

Let foreign truckers drive

By [Nicholas Woode-Smith](#)

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As of 20 June 2022, 213 foreign truck drivers had been arrested for operating illegally this year. This has been accompanied by local truck drivers staging economically devastating protests across the N3 and other major highways. These protests are already predicted to have cost the economy over R300m.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

Through all of this, many are blaming foreign truck drivers. But they are not the ones hurting the economy through destructive protests. If anything, they are the ones keeping it alive by maintaining crucial supply chains across the country.

To solve the problem of foreign truck drivers, an 11-point plan has been agreed upon by the South African Transport Union (Satawu), the industry bargaining council, the All Truck Drivers Alliance (ATDF), and the Transport Association of South Africa (Tasa).

The plan, in essence, involves restricting the rights of foreign truck drivers, bringing foreign truck drivers in line with restrictive SA labour laws (that don't help anyone), and the tightening of visa requirements.

The knee jerk reaction by many is that foreigners are taking South African jobs, and this must stop. Local is lekker, right? Well, not necessarily.



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Many businesses employ foreigners because they aren't held back by inane labour regulations that make employing South Africans risky, costly, and restrictive. Often, foreign drivers are also more experienced and better suited for the job. If they weren't a net benefit to the business, and the economy by extension, they wouldn't be hired.

Local truck drivers don't want to compete with foreigners, so they're disrupting innocent people's lives, halting supply chains, and damaging the economy. They're effectively holding the state and SA hostage because they fear competition from skilled workers who just want to do their job.

The fact that these truck drivers are foreign is irrelevant. Being local doesn't make someone more 'deserving' of a job than a foreigner. And lack of compliance to destructive labour laws is more a reflection of why those labour laws should be abolished. Foreign truck drivers aren't actually hurting anyone. They aren't 'taking' jobs from locals. Because if local people truly wanted those jobs, they wouldn't be hiding behind unions, labour laws and the state. They'd perform better. Work harder or be willing to be paid less.

Boon for the economy

And as consumers, having many cheaper truck drivers shipping goods around the country is a net boon for the economy and for our society. It will reduce the cost of living and make everything cheaper.

We should be welcoming more foreign truck drivers, not pushing them away.

What these moves to restrict foreign truck drivers really amount to is babying industries and lobby groups. It's pampering local businesses like children. When we restrict competition, we let our local businesses and workers live in a fictional world in which they have protected employment and don't have to perform well or be paid realistically (because the market rate is what really matters). It doesn't prepare us for the global market or reality.

But most of all, our economy relies on skilled and affordable truck drivers. And the majority of these are foreign truck drivers. If they are forced out of the industry and country, then watch prices soar even more. And it won't be the local truck drivers who suffer. The costs of their selfishness will be handed down to the poorest South Africans, who will have to pay even more for the barest essentials.

Cut the red tape

Instead of restricting foreign truck drivers and forcing ill-thought-out labour laws on them, we should be abolishing the laws for all people working in South Africa. Be them local or foreigner. Restrictive labour laws are the prime cause of our economy stagnation and decline. Businesses can't afford the risk or expense of employing costly, often apathetic, union-bound workers. And those who want to work, can't, as the minimum wage, labour restrictions and a host of regulations disincentivise businesses from employing new workers.

Cut the red tape for everyone, and South Africans will no longer need to worry about foreign truck drivers. Everyone will be on the same footing.

The government and all South Africans must not bow to the demands of these local truckers and their heavy-handed unions. Jobs belong to those willing to work. Accidents of birth should have no bearing on who has the right to work. Let anyone, foreign or not, be employed as a trucker if their employer seems them suitable. And let their performance speak louder than any bit of xenophobic legislation.

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