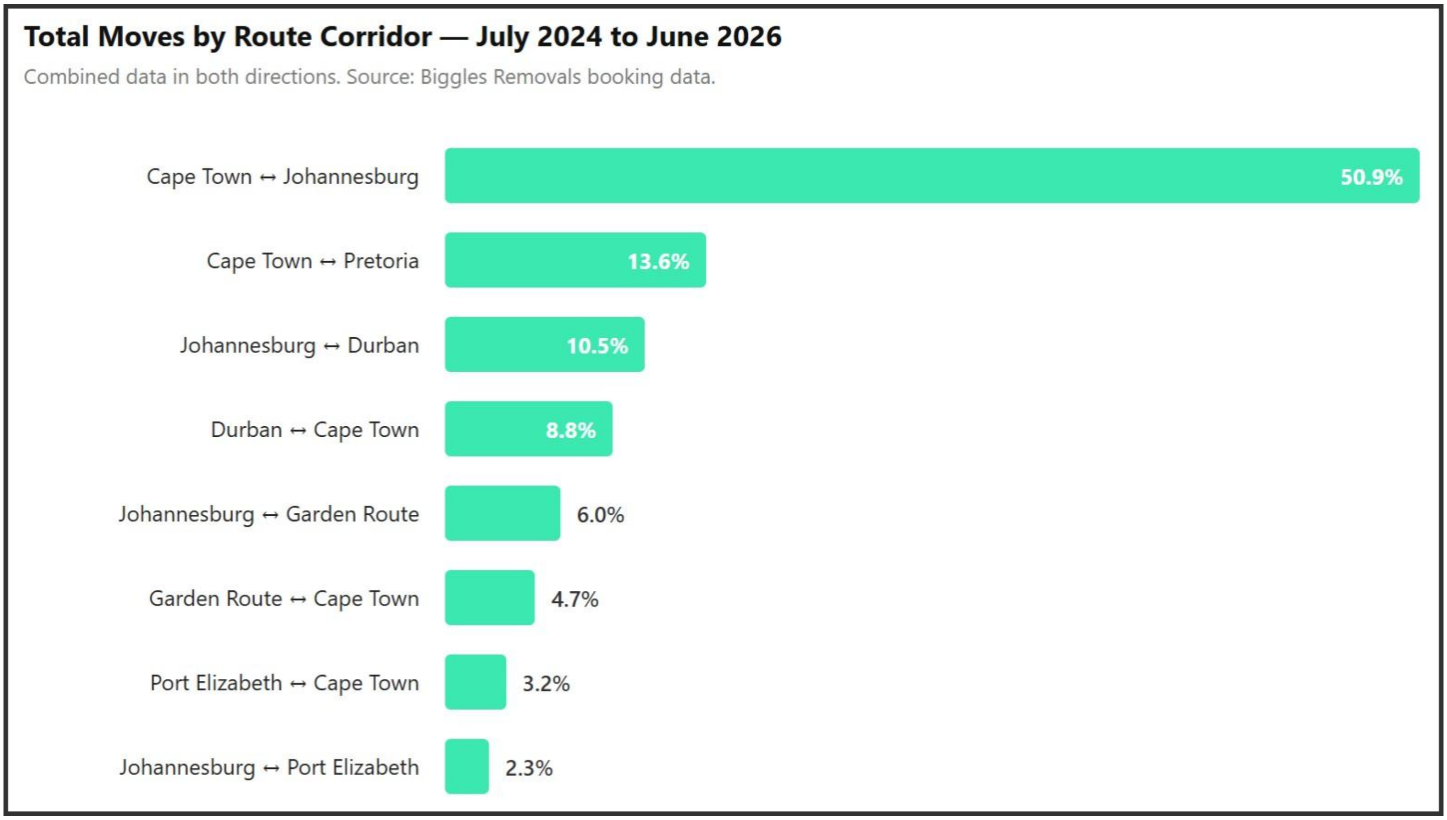
Migration patterns are not fixed. They respond to changing employment opportunities, housing affordability and regional economic conditions, meaning moving companies cannot rely on historical demand alone. Operators need to continually adapt their networks and scheduling to reflect where people are actually relocating.

Internal migrants are not a marginal customer segment. Stats SA's Income and Expenditure Survey data shows that internal migrant households typically earn and spend more than non-migrant households. This has direct implications for service expectations: higher uptake of comprehensive insurance, professional packing, and storage rather than the cheapest possible option.

The concentration of moves along a handful of major corridors also allows moving companies to operate more efficiently. Rather than servicing every destination equally, established operators can invest in regular schedules, local depots, dedicated crews and improved fleet utilisation on routes where demand remains consistently high. Higher volumes also reduce empty return trips, helping to improve operational efficiency and pricing.

Building a Network Around South Africa's Busiest Moving Routes

As migration patterns evolve, so too do customer requirements. Long-distance relocations increasingly include students, young professionals and smaller households alongside traditional family moves. In response, many operators have expanded scheduled shared-load services, allowing customers to move smaller loads without paying for an entire vehicle.



Biggles Removals has structured its national network around many of South Africa's busiest long-distance migration corridors. Scheduled services connect Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, Gqeberha, Bloemfontein and the Garden Route, supported by locally based teams rather than relying on a single national dispatch hub.

The Johannesburg-Cape Town corridor accounted for just over half of all bookings across the eight major routes analysed, making it comfortably Biggles' busiest long-distance corridor. Demand, however, was not evenly balanced. Over the two-year period, southbound relocations exceeded northbound moves by approximately 34%, creating an imbalance that directly influences fleet scheduling, vehicle utilisation and return-load pricing.

Pretoria tells a different story. Relocations between Pretoria and Cape Town were distributed far more evenly in both directions, indicating relatively balanced demand throughout the study period. The corridor also generated substantially more long-distance activity than Durban-Cape Town, making it one of the company's busiest inter-city routes outside Johannesburg.

To support demand on these high-volume corridors, Biggles operates scheduled weekly shared-load services, allowing customers to pay only for the vehicle space they require while still receiving free Goods in Transit insurance and delivery within three to five business days. The same model is available on routes including Johannesburg-Durban, Johannesburg-Gqeberha, Durban-Cape Town and Cape Town-Garden Route, with regular services also connecting Nelspruit, Bloemfontein and major centres in Limpopo with destinations across South Africa.

Smaller relocations are supported through dedicated mini-mover services designed for apartments, student moves and single-room households, while commercial relocation teams assist businesses moving between South Africa's major economic centres.

The Future of South Africa's Long-Distance Moving Market

South Africa's long-distance moving market continues to reflect the country's underlying migration patterns. As long as Gauteng and the Western Cape remain the country's strongest employment hubs, demand will continue to concentrate on the corridors connecting these regions with provinces experiencing sustained population losses.

For the removals industry, understanding these trends is about far more than forecasting customer demand. Migration patterns increasingly influence fleet planning, depot locations, scheduling, pricing and service design. Companies that continue investing in South Africa's busiest long-distance corridors will be better positioned to meet demand, optimise fleet utilisation and respond as migration patterns continue to evolve.

To learn more about Biggles Removals' long-distance services or request a free moving quote, visit: https://bigglesremovals.com/za/