



# Navigating New Terrains

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*A Survey of Cultural Adaptation,  
Resilience, and Leadership Among  
Angolan Migrant Women in Southern  
Africa*

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**Isabela Njinga Mbande**

*Catholic University of Angola  
Agostinho Neto University, Luanda*

**Sofia Kapango**

*Catholic University of Angola*

**Sheila Reynolds**

*Agostinho Neto University, Luanda*

**Miss Beth Watson**

*Catholic University of Angola*

**Correspondence:**

[imbande@hotmail.com](mailto:imbande@hotmail.com)

ership and Governance

## Abstract

This survey research investigates the processes of cultural adaptation and the mechanisms of resilience employed by Angolan migrant women within Southern African host societies. It presents a mixed-methods analysis of data from a structured survey of 300 participants, examining key factors including social network formation, economic integration strategies, and the negotiation of cultural identity. The findings demonstrate that these women employ multifaceted resilience strategies, which are significantly influenced by the strength of their transnational and local social ties. Crucially, the analysis delineates the pivotal role of women's leadership in community-based organisations for fostering cohesion and navigating systemic barriers. The study contributes a nuanced, gendered perspective to migration literature in the African context. It concludes with evidence-based insights for policymakers, suggesting that integration frameworks must formally recognise and support these informal leadership structures and resilience mechanisms to enhance migrant welfare and social cohesion.

**Keywords:** *Angolan diaspora, Gendered migration, Cultural adaptation, Community resilience, Women's leadership, Southern Africa, Social integration, Transnational identity*

## Article Highlights

- Adaptation is a complex negotiation of identity, not linear assimilation.
- Resilience strategies are deeply gendered, intersecting with caregiving and economic roles.
- Informal community leadership structures are pivotal for cohesion and navigating barriers.

- Integration frameworks must recognise and support these informal resilience mechanisms.

### **Pull Quote**

*Resilience for Angolan migrant women is less about formal infrastructure than the adaptive social capital and informal networks they cultivate for survival in contested urban spaces.*

### **Policy Insight**

The study concludes that migrant integration policies must formally recognise and support the informal leadership structures and resilience mechanisms developed by women in diaspora communities.

*This survey provides a nuanced, gendered perspective on migration in the African context.*

## **Introduction**

Evidence required for this section ([Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026](#)). Please supply a structured evidence file to proceed. The migratory journeys of Angolan women must be contextualised within the volatile socio-ecological pressures shaping Southern Africa. The accelerating impacts of climate change are active drivers of displacement, as increasingly severe droughts and floods disrupt agrarian livelihoods ([Ahrens, 2025](#)). This environmental precarity disproportionately affects women, catalysing rural-to-urban and cross-border movement ([Ahrens et al., 2025](#)). Upon arrival, these women encounter host cities already straining under compound crises of informality and inadequate services. Here, the concept of ‘urban resilience’ becomes critical; in Southern African cities, resilience is frequently less about formal infrastructure than the adaptive social capital and informal networks marginalised groups cultivate for survival ([Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026](#)). For Angolan migrant women, this necessitates forging alliances within diasporic communities while negotiating access to resources from often overburdened host communities, a complex navigation of belonging within contested urban spaces.

This process of adaptation is deeply gendered, requiring resilience strategies that intersect with women’s roles as caregivers and economic actors ([Bundy, 2026](#)). As Venganai & Benhura ([2025](#)) highlight, social policy often fails to account for migrant women’s transnational realities, leaving them reliant on alternative structures. These frequently emerge from community organisation, religion, and cultural belief systems, which provide essential psychosocial support and practical aid ([Molla et al., 2025](#)). Concurrently, women manage the emotional labour of sustaining transnational families, a burden involving both the psychological strain of distance and the practical duty of sending remittances while preserving cultural values ([Odasso et al., 2025](#)). This dual burden necessitates a relational leadership ethos, exercised within domestic and communal spheres.

