

Some of Home Affairs' challenges stem from understaffed offices, the department must urgently complete the filling of funded positions

By **Angel Khanyile MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Home Affairs

Thank you Chairperson,

Today, as we debate the Home Affairs Budget, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Jackson McKay, former Deputy Director-General (DDG) of Immigration, for the sterling work and dedication he has shown while serving in the aforementioned portfolio, and we wish him well on his retirement.

We would like to express our appreciation to the D-G, Mr. Makhode, DDG, Civic Services, Mr. Sigama and their teams for the efficient service and response to all queries we escalate to their offices. Sadly, these men and women are thrown under the bus by the Minister, who does not take this department seriously.

The network system at Home Affairs is consistently offline. As a result, queuing at Home Affairs branches before sunrise gives no guarantee of making it into the building before sunset. We have conducted oversights at Balfour, Nigel, Springs, Barrack Street, and Stellenbosch branches.

We also conducted an oversight at the Home Affairs Regional Office situated on Harrison and Plein Streets, and this oversight was led by the Leader of the Opposition, as he felt he could not fold his arms while we were inundated with a huge volume of calls from members of the community complaining about the disservice they were subjected to in various branches. They are always told to return the next day because of an offline network.

For all the above oversights, we have witnessed the network being offline, or a photo booth crashing while we were on the premises. The home affairs network regularly goes offline, effectively shutting down the application for documents until the system is back online. This may take up to 7.5 hours, which may prompt officials to ask the applicants to return the following day. The applicants will then make an effort to arrive as early as 05:00 the next day to be first in the queue. This also puts the applicants' lives at risk as they are expected to leave their homes around 04:00 because some of them catch about three taxis to get to the Home Affairs offices.

In August 2021, we welcomed an announcement by the department to introduce an appointment booking system. This intervention will not yield fruitful results if the Minister does not attend to the system's upgrade urgently.

This network issue also puts the lives of the officials in local offices at risk. We have been told by some officials that when they advise applicants that the system is offline, they get physically and verbally attacked because applicants blame them for the department's inefficiencies. On many occasions, they have been rescued by SAPS, but the Minister wouldn't know about this because he is hardly on the ground.

Some individuals use the long queues to exploit applicants by making them pay R300 to skip the queue. This also puts those without money further back in the queue.

Just last week, on May 16, 2022, all Home Affairs branches were offline and we have been advised that most branches, if not all, lose about 40 hours of work per month.

I would therefore like to suggest that the Minister:

- Must urgently attend to the systems upgrade.
- Introduce a queuing system where applicants will be given numbers as they arrive and the numbers will be linked to an attendance register with full details of the applicant. This will ensure no one skips the queue.
- A queue marshal must always be available outside to direct applicants to designated queues.
- Issue a schedule to schools for mobile unit visits a month in advance to enable parents to make arrangements to take leave.

Chairperson,

Most offices operate with insufficient staff. We urge the department to urgently finalise the filling of funded posts.

I invite the Minister to visit various Home Affairs offices and witness the horrible long queues applicants are exposed to.

Chairperson,

The IEC delivered the worst LGE elections in November 2021, a huge number of voters were denied their right to vote for their preferred candidates, and this was caused by the IEC's incompetency.

On the registration weekend, the IEC system was offline, which prompted the details of those who wanted to be registered to be captured manually and those details were never captured into their system. This was caused by the use of a newly procured voter management device which was not tested. On the voting day, we witnessed lots of voters being turned away from various VD's because they did not appear on the voters' roll. This happened even after the IEC appeared many times before the Portfolio and confirmed its readiness to hold elections.

Many voters were registered in VD's that are between 5-7km away from their residential area, not only that they were registered in a different ward.

In closing, Chairperson, the Afrobarometer survey conducted in 2021 on the community trust rate for the Electoral Commission shows that it has declined from 69% in 2014 to 36% in 2021.

We expect the Minister to ensure that every voter exercises their right to vote as enshrined in our Constitution and the first time voters are just as important. They MUST never be denied an opportunity to vote.

I thank you.