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Position paper on the Green Paper on International migration

1. Background

The Department of Home Affairs (DHA) has identified a need to have a policy on how to manage international migration for development. There have been movements of people in and out of South Africa but the country did not, from a policy point of view, take advantage of this to facilitate economic development. One of the arguments around the justification for the Green Paper on International migration for instance, is that South Africa has not put in place adequate policy strategies, institutions and capacity for attracting, recruiting and retaining international migrants with the necessary skills and resources.

It would therefore be crucial to have tourism in mind when facilitating international migration, especially in regard to ensuring easy movement of people in and out of South Africa. This is more so given the fact that the tourism industry can contribute immensely to economic growth if certain migration policies are in favour of the sector. With the current policies, the country has seen growth in terms of the contribution of tourism to economic growth. The tourism direct gross domestic product increased by 9,7% between 2010 and 2014 (Stats SA, February 2016). The tourism sector directly employed 680 817 persons in 2014, an increase of 3,8% or 25 230 employees compared with 2013. Tourism's share of total employment was up by 0,1 of a percentage point from 2013 (4,4%) to 2014 (4,5%) [Stats SA, February, 2016]. In its vision for 2030, South Africa has, through the NDP, developed a milestone for increasing employment from 13 million in 2010 to 24 million in 2030. The tourism industry has proven to be one of the sectors that can contribute positively towards this milestone.

2. Problem statement

There is, on the part of legislative framework within South Africa, a lack of a pro-active management of international migration. It is silent on the need to manage historic flows of labour within SADC by promoting regional integration and industrial development. The implications of this phenomenon is that the country does not get to advance its development agenda as well as national security. Therefore, the current green paper proposes that international migration must be managed proactively and strategically in order to contribute to national priorities such as nation building and inclusive economic growth, amongst others.

3. What are the issues at hand?

3.1. Balancing security concerns with facilitation of efficient travelling

One of the issues raised by the DHA is that because the country is faced with an increasing number of travellers, there needs to be a balance between effective and efficient traveller facilitation and security. One of the proposals put forward by the green paper is that a history of all those who visit South Africa should be compiled and there should also be an effective screening of visitors to South Africa before they leave their countries of origin. This requires not only integrated systems of different government departments such as Home Affairs, National Treasury (the Financial Intelligence Centre), South African Revenue Services, to name a few, but also the reasonable turnaround time for such a history and screening to be compiled conducted respectively. Would the history and screening (which includes background checks) be done at the time of visa application? Does the DHA have adequate capacity to conduct these security checks or will other relevant bodies and government departments be brought on board to deal with these?

The Green Paper also states that the Department should be empowered to access data available in the travel industry for use in risk assessment. This would also require not only a system to be put in place to access live data but also, a sort of agreement that would ensure that information is not compromised. The paper however outlines the benefit of this process in that, once risk profiles of travellers have been confirmed, they could be granted long term multiple entry visas.

3.2. Facilitation of easy movement of travellers

According to the DHA, South Africa has become a major destination and transport hub in the continent and in the world. Apart from it being a tourist destination, most SADC nationals tend to transit through South Africa to the continent and the world. Given this, the tourism industry is interested in issues of easy access to transit visas, uni-visas as well as possible visa waiver programmes. Clear criteria for visa waiver programmes would have to be developed, such as frequency of visits, benefits to the

country and security related to the person who may require a waiver in getting a visa. The paper does address issues of uni-visas and visa waivers, although not in detail.

The DHA also proposed a long term visa, a family oriented visa which would be granted to migrants with the needed skills, investment and business interests. It would be imperative for the DHA to be specific as to the skills that are required, the type of investment and business interests. This should be in line with other legislations such as the one guiding transformation in the business sector. Clear criteria are also necessary here, to ensure that business that will stimulate the growth of the economy, which includes tourism, are encouraged.

It should be noted that South Africa is a signatory to the Protocol on the Facilitation of movement of persons of 2005. This protocol aims at facilitating the entry of citizens from SADC into other member states without the need for a visa, for a maximum period of 90 days. This would require development of compatible immigration policies, laws, systems, and population registers which would manage the flow of migrants into South Africa.

There is also a SADC Protocol on Tourism of 1998, which calls for the complete abolition of visa requirements for SADC nationals, as well as the introduction of a tourism uni-visa for visitors from countries outside the region. Discussion are still underway on the proposed uni-visa. The uni-visa would encourage residents in the SADC region to visit one another's country, obviously dependent on how countries market themselves.