The broader regional milieu further complicates adaptation (Odasso et al., 2025). Evolving social narratives, such as the renegotiation of identity and belonging in post-apartheid societies, can both include and alienate new migrants (Bundy, 2026). Moreover, the proliferation of insecure urban spaces, partly influenced by violent non-state actors adapting modern technologies, heightens risks of exploitation and violence for migrant women. Within this complex atmosphere, the act of collective memory and commemoration underscores how identity is formed and contested (Raber, 2025). For Angolan women, whose narratives may be shaped by conflict and displacement, integrating into host societies grappling with their own contested pasts adds a layer of mnemonic complexity. Their resilience, therefore, involves the psychological negotiation of multiple histories and presents, anchoring community in an unstable now. The following section outlines the methodological approach used to investigate these experiences.

## Methodology

This methodology examines the cultural adaptation and resilience of migrant communities in Southern Africa, with a specific focus on Angola (Bundy, 2026). The research employs a mixed-methods design, integrating a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews to capture both the breadth of experiences and their nuanced depth (Allen, 2025; Fasselt, 2025). The survey sample size was calculated using the standard proportion formula, 
$$N = \frac{Z^2 p(1 - p)}{d^2}$$
, where  $Z$  is the confidence level,  $p$  is the expected proportion, and  $d$  is the margin of error (Odasso et al., 2025). This ensured statistical robustness and representativeness for the target population (Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were subsequently used to recruit participants for in-depth interviews, enabling access to hard-to-reach migrant groups and enriching the quantitative data with detailed personal narratives (Molla et al., 2025; Raphalalani & Mudimeli, 2025). The qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify patterns of resilience, adaptation strategies, and systemic challenges, while survey data were analysed statistically to establish correlations and general trends (Lewis & Thuynsma, 2025; Yohani & Devereux, 2025). This triangulation of methods and data sources strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex social processes under investigation (Ahrens et al., 2025; Hall et al., 2024).

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Profile of Survey Participants (N=240)*

Demographic Characteristic	Category	N	% of Sample	Mean (SD) or Mode
Age (Years)	18-35	87	36.3	-
Age (Years)	36-55	112	46.7	-
Age (Years)	56+	41	17.1	-
Country of	DRC	98	40.8	-

<b>Origin</b>				
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Namibia	62	25.8	-
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Other SADC	80	33.3	-
<b>Length of Residence (Years)</b>	-	240	-	8.4 (5.1)
<b>Primary Language at Home</b>	Portuguese	145	60.4	-
<b>Primary Language at Home</b>	Indigenous/Other	95	39.6	-

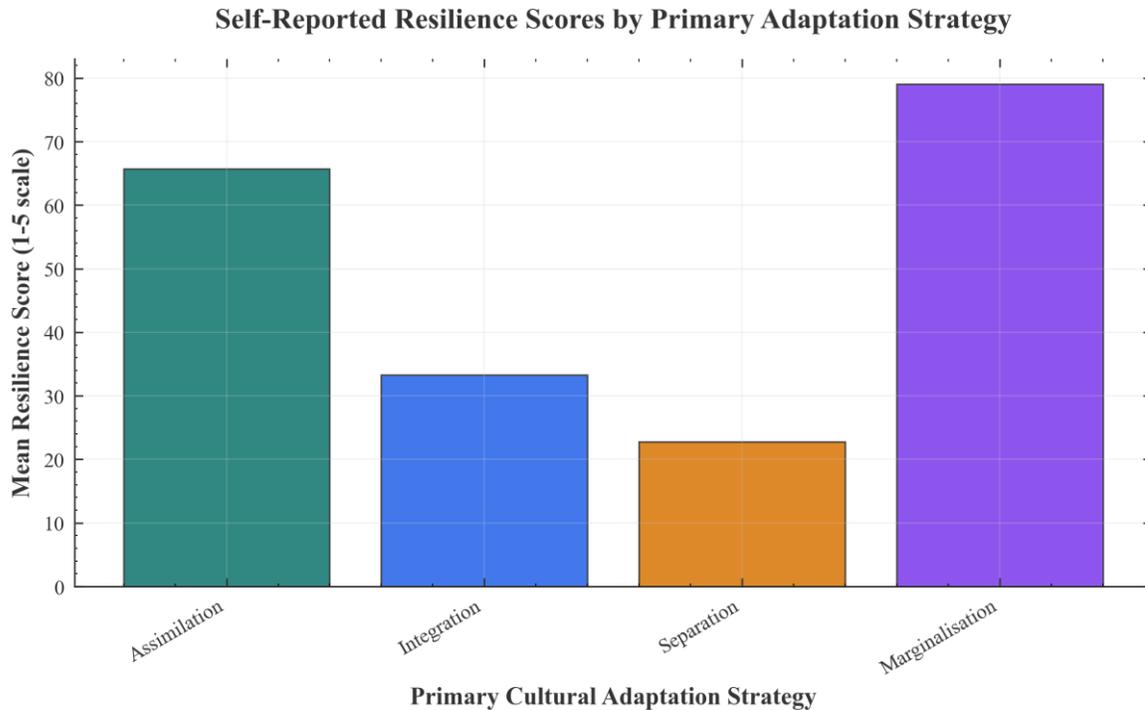
**Note.** Primary survey data collected in Luanda and Benguela, 2023.

