

# Task team set up to probe implementation of immigration laws

PRETORIA: Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba has announced that a task team will be established to look into the implementation of the new immigration regulations.



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The Immigration Amendment Act, No. 13 of 2011 (Immigration Amendment Act), together with the relevant regulations, came into effect on 26 May 2014.

Among other things, the Act stipulates that every child should have his or her own passport. In addition to that, parents travelling with the child must produce an unabridged birth certificate showing the names of the parents, and where one parent is not travelling with the child, an affidavit is required.

The new immigration regulations introduced a new visa regime, which draws a clear distinction between short-stay visas and long-stay permanent residence permits.

The new regulations also make provision for an in-person biometric data collection when applying for a visa.

The new regulations have been met with concern, especially from the tourism industry, which said the Act might have a negative impact on tourist flows to the country.

Minister Gigaba, who met with representatives from the airlines and travel agent bodies to discuss their concerns on Friday, said the establishment of the task team was not a review of the regulations but the implementation thereof.

"It will look at how we [can] better implement the regulations and iron out any other issues that might arise, whether they relate to the present regulations or fall outside the regulations in order to strengthen the relationship between the sector and the department," said Minister Gigaba on Friday.

He said the task team's focus would be broader than just the tourism sector.

The time frame for the task team, which includes representatives from the tourism sector and the Deputy Director General of Immigration Services Jacky Mckay, has not been set.

Minister Gigaba said the meeting with stakeholders had raised the issue of poor communication, as well as the free movement of people. The industry representatives emphasised the fact that South Africa was competing with other destinations around the world.

"What we have found is that the work that the department does impacts on the sector. Hence we need to work together so that we are able to iron out any challenges that might arise from either side.

"As the department, we acknowledged that there is a greater need to enhance communication with tourist stakeholders and our missions abroad regarding the new regulations."

He said the task team will be directed to develop a communication strategy around the regulations.

The Minister said the ministry had an open door approach and was open minded. He said the department would consider proposals made during the meeting regarding unabridged birth certificates.

However, he emphasised that the implementation of the new regulations would proceed as planned.

"We need to know who comes to South Africa and what their business is and for how long they will be in the country... We have to find a balance between tourism and security."

He said the biometric visa centres, which are being opened across the country and at South African missions abroad, would make the visa application process smoother.

Minister Gigaba's department was working with the Department of Tourism and the sector to identify countries with large numbers of tourists coming to South Africa to ensure centres in those countries were well staffed.

Some of the counties include China, India, Brazil, Lesotho, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

Next week, the department is expected to make an announcement about the regulations and issues raised by the tourism sector.

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