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Submission by AgriSA on the Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection

Executive Summary

AgriSA welcomes the Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection (Government Gazette No. 6947, 12 December 2025) and supports its vision of a modernised immigration system aligned with national development priorities.

We affirm the White Paper's emphasis on job creation for South Africans, recognising that employment is not only about income but about dignity, social inclusion, and upliftment. AgriSA fully supports this imperative. At the same time, agriculture continues to rely on foreign labour, particularly for seasonal and unskilled roles.

The current corporate visa system is administratively burdensome and inequitable. Agriculture accounts for approximately 91% of all corporate visa allocations, yet the system requires each farm or agribusiness to apply individually. This creates inefficiencies, disadvantages smaller enterprises, and undermines government's ability to monitor migration flows effectively.

AgriSA therefore recommends:

- *Replacing corporate visas with a sectoral visa system, administered at the sector level.*
- *Ensuring proper documentation of all foreign workers.*
- *Establishing alignment between the Department of Labour and Employment and the Department of Home Affairs to streamline processes.*
- *Recognising the continued need for an unskilled labour force in agriculture.*
- *Aligning national policy with the AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2006).*
- *Safeguarding both South African and foreign workers through fair, transparent, and inclusive mechanisms.*

This approach will ensure immigration policy serves national interests, protects dignity through job creation, and sustains key economic sectors such as agriculture.

1. Introduction

AgriSA appreciates the opportunity to provide input on the Draft Revised White Paper. As the leading representative body of South Africa's agricultural sector, we are committed to constructive engagement with government on matters that directly affect food security, rural livelihoods, and sustainable economic growth.

We acknowledge the White Paper's ambition to modernise South Africa's immigration framework and to align visa categories with national development priorities. We also affirm the White Paper's emphasis on job creation for South Africans, recognising that employment is about dignity, self-worth, and social inclusion.

2. Background

The corporate visa system was designed to allow individual companies to employ a specified number of foreign workers under quota-based approvals. While this mechanism has provided a regulated pathway for labour migration, it has proven administratively burdensome and fragmented.
In agriculture, these shortcomings are particularly pronounced. Seasonal labour demands, dispersed operations, and fluctuating production cycles characterise the sector. Requiring each farm or agribusiness to apply individually is ill-suited to these realities.

In 2024, the Department of Employment and Labour processed corporate visa applications covering more than 6,200 migrant workers, with agriculture accounting for an estimated 91% of all approved work visas. [1] This demonstrates that agriculture is the single largest driver of corporate visa demand.

3. Problem Statement

By placing the burden of visa applications on individual companies, the corporate visa system creates inefficiencies, duplication, and inequities. Smaller enterprises often struggle to navigate the complex requirements, while larger corporations are better positioned to secure allocations.

This imbalance undermines fairness and risks constraining productivity in sectors vital to South Africa's development. The absence of sector-wide oversight reduces government's ability to monitor and regulate migration flows effectively, while leaving employers vulnerable to administrative delays and inconsistent access to labour.

Furthermore, the current system does not adequately ensure that existing foreign workers are properly documented, leaving both workers and employers exposed to risks.

4. Recommendations

AgriSA proposes establishing a sectoral visa system, administered by the Department of Home Affairs, as a more effective alternative. We recommend that the term' corporate visas' be formally replaced with 'sectoral visas' to reflect this shift.

4.1 Alignment with National Priorities

4.1.1 Immigration policy must prioritise opportunities for South Africans, recognising that employment is about dignity and social upliftment.

4.1.2 While prioritising South African workers, policy must acknowledge agriculture's reliance on foreign labour, particularly for seasonal and unskilled roles.

4.2 Proper Documentation and Compliance

4.2.1 All foreign workers must be properly documented to ensure compliance, protect workers' rights, and safeguard employers.

4.2.2 A streamlined documentation process should be developed in consultation with the Department of Labour and Employment and the Department of Home Affairs.

4.3 Interdepartmental Coordination

4.3.1 Immigration policy must be harmonised with the operational mandates of the Department of Labour and Employment and the Department of Home Affairs.

4.3.2 A joint coordination mechanism should be established to prevent duplication, conflicting requirements, and administrative delays.

4.4 Operational Framework for Sectoral Visas

4.4.1 Quota allocation: Sectoral visas should be allocated based on annual labour market assessments, with input from industry bodies such as AgriSA.

4.4.2 Consultation committees: Structured consultation between government and sectoral organisations should guide allocations and compliance.

4.4.3 Monitoring and oversight: Government should monitor migration flows at the sectoral level, ensuring transparency and accountability.

4.5 Safeguards and Fairness

4.5.1 Sectoral visas must not displace South African workers but complement local employment strategies.

4.5.2 Migrant workers must be safeguarded against exploitation, with clear labour rights and access to grievance mechanisms.

4.5.3 Simplified processes should ensure that smaller farms and agribusinesses can access visas fairly.

4.6 Regional and Continental Consistency

4.6.1 South Africa's immigration policy should align with the AU Migration Policy Framework for Africa (2006), which recognises labour migration as a driver of development.

4.6.2 Harmonising national policy with continental commitments will strengthen regional cooperation while protecting national sovereignty.

5. Conclusion

AgriSA supports the White Paper's vision of a modernised immigration system that prioritises job creation for South Africans and upholds the dignity of work. At the same time, we urge government to adopt a sectoral visa system that reflects the realities of agriculture and other labour-intensive industries.

This system would provide a more efficient, equitable, and economically aligned framework for managing labour migration, ensuring that immigration policy serves both national interests and the sustainability of key economic sectors.

AgriSA stands ready to collaborate with government and other stakeholders to design and implement such a system

[1] Parliamentary Q&A response, 2024 – Department of Employment and Labour. Foreign Farmers Flock to South Africa for Better Opportunities