

FINAL

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TOURISM BUSINESS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA'S (TBCSA) INPUT ON IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS

1. Introduction

The Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA) is an umbrella organization, which represents the unified voice of businesses in the Travel and Tourism (T&T) sector. TBCSA is a non-profit, private organization working to unite and influence the diverse Travel and Tourism private sector behind one core mission to contribute to a competitive, responsible and inclusive Travel and Tourism (and South African) economy. Our mandate is to serve the needs to our members who broadly constitute 20% of the sector's leading business enterprises and whose output represents 80% of the sector's overall economic contribution.

The tourism industry contributes significantly to the GDP of this country. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the industry directly contributed R 136.1 bn or 2.9% total GDP in 2017. The total contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP was R412.5bn or 8.9% of GDP in 2017. The Travel and Tourism industry also contributed 9.5% of total employment or 1 530 500 total jobs or in 2017. This includes jobs indirectly supported by the industry. Visitor exports generated R126.7bn, which is 9.2% of total exports in 2017. According to the Statistics South Africa's Tourism Satellite Account, tourism outperformed the agriculture industry as one of the key industries contributing to the GDP. These benefits will accrue more as South Africa gets more tourist arrivals.

According to Stats SA's latest Tourism and Migration report, in April 2018, 3 582 842 travellers (arrivals, departures and transits) passed through South Africa's ports of entry. These were made up of 1 027 709 South African residents and 2 555 133 foreign travellers. The ten leading overseas countries whose tourists visited South Africa in April 2018 were United Kingdom (UK), 31 641 (16,3%); United States of America (USA), 27 775 (14,3%); Germany, 19 827 (10,2%); France, 15 861

(8,2%); The Netherlands, 10 892 (5,6%); Australia, 9 740 (5,0%), India, 7 652 (3,9%), China, 7 280 (3,8%); Canada, 5 557 (2,9%) and Brazil, 5 247 (2,7%). The number of tourists that came to South Africa increased for three of the ten leading countries (Brazil, China and Canada), but decreased for Germany, UK, India, The Netherlands, Australia, France and USA. This provides background to the key source markets that account for large numbers of inbound tourists.

2. Our Input

2.1. Process of visa renewal application

Whereas there are different types of visas in South Africa, currently the outcry in the tourism industry is mainly on the issue of work permits. Our first input is on the process of application for permits and visas. A cursory glance at the requirements for applying for critical skills work visa and the requirements for its renewal are exactly the same. This means that the same documentation needed for renewal would be readily available in the DHA database. In our view there is no need for applicants to go through a hassle of re-submitting some of the documentation that is already in the Department of Home Affairs' database. The processing times are also inconsistent per country. Some South African embassies take two weeks to process these, whereas others take several months. Some of the experience in the industry has been that people who had work permits that were in the process of expiry were told to go back to Europe to re-apply.

The prolonged process of obtaining work permits for foreigners affects the sectors that are in need of scarce skills which are not currently available in the country. In the tourism sector, the tour operating sector, including some travel agents are in need of foreign language skills such as Spanish, Germany, Dutch and Swedish, which they are only able to obtain from the foreigners who also know the culture of the speakers of such languages. The prolonged process of obtaining visas delays the process of getting tourists into South Africa, especially during the peak season. A secure online application process could assist, which should be driven by employers. This process should include travel authorisation upon acceptance of application as well as capturing of bio-metrics once the applicant enters South Africa.

In our view, the department of home affairs needs to revitalize its strategy or systems that it currently uses in processing visas, as it is indicated that the processing times vary and fluctuate and people are normally expected to wait for 6-8 weeks to get visas. It is recommended that the DHA should introduce a more advanced and fast track option, possibly at a surcharge to minimize the delays, frustration, confusion, long queues and everything that generally comes with whole application, so that people who need to urgently travel at short notice have that option.

2.2. Critical Skills

The tourism industry has critical language skills, namely, Spanish, Dutch, Swedish and German, which are not recognized by the Department of Higher Education's Gazette on the National List of Occupations in High Demand. Tourist guides are in high demand, especially those speaking the languages already mentioned. We have discovered that whereas speaking a foreign language is a critical skill for the banking sector and call centres, this is not the case for the tourism industry. When this skill is not recognized, tour operators end up reducing the number of trips that have to be taken as the visas of the guides they have do not get renewed. The more tours the industry has from South Africa's key source markets, such as Germany and the Netherlands, the more jobs the industry could create for South Africans, in other job responsibilities such as sales, reservations and accounts, to name a few.

The Department of Home Affairs should consider providing work visas to non-South Africans who are in the country on asylum basis or spouse visas, who already speak foreign languages. These are people from other African countries, and are able to provide inbound customer service work in their local languages. Currently, this is not the case, and it adds to the challenge that is already there.

Another skill is that of D-Rated pilots for the Hot Air Balloon industry. South Africa does not have many D-Rated pilots. The ones that are there either run their own operations or are not based in Johannesburg and are unable to relocate. This has created a need for the industry to import pilots from countries such as the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Turkey and Egypt. The process for having visas for these pilots is tedious and can take up to six weeks. We therefore

suggest that multiple entry visas be used as a standard, and that the 90-day period be reconsidered as the pilots spend the first four to five weeks just to get qualified, leaving them with seven weeks to work and then reapply for the visas. A five-year visa would actually save the industry time and money. We submit that the Hot Air Balloon Pilot be regarded as a critical skill, as there are limited pilots available in this area. This would shorten the process of application for visas.

2.3. Business Visa

One other issue that needs to be taken into consideration is the business visa, which is essential for people who are planning to start businesses or who intend to invest in this country. Enabling easy access to this visa will always open doors for investments opportunities into different industries, including the tourism industry. As the country is striving towards attracting foreign direct investment, assurance by the DHA that there are no challenges and obstacles encountered when applying and renewing this visa will be beneficial and an answer to the problem of lack of investors in this country. This move would be in line with the President's plan of attracting investors into the country, in line with the State of the Nation Address of February 2018.

3. Conclusion

It is in the interest of our country that the foreign language skill and Hot Air Balloon pilot skill be recognized as a critical skills for the tourism industry. This would pave way for critical skills visas to be provided. The tourism industry is able to create about 30 South African jobs due to increased sales turnover with the foreign travel consultants they can hire.

There are also chances of training and language skills transfer if the visas of the foreign language speakers can be renewed. Perhaps the Department of Home Affairs can have that as one of the conditions for approval of such visas. Intra-company transfer visas would be beneficial for the sector in order not to distract operations.

The Department of Home Affairs' turn-around times for visa applications also need to be optimised, in order to avoid bottlenecks.

Yours Sincerely

Ms. Tebogo Umanah

GM: Policy Analysis and Strategic Projects

Tourism Business Council of South Africa

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