

More migrant worker checks

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The Department of Home Affairs is set to increase its inspection of the sectors that employ large numbers of migrants.



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Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba said in Pretoria on Tuesday the issue of migrant workers had taken centre stage worldwide and needed to be managed sensitively.

He said the government needed to "control the narrative" regarding an issue that was becoming subject to right-wing opinions globally.

Gigaba said the department planned to increase inspections in the mining, hospitality, construction and agricultural sectors. It also wanted to work with industry bodies, he said.

On Tuesday, he met representatives of the hospitality sector to discuss the high rates of immigrant employment in the various sectors.

A key issue was a failure to properly distinguish between economic migrants and refugees, he said.

SA has been pushing various legislative reforms, including the 2014 Immigration Act, which introduced contentious requirements for unabridged birth certificates when travelling.

The act also requires that individuals applying for a business visa, or companies applying for a corporate visa to bring in individuals with requisite skills, prove they employ at least 60% South African nationals.

Legislative changes to the Refugee Act are also in the offing, with the Refugee Amendment Bill currently before Parliament, which will among other things, redefine some of the grounds for exclusion of refugee status.

Federated Hospitality Association of Southern Africa CEO Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa said the association had a direct interest in ensuring adherence to regulations for its members and the rest of the sector.

The association said it would work to ensure "credible" research was undertaken to assess the extent of the issue in the sector in order to properly inform policy-making.

There was alleged widespread lack of compliance with the Immigration Act and labour laws and concerns were being raised by citizens, communities and government departments about that sector, Gigaba said. He said similar meetings would be held with the mining, agricultural and construction sectors.

The meeting also followed complaints by Cosatu last week that a Chinese company was "illegally" bringing in hundreds of Chinese workers as part of a contract to upgrade a cement plant from PPC.

PPC has said in response it was satisfied the company - CBMI Construction - had complied with government regulations and protocols in relation to the labour employed on the project. This included local labour and scarce skills sourced abroad, it said.

Gigaba said the department would probe the allegations.

An announcement on the status of the Zimbabwean Special Permit - covering 197,000 people - should be made in February, he said.

The special permits, which date back to 2010 and have been intermittently renewed, were unlikely to be extended past December 2017 and Zimbabweans who were eligible for existing visas should apply for them, Gigaba said.

"We are not going to take any decision that is going to leave hundreds of thousands of people on the street without documentation," he said. - *reporting with Mark Allix*

Source: Business Day

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