

Home Affairs gears up for high traveller volumes

By [Nthambeleni Gabara](#)

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The Department of Home Affairs is gearing itself up to deal with high volumes of travellers at all the country's ports of entry during the festive season, with effect from Saturday, December 15.

The department's Director General, Mkuseli Apleni, said plans included additional capacity, mainly at inland borders, which will see the deployment of over 300 staff members and the extension of working hours.

He said some borders would operate 24 hours, while others would increase their operation hours to midnight.

"This plan will run from 15 December to 19 February 2013 to accommodate the opening of schools and the African Nations Cup (Afcon)."

The targeted borders are Maseru Bridge, Beitbridge, Lebombo, Oshoek and Kopfontein, which tend to register high volumes of people and goods over the festive season.

Apleni said special arrangements would be made to process trucks and buses a few kilometres from the Lebombo border, which services over 30,000 migrant workers crossing the border before Christmas and after the New Year.

"It is important to note that these plans will be carried out jointly with the South African Police Services (SAPS), South African Revenue Services (SARS) as well as with our counterparts who share borders with South Africa.

"This is done in order to facilitate the smooth movement of people and goods across our borders during this time," he said.

Apleni also urged those who will be travelling to keep their travelling and Identity Documents safe at all times.

With regard to Refugee Reception Centres, he said the department was in the process of building a refugee centre next to the Lebombo border in Limpopo, in line with their strategy to establish refugee reception centres closer to the ports of entry.

He said this move would bring services closer to the asylum seekers and refugees, who are fleeing from persecution in their respective countries and in search of refuge in South Africa.

"A refugee reception centre at Lebombo border would enable asylum seekers to access services upon entry into South Africa. Presently, asylum seekers and refugees have to travel across the country to lodge their claim at a refugee

Reception Centre within the stipulated 14 days, when this could be done nearer to the ports of entry," he said.

Apleni said the department had noted misleading media reports alleging that the department was considering building "refugee camps" near to the ports of entry.

"We reject this accusation as being totally unfounded and out of line with government policy on asylum seeker and refugee management," he said.

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