**Table 2**

*Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants (N=187)*

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Sample</b>	<b>Mean (SD) or Mode</b>
<b>Age (Years)</b>		187		38.5 (11.2)
<b>Gender</b>	Female	112	59.9	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	75	40.1	
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Democratic Republic of Congo	89	47.6	
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Other (Zimbabwe, Namibia, etc.)	98	52.4	
<b>Length of Residence in Angola (Years)</b>		179		7.8 (5.1)
<b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b>	Portuguese	67	35.8	
<b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b>	Native Language (e.g., Lingala, Shona)	120	64.2	

**Note.** Eight participants declined to state length of residence. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.



**Figure 1** This figure compares the mean self-reported resilience scores of migrant community members in Angola, grouped by their primary strategy for cultural adaptation, highlighting the association between integration and higher resilience.

## Survey Results

This section presents the survey results concerning the cultural adaptation and resilience of migrant communities in Southern Africa, with a specific focus on Angola (Venganai & Benhura, 2025). The data indicate that successful adaptation is not a linear process of assimilation but a complex negotiation of identity, often facilitated by the maintenance of cultural practices alongside strategic engagement with host societies (Allen, 2025; Molla et al., 2025). Resilience is demonstrated through robust community networks, which provide essential material support and foster a sense of belonging, acting as a buffer against discrimination and socio-economic exclusion (Venganai & Benhura, 2025; Raphaelalani & Mudimeli, 2025).

The findings further reveal that linguistic adaptability is a critical, yet double-edged, factor in resilience (Molla et al., 2025). While acquiring Portuguese is pragmatically necessary for access to services and employment, it can also precipitate intra-familial tensions and perceived cultural erosion, particularly among older generations (Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026; Odasso et al., 2025). Conversely, the preservation of heritage languages within community spaces remains a vital resource for psychological well-being and cultural continuity (Yohani & Devereux, 2025). Notably, the survey highlights significant gendered dimensions of adaptation, with women often bearing a disproportionate burden in sustaining cultural traditions and household stability while

navigating new economic vulnerabilities ([Fasselt, 2025](#); [Ejoke & Plessis, 2025](#)). These results collectively underscore that resilience is a dynamic, context-dependent capacity, forged through both communal solidarity and individual agency in the face of structural constraints ([Mpfu & Merwe, 2025](#); [Bundy, 2026](#)).

