

# Migration and Covid-19 : A review of South Africa's policy response to the pandemic

Summary of issue brief #2 : Key concerns and recommendations  
Migration and Coronavirus in Southern Africa Co-ordination group (MiCoSA)

## Key findings

### Screening and testing for Covid-19

The requirement for an ID or passport number at the point of testing may act as a barrier to non-citizens accessing care. In addition, regulations regarding the use of information gathered during testing are insufficient to protect the privacy of non-citizens.

### Social services and relief programmes

Lockdown has curtailed the provision of some social services. Although a Social Relief of Distress grant has been created, to date only South African residents, refugees and Permanent Residents have been eligible to apply.

### Employment

The pandemic and lockdown have had implications for both the formal and informal economies. Regulations guiding the easing of lockdown and re-opening of the economy have paid insufficient attention to non-citizens. While non-citizens are eligible for the Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme, there have been delays in non-citizen applicants receiving pay-outs.

### Cross-border migration

Movement into South Africa has been limited since 18 March. Although a blanket extension has been applied to all permits until 31 July, there are no mechanisms for new arrivals to regulate their arrival in South Africa.

### Detention and deportation

The detention and deportation of non-citizens has continued, even though concerns have been raised about the conditions in detention centres and a call has been made for a moratorium on deportations.

### Refugees and asylum seekers

Asylum seekers should soon be eligible for the Social Relief of Distress grant. While asylum permits have all been extended until 31 July, no provisions have been made for those wishing to apply for asylum.

### Internal migrants

As lockdown has eased, regulations have allowed for inter-provincial and inter-district movement. However, policy has failed to anticipate the implications of this movement for the spread of Covid-19.

### Housing

Quarantine and isolation facilities have been made available to those who cannot self-isolate or quarantine at home, including those who are homeless. Although evictions were banned during stages 5 and 4 of lockdown, constructive evictions of non-citizens were reported.

### **Children**

Policies reviewed do not mention or take into account the impact of Covid-19 and the lockdown on children.

### **Tourists and visitors**

Non-citizen tourists and visitors have, on the whole, been well catered for within the regulations with provisions being made for their isolation and repatriation.

## **Way forward**

Through an analysis of existing policy responses, clear concerns have emerged with regards to the ways in which migration is being responded to and migrant and mobile communities are affected. As the pandemic develops and new policies are developed in response, we call for the South African government to ensure that:

1. A human-rights approach underpins the policy response to Covid-19 and the ways in which this response engages with migration and non-citizens in South Africa;
2. Responses to Covid-19 are migration-aware and mobility-competent. This will involve considering the specific needs of South African migrants and non-citizens, including children, LGBTIQ+ migrants, and migrants who work in the mining and agricultural sectors;
3. The government engages with and includes migrant-led organisations, civil society, international organizations and researchers working with migrant groups in the development of responses. This includes the involvement of groups that are already left behind including migrants with disabilities, sex workers, LGBTIQ+ migrants, reclaimers, farm and mine workers;
4. All non-citizens are entitled to state relief programmes and are encouraged to access screening, testing and treatment for Covid-19. Non-citizens must be assured that they will not face any penalties should they be without the documents required to be in the country legally, or should their documentation have expired; and
5. A moratorium is placed on the arrest, detention and deportation for immigration offences.

The full brief can be accessed at [mahpsa.org](http://mahpsa.org) alongside others in the series.