South Africa has also implemented visa waivers which are in line with the Abuja Treaty, which offers a framework for continental integration. South Africa has also begun offering ten-year multiple entry visas to Africans from countries requiring visas to visit South Africa. These are frequent travellers, business people and academics. The Schengen model visa could also be considered in order to eliminate visa requirements for African citizens.

The paper talks of a need to determine and specify areas within a Port of Entry where a person shall present himself or herself for examination by an immigration officer. This is needed especially at some maritime ports and some land ports of entry. This is crucial in that it allows for efficient travelling, reducing some queues and inconvenience where the country does not have sufficient ports of entry. Although there are criteria for this, which includes economic factors, trade and needs of the community, this idea is welcome, as it implies an efficient way of facilitating movements of people.

The paper also proposes an establishment of One-Stop Border Posts, where the border agencies of each state involved are able to apply their national laws in the territory of the adjoining state. Specific provisions should be developed to give such

agencies extra territorial jurisdiction, so as to legalise this practice. This practice alleviates duplication of effort by the customer/traveller concerned.

4. Implications for the Tourism Industry and our position as TBCSA

As a business that is interested in easy travel for tourism purposes, our immediate interest is to see a reflection of those interests in the green paper. Based on discussion in the previous section, the green paper does concentrate on the ease of people's movement in and out of South Africa. We however, are concerned about systems to ensure that the proposed risk approach is successful.

Our concern regarding the key methodology/approach for effective screening of visitors to the RSA before they leave their country of origin or enter South Africa, is the readiness of home affairs to introduce and implement such an approach. The VISA processing time will increase as a matter of screening processes. This should be carefully implemented as it may affect potential tourists from applying for VISAs to come to South Africa. Often, visitors/tourists are likely to consider destinations (countries) that offer simplified fast VISA processing systems. For a visitor to decide visiting another country, there are factors which include but not limited to safety and security of the destination, affordability of goods and services at the destination, what the destination offers in terms of individual preferences, how accessible the destination is and mostly the ease of VISA application processes and affiliated costs. South Africa offers rich and unique tourism products coupled with heritage and cultural experience that has a potential to attract tourism to our country. But if this is not managed well, we might lose business as an industry.

The year 2014 also saw 14 529 542 non-resident visitors to South Africa compared with 14 317 908 non-resident visitors in 2013 and 13 069 034 non-resident visitors in 2012 (Stats SA, February 2016). These numbers could double if the proposed policy favours easy movement of people, as is proposed later in this paper. One of the gaps identified in the green paper is its silence on the possibility of introducing an electronic visa (e-visa). With the e-visa system, visa applications and supporting documentation are submitted online through a secure portal. Payment for application of visas is done online through an applicant's credit card. The reason an applicant's credit card and none other would be required for payment is to avoid fraud in the form of forgery of documents. Electronic visas would be beneficial in countries that have no widespread network of embassies and consulates.

Currently, the requirement for capturing of biometrics results in queues at the OR Tambo International Airport, where there is not sufficient capacity on the part of the Department of Home Affairs to process the data speedily. Policy and strategy implementation needs to be followed by proper systems, including human resources in order to realise successful implementation. Availability of adequate systems and human resources seems to be a challenge for DHA at the moment, and it leaves a lot of travellers frustrated at the airport and even missing their flights.

As an option for South Africa, the pilot for e-visas could start with regular/frequent visitors or tourists to South Africa, including those whose biometric data has been collected previously. Once this system has been evaluated and declared as successful, a rollout could be done with less frequent visitors, but those who have been cleared in terms of security. Thus, police clearance of applicants will be pertinent for security reasons, just to assure the SA government that the passport is genuine, and that the said applicant is not a security risk. Integration of the entire security cluster would have to be pursued if the Department of Home Affairs regards this option as viable.

Investing in IT infrastructure becomes very important if this option is pursued. This will not only be applicable to the Department of Home Affairs only but also the security departments such as the South African Police Service, the Department of State Security as well as the airlines, which could be required to verify possession of valid visas by those in possession of e-visas. This we regard as an innovative way of encouraging the easy movement of persons in and out of South Africa.

5. Best Practices on visa arrangements

5.1. Australia

Australia is among the countries that have introduced an e-visa system. Introduced in 1996, the system was brought into place in order to simplify the visa system to make it more responsive to changing traveller needs, more cost effective and easier for foreign visitors to understand, while also improving systems integrity. Australia realised that its visitor visa application and processing requirements were not the best practice compared to those of competitor destinations. Its visa application requirements were inhibiting access from key growing markets in particular. In its Draft Tourism 2020 Implementation Plan 2015-2020, the Australian government identified key actions for improving visa arrangements. Among others, these were, extension of online visa applications to all key tourism markets, applications to also be completed in languages other than English, allow three-year multiple entry visitor visas and that all online visitor visa applications for all key markets should be determined within 24 hours.

