



Refugee Digest 85

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Migrants, Refugees and Displaced Persons

As we head into times of possible realignment of politics and nuances in policy matters, the key issue in the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) regarding policy certainty is in the field of visas and status documents. This continues to be a highly contested issue that impacts the lives of tens, indeed, hundreds of thousands of people. Elsewhere, spikes in anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobic action are apparent across the world, especially in the United Kingdom at this time. As ever, issues affecting migrant communities must be treated sensitively and according to verifiable data and sound research. The saga around the Zimbabwe Exemption Permits continues. The former Minister of Home Affairs applied for leave to appeal the court ruling prohibiting the DHA from terminating ZEPs, and the Helen Suzman Foundation has filed papers opposing the Minister's application, reiterating its stand that the decision to terminate was unlawful and unconstitutional.

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/2024-03-18-helen-suzman-foundation-heads-to-apex-court-over-zimbabwean-permits/>

https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-03-18-zep-saga-helen-suzman-foundation-takes-on-home-affairs-minister-in-concourt/?utm_source=Sailthru

In the meantime, the newly-appointed Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Leon Schreiber, has asked for time to think through the exemption permit issue, emphasising the importance of 'getting it right.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZSTTefXh2M>

A very interesting article traces the journeys of Ethiopians to South Africa and the hostility they encounter both institutionally, in the labyrinths of Home Affairs, and more so in the attitudes of South Africans in their daily encounters. Many aspects of the experiences documented here are also true for the mobile community generally.

<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2024/04/09/how-growing-hostility-south-africa-impacts-south-south-migration>

Political party Action SA has publicly called for the new Minister of Home Affairs to 'get tough on illegal foreigners in South Africa'. It has attributed the rise in crime and illegal flows of goods across the border to this category of persons. These sentiments contribute to an atmosphere of growing hostility towards foreigners in the country and normalise toxic discourses.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tK4CyUQZGw\t>

The polemic against undocumented persons after the elections had its roots in the strong anti-immigrant and xenophobic language used in campaigning before the election, thereby elevating it into acceptable discourse and making mobile communities more vulnerable than ever.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/05/06/south-africa-toxic-rhetoric-endangers-migrants>

As this is being written, riots across the United Kingdom have concentrated on immigration centres, immigration lawyers, and civil society organisations assisting refugees and migrants. In some cases there were attempts to attack migrants' places of temporary residence.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/now/video/far-right-anti-immigrant-riots-break-out-across-the-u-k-216506949821>

Shortly before relinquishing his post, the former Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Motsoaledi, was forced to withdraw amendments to the regulations of the Immigration Act, after criticism from several quarters especially with regard to the failure to create time for public participation, and because of the obvious negative effects on the economy. Tourism would have suffered greatly from the implementation of these regulations, especially as it would have forced many to cut short their stay in South Africa. This was particularly true of the 'swallow' group, who spend the summers in South Africa and add to the economy by their annual presence.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2024-04-09-comedy-of-errors-motsoaledis-ill-advised-visa-rules-withdrawn/>

<https://tinyurl.com/5n82kx4d>

On the issue of visas and other documents, it seems that banks that have been allowed to issue these documents have shown a higher level of efficiency and output than the DHA itself. One aspect that has been singled out for comment has been the loss of operating time. The Department has acknowledged a loss of 29 237 hours due to load shedding and systems failure. The banks, on the other hand, lost only 1 241 hours due to more efficient systems, better back-up and efficient work practices.

<https://businesstech.co.za/news/trending/767983/banks-are-beating-home-affairs-at-its-own-game-in-south-africa/>

Minister Schreiber has commented that the phrase 'offline' should become a swear word in the Department. He stated that one of the low hanging fruits was getting order into the systems, and thus avoiding long queues and wasted time and money.

<https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/system-offline-home-affairs-swear-word-leon-schreiber/>

Shortly before the May elections, Busi Mavuso, the CEO of Business Leadership South Africa, welcomed some of the amendments to regulations under the Immigration Act, but opined that it seemed that the DHA did not have the capacity to carry out efficiently the changes required. This threatened to retard any progress in sorting out these administrative difficulties which, in turn, was hindering investment and a sense of personal security for foreigners living in South Africa. After the elections many of her reservations still hold sway.

<https://tinyurl.com/4e7k8e23>

Peter-John Pearson
Director

pearson@iafrica.com