

# Are foreigners stealing your jobs and healthcare? Find out.

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Last week, Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi claimed in a speech at the National Education, Health and Allied Workers' Union's (Nehawu) Nurses' Summit that undocumented immigrants are flooding South Africa and overburdening clinics and hospitals.



Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi. Photo:GCIS

When immigrants “get admitted in large numbers, they cause overcrowding, infection control starts failing”, he said.

In his speech, Motsoaledi argued that South Africa must re-evaluate its immigration policy in order to prevent illegal immigrants from entering the country. But he offered no data or evidence to substantiate his claims about immigrants being such a burden on the public healthcare system.

## How many immigrants are in South Africa?

According to [the most recent census](#), there were 2.2-million foreign-born people living in South Africa in 2011. This figure includes both documented and undocumented immigrants.

Statistics South Africa [estimates](#) that one-million people immigrated between 2011 and 2016. Add that to the census' total, subtracting the almost 400,000 foreigners that the 2017 White Paper on International Migration says Home Affairs deported during roughly the same time, then about 2.8-million immigrants called South Africa home in 2016.

## What does that mean?

Immigrants comprised about 5% of the country's total population of 55.9-million.

Reliable data clearly shows that the country is not overwhelmed with immigrants. That clearly hasn't stopped claims by politicians and Motsoaledi is not alone.

In 2015, former Gauteng health MEC Qedani Mahlangu told *Eyewitness News* that often “nine out of 10” patients in provincial health facilities were immigrants and blamed them for putting strain on the healthcare system. She was unable to substantiate that claim.

Then, like today, there was no evidence that foreigners were flooding clinics and hospitals.

Francois Venter from the Reproductive Health and HIV Institute at Wits University responded to Mahlangu's claims, telling *Health-e News Service* that “blaming foreigners for the failure to organise the public health services properly is the worst kind of xenophobia”.

“I've worked in the public sector for over 10 years [as a doctor], and the problems we see [at the hospital] are largely due to poor human resource and supply line management, and the disease burden related to the local failure of poverty relief programmes and poor organisation of services — not a handful of foreigners who are here for jobs, not for healthcare,” he said.

When it comes to the public healthcare sector, it is true that the clinics and hospitals are stretched to the limit. But this is not because of immigrants; the crisis in the healthcare sector is due to years of mismanagement, understaffing, poor planning and corruption.

The failure to deliver basic services and quality care to millions of South Africans who cannot buy private healthcare is why Motsoaledi is blaming powerless and voiceless foreigners.

As Nelson Mandela University researcher Savo Heleta recently [wrote](#) on the online media outlet *Africa is a Country*: “Why would politicians choose to face the rightful anger of millions of poor and hopeless South Africans when they can revert to anti-immigrant rhetoric and shift blame to those who have no voice?”

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