



More airport staff request still pending

● *Department tries to cut queues amid hiring freeze*

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The Department of Home Affairs says it is still awaiting feedback on an application to deploy additional staff to immigration terminals at international airports to process foreign tourists.

New immigration regulations, confusion over the requirements for abridged birth certificates and new biometric systems introduced to record passenger details have led to long delays at airports.

The department does not have enough staff for all the immigration counters at OR Tambo International Airport and

tourism providers and airport management are scrambling to put in place mitigating measures for the busy festive season.

Many companies are hoping for a boost following a disappointing third quarter.

GDP figures released by Statistics SA on Tuesday show that trade, catering and accommodation – which includes tourism – contracted 2.1% during the third quarter from 1.4% in the second quarter.

“Normally, the fourth quarter will always be stronger [for tourism]. The other thing that played a part in the last year or so has been the exchange rate,” said Statistics SA chief

director for national accounts Michael Manamela.

The Tourism Business Council of SA has developed proposals to ease the congestion. The organisation said that it was hoping for feedback after a Department of Home Affairs and Department of Tourism meeting on Wednesday.

The council said staff shortages at OR Tambo were at the “heart of the issue” and it had motivated for the government to expedite the Department of Home Affairs’ request.

Treasury austerity measures aimed at reining in public expenditure include a prohibition on hiring public servants.



Only critical vacant posts can be filled.

Despite changes to the shift system, only 60% of immigration counters are operational at peak periods. The Department of Public Service and Administration has also been asked to examine this problem.

Department of Home Affairs spokesman Mayihlome Tshwete said on Tuesday that the department was still awaiting feedback on its requests for hiring additional staff.

This was a long-standing issue and was not limited to airports, he said. “Nothing happens in isolation of resources ... our officials are already working 10 times over and are already stressed,” Tshwete said.

The department was considering redeploying personnel, but this would simply mean it would be “robbing Peter to pay Paul ... we are already cutting from muscle, not cutting fat”, he said.

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Heart of the issue:

Passengers at international arrivals at OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. /The Times