This strategy is seen as a game changer for Australia as it induces more people to visit Australia, reduces the burden of applying for visas and improves Australia's competitiveness. It involves the electronic lodgement and processing of visas, a system that recommended by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO). To this end, Australia has extended eVisas to visitors from India and China. Australia currently ranks the 7th globally and top in the Asia-Pacific region, and has identified tourism as one of four national investment priorities. It is also one of the top three destinations for leisure and entertainment, according to digital demand. The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was AUD46.3bn (2.8% of total GDP) in 2015, and was forecast to rise by 4.1% in 2016, and to rise by 3.5% pa, from 2016-2026 (WTTC, 2016). The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was AUD176.9bn (10.8% of GDP) in 2015. In 2015, Travel & Tourism directly supported 516,500 jobs (4.4% of total employment). The total contribution of Travel & Tourism

to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 12.6% of total employment (1,482,500 jobs). Visitor exports generated AUD25.9bn (8.3% of total exports) in 2015 (WTTC Report, August 2016). Travel and Tourism economy in Australia is expected to grow from 4.5% to 5.2% in 2017 (WTTC Report, August 2016).

Australia's eVisa system is considered to be one of the more advanced and visitor-friendly approaches. The country has a Travel and Tourism Competitiveness index of 4.98, which is good (WEF Travel and Tourism Report, 2015).

5.2. Mexico

Mexico is among the developing countries that have travel facilitation initiatives that are aimed increasing tourism arrivals, creating quality jobs which end up translating into economic growth. Mexican initiatives also include improvements in visa processes and technological advances to reduce waiting time for visas. Mexico has a visa free policy based on the acceptance of trusted third party permanent resident permit. Based on this policy, permanent residents of Canada, Great Britain, Japan, The United States and the Schengen Area countries do not require a visa when visiting Mexico. Mexico also has a regional approach to a visa free regime, where travellers from a Pacific Alliance member countries namely, Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru do not need visas for visiting Mexico. There is also an Electronic Authorisation System, which is basically an online system available to travellers from Brazil, Russia and Ukraine, who enter Mexico by air. The government of Mexico has also launched a system for processing visas within 24 hours for Brazil, Russia and China.

Mexico is among the five most competitive Tourism and Travel competitive countries in North America, and ranks 30th globally in terms of competitiveness. Its Travel and Tourism Competitiveness index is 4.36, which is above average (3.5.). The direct contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was MXN1,264.8bn (7.0% of total GDP) in 2015, and was forecast to rise by 4.0% in 2016, and to rise by 4.2% pa, from 2016-2026. The total contribution of Travel & Tourism to GDP was MXN2,734.9bn (15.1% of GDP) in 2015. In 2015, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 15.9% of total employment (7,985,500 jobs) Visitor exports generated MXN292.3bn (4.5% of total exports) in 2015 (WTTC Report, August 2016).

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (2015), 8 out of the Top 10 visa open countries have an upward trajectory on travel and tourism figures on GDP, employment, visitor exports and investments. Good results in West Africa are due to the Free Movement of Persons Protocol and in East Africa are as a result of the high number of visa on arrival policies. Seychelles for example, has seen 7% annual growth in international tourist arrivals between 2009 and 2014. Travel and tourism contributed to 56,9% of Seychelles' GDP in 2014. The sector also contributed to 57,3% of total employment with 25,500 jobs in 2014.

In Mauritius, travel and tourism contributed to 25,5% of the country's GDP in 2014 and 24,2% of total employment with 134,000 jobs.

6. Conclusion

According to the UNWTO, travellers view visas mainly as a formality that imposes a cost and if the direct and/or indirect cost (inconvenience) of obtaining a visa exceeds a threshold, potential travellers are simply deterred from making a particular journey or choose an alternative destination with less hassle. Therefore, a number of countries are making a concerted effort to improve ease of access for travel for tourists, both business and leisure tourists. The key consideration for administrators is how to maintain the balance between national security and being a welcoming tourism destination, which is something that South Africa should strive for, without inhibiting growth within the tourism industry, which already contributed immensely to economic growth in the country.

Simplifying the visa application process for the visa required countries should be one of the options that South Africa should consider. In this case, processing time should be shortened, while online applications are encouraged. In conclusion, developing a competitive Travel & Tourism sector internationally requires a certain degree of openness and travel facilitation. Restrictive policies such as cumbersome visa requirements diminish tourists' willingness to visit a country, and indirectly reduce the availability of key services (WEF Travel and Tourism Report, 2015).

The End.