

# ‘Lack of funds caused backlog’

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THE Department of Home Affairs has told Parliament that a lack of funds and capacity was crippling the country’s refugee reception offices.

Yesterday, MPs grilled the department over the closure of its two major refugee reception offices in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

Parliament heard that the department was not adequately staffed, with 713 officials.

The department’s acting deputy director-general, Jackson McKay, said: “If there was an inspectorate at our facilities, people would not have to travel all the way from the north to Cape Town to apply for asylum.

“We have only 713 inspec-

torate officials in South Africa. There are more police at OR Tambo. How can you expect any impact?” He said the National Treasury’s decision to put a ceiling on the compensation of employees’ spending in government had placed their refugee reception offices under immense pressure.

“How can you manage migration if we can’t police it? We don’t have the capacity to police it. We have R7.9 billion, it has still not enough for the department.

“Even if you reprioritise, this is a department at the centre of government. It needs to be treated that way,” said McKay.

Parliament was told during consultations on the Immigration Amendment Bill that the country sat with a backlog of

about 200 000 applications by asylum seekers.

Home Affairs disregarded a court order last year instructing it to reopen its refugee reception office in Cape Town by March 31, 2018. The office is open for renewal permits by asylum seekers who registered at the office before its closure in June 2012.

It said it was waiting to be assigned a building by the Department of Public Works.

The country has five refugee reception offices. However, services to first-time applicants were suspended in two of them.

Acting director-general Thulani Mavuso said the office in Port Elizabeth could process new applications by the end of October, while the Cape Town office was set to operate early next year.