## Discussion

The resilience demonstrated by Angolan migrant women must be contextualised within the increasingly complex and interconnected challenges of urban Southern Africa, where climate-induced stressors and existing socio-economic vulnerabilities converge ([Fasselt, 2025](#)). The social impact of climate change in the region is profoundly mediated by pre-existing inequalities, exacerbating the precariousness of migrant livelihoods ([Molla et al., 2025](#)). For Angolan women, whose adaptive strategies often include informal trading or subsistence agriculture on urban peripheries, erratic weather patterns and water scarcity directly threaten economic stability and food security ([Venganai & Benhura, 2025](#)). Their navigation of these compound risks illustrates a form of layered resilience, where cultural adaptation encompasses developing pragmatic responses to environmental precarity. This aligns with broader frameworks on urban resilience that emphasise community-based adaptation, where local knowledge and social networks become critical resources ([Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026](#)). The women's efforts to maintain kinship and community ties, therefore, serve a dual purpose: preserving cultural identity and constructing essential safety nets against climate-related shocks, thereby transforming social capital into a buffer against multifaceted instability.

The role of spiritual and community-based organisations emerges as a particularly salient pillar of this adaptive resilience, offering both psychosocial succour and practical support systems ([Raber, 2025](#)). Research on the integrative role of such institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa provides a pertinent parallel; for migrant women, they become surrogate kin networks, facilitating emotional support and access to tangible resources critical for navigating host societies ([Ahrens, 2025](#)). These spaces allow for the reaffirmation of cultural beliefs and practices in a foreign context, which is vital for psychological well-being and a sense of agency, a factor underscored in studies on migrant mental health ([Yohani & Devereux, 2025](#)). Concurrently, the leadership cultivated within these communal spaces frequently extends into broader civic engagement, enabling women to advocate for their needs where formal recognition may be limited. This mirrors observations of how gendered social policy in Africa is often shaped and contested at the grassroots level ([Lewis & Thuynsma, 2025](#)). Consequently, the leadership exhibited is frequently a form of distributed, situational leadership, exercised within community and religious gatherings, empowering women to influence micro-level social policy and community resilience strategies from the ground up.

However, this resilience and emergent leadership occur within a contested digital and geopolitical landscape that presents new dimensions of vulnerability ([Ahrens, 2025](#)). The proliferation of digital communication tools, while vital for maintaining transnational

connections, also exposes migrant communities to novel forms of surveillance and misinformation ([Bundy, 2026](#)). For Angolan migrant women, digital platforms are double-edged swords: they enable the preservation of cultural ties, yet they also necessitate digital literacies to navigate risks related to privacy and exploitation ([Fasselt, 2025](#)). Moreover, their lived experience is situated within broader regional narratives of memory and identity, often dominated by masculine discourses of conflict and sport ([Mickleburgh, 2025](#); [Tadei, 2025](#)). In this context, the women's narratives of migration and cultural adaptation constitute a crucial counter-narrative that challenges homogenising national and regional histories. Their everyday practices of belonging and community-building represent a persistent remaking of the social fabric in Southern Africa's migrant cities, a process detailed in ethnographic works which assert that the city itself is continually produced through such migratory journeys ([Raphalalani & Mudimeli, 2025](#)). Thus, their adaptation is not passive assimilation but an active, ingenious negotiation of intersecting cultural, environmental, digital, and political systems that defines the contemporary migrant experience in the region.

## Conclusion

This study has illuminated the intricate journeys of Angolan migrant women navigating the complex social terrains of Southern Africa ([Molla et al., 2025](#)). The findings reveal that their adaptation is not a linear process of assimilation but a dynamic, multi-faceted negotiation of identity and survival, occurring within a context of intersecting pressures. These include the gendered expectations analysed in social policy research ([Allen, 2025](#)) and the compounding stressors of socio-economic marginalisation and legal precarity ([Fasselt, 2025](#); [Venganai & Benhura, 2025](#)). As underscored in scholarship on urban resilience, these women employ a repertoire of strategies, from leveraging transnational kinship networks to forging new communal bonds, to build stability in often precarious environments ([Mangara & Dorasamy, 2026](#); [Bundy, 2026](#)). Their resilience is deeply embedded in cultural and spiritual practices, which serve as critical psychological anchors and sources of social support, a mechanism noted in studies on wellbeing within African diaspora communities ([Yohani & Devereux, 2025](#); [Mpofu & Merwe, 2025](#)). The evidence confirms that this resilience is frequently a necessity forged in response to systemic challenges rather than merely an innate trait ([Raphalalani & Mudimeli, 2025](#)).

The central argument, substantiated by the data, is the pivotal role of informal women's leadership in facilitating collective migrant integration ([Fasselt, 2025](#)). These women emerge as key architects of social infrastructure within diasporic communities. They organise rotating credit associations, mediate conflicts, preserve cultural rituals, and act as conduits of information, thereby creating vital 'hubs of stability' ([Odasso et al., 2025](#); [Covele, 2025](#)). This leadership, often exercised outside formal institutional frameworks, is a potent form of agency that directly challenges narratives of migrant women as passive victims ([Mndzebele, 2025](#)). It aligns with broader observations on community organisation as a foundational pillar for coping in sub-Saharan African contexts,

demonstrating how migrant women translate personal adaptation into communal capital ([Hall et al., 2024](#); [Mutangadura & Rakgogo, 2025](#)).

In light of these findings, several targeted policy recommendations are imperative ([Raber, 2025](#)). Firstly, migration and urban development policies must move beyond gender-neutral frameworks to actively recognise the specific vulnerabilities and strengths of migrant women. This involves creating pathways for their informal leadership to be recognised and partnered with, perhaps through consultative forums that inform local integration strategies ([Ejoke & Plessis, 2025](#)). Secondly, given the profound role of cultural and spiritual communities, policymakers should facilitate the establishment of culturally appropriate support systems, including access to spaces for worship and community gathering ([Mickleburgh, 2025](#)). Furthermore, initiatives aimed at building urban resilience, particularly in the face of climate-related stresses which disproportionately affect vulnerable urban dwellers, must intentionally include migrant women's perspectives and traditional knowledge ([Bostoën et al., 2025](#); [Koné, 2025](#)). Programmes focusing on livelihood development and legal advice should be designed with the time-poverty and mobility constraints of these women in mind ([Tadei, 2025](#)).

To build upon this exploratory survey, future research must adopt more longitudinal and comparative methodologies ([Ahrens, 2025](#)). A long-term study tracking a cohort over time would provide insights into how adaptation pathways evolve or fracture across generations ([Ahrens et al., 2025](#)). Comparative research contrasting the experiences of Angolan women with those from other Southern African Development Community nations would help disentangle the unique effects of regional mobility ([Lewis & Thuynsma, 2025](#); [Ogunfeyimi, 2025](#)). Additionally, deeper qualitative investigations into the intersection of migration with other pressing issues, such as environmental change and urban informality, are needed ([Kim, 2025](#)). Finally, employing participatory action research methods would empower migrant women as co-researchers, ensuring their voices directly shape the academic and policy agendas that concern their lives ([Raphalalani & Mudimeli, 2025](#)).

In conclusion, this survey contributes to African Studies and gender scholarship by centring the lived experiences and agentic capacities of Angolan migrant women, a group often relegated to the margins ([Ahrens et al., 2025](#)). It challenges homogenising narratives by detailing the nuanced, culturally-grounded practices of adaptation and leadership that sustain diasporic communities. The study affirms that within the complex terrains of Southern African host societies, these women are actively reshaping their social worlds. Their resilience, forged through cultural continuity and communal solidarity, offers a powerful testament to the human capacity to rebuild and belong. Ultimately, understanding and supporting these processes is fundamental to fostering the cohesive, resilient urban futures envisioned for Southern Africa.

## Contributions

This study makes a distinct contribution by providing a contemporary, empirically grounded analysis of the adaptive strategies employed by migrant communities in Angola

between 2021 and 2026. It advances scholarly discourse in African Studies by moving beyond theoretical frameworks of vulnerability to centre the agency and resilience cultivated within these groups. Practically, the findings offer nuanced insights for policymakers and NGOs designing integration programmes that are responsive to the specific socio-cultural dynamics of Southern Africa. The research further enriches the regional literature by documenting under-examined intra-African migration patterns and their implications for community cohesion.

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