



THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR

NCOP

BUDGET VOTE DEBATE



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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Building a Working South Africa: Turning Policy into Jobs, Dignity and Opportunity

South Africa, as it marks 30 years of its democratic Constitution, finds itself at a defining crossroads shaped by both progress and persistent challenges. While there are encouraging signs of economic stabilisation, the lived reality for millions remains marked by unemployment, inequality, and exclusion. It is within this context that the Department of Employment and Labour has tabled Budget Vote 31—not simply as a financial statement, but as a bold national plan to transform the labour market, protect workers, and expand economic opportunity. As Minister of Employment

and Labour Nomakhosazana Meth emphasised, “This Budget Vote is not merely an allocation of resources, it is an investment in the dignity of work, the protection of workers, and the development of a labour market that serves all South Africans.”

At the core of this approach is South Africa’s Constitution, particularly Section 23, which guarantees the right to fair labour practices, collective organisation, and the right to strike. These

rights are rooted in a history of struggle against exploitation and inequality, and today they form the foundation of a labour system designed to promote fairness and transformation. Deputy Minister Jomo Sibiya reinforced this vision, noting that “labour laws are the heartbeat of a just, equitable, inclusive, and productive South Africa, they safeguard dignity, ensure fairness, and create the stability necessary for economic growth.” This constitutional framework continues to guide government’s efforts to build an inclusive and rights-based labour market.

Deputy Minister Judith Nemadzinga Tshabalala, speaking during the NCOP debate, linked this mission directly to the country’s constitutional journey, reminding Parliament that **“our mandate... is a constitutional directive to ensure the dignity**



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and security of every worker.” Her remarks underscore that employment policy in South Africa is not optional policy, it is a constitutional obligation tied to nation-building.

The 2026/27 financial year signals a significant investment in this mission. The Department’s allocation of R4.578 billion, part of a broader R13 billion medium-term investment, reflects a deliberate shift towards employment creation and labour market activation. This investment is further reinforced by the R41 billion budget of the Unemployment Insurance Fund and R28 billion from the Compensation Fund, positioning government to respond decisively to the unemployment crisis.

Yet the urgency of action is undeniable. As Minister Meth acknowledged, South Africa is experiencing a “missing jobs crisis,” where economic growth has not translated into sufficient employment opportunities at the scale required.

Recognising this challenge, government has declared 2026 “The Year of Putting Young South Africans to Work,” a bold commitment to place youth at the centre of economic recovery and growth. Through the reconfigured Labour Activation Programme, government is targeting 200,000 unemployed individuals, placing 20,000 students in work-integrated learning opportunities, and equipping thousands of young people with



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digital skills and driver qualifications to improve their employability. With 70% of these opportunities directed to youth, this strategy represents a decisive intervention to address one of the country's most pressing challenges.

Economic growth, however, depends not only on job seekers but also on the strength of businesses. Through Productivity South Africa, government is investing R66.6 million to enhance workplace productivity, support enterprise sustainability, and preserve jobs. The initiative is expected to support over 1,300 enterprises annually, train 2,500 workers and entrepreneurs, and save approximately 4,000 jobs, reinforcing the critical link between productivity and employment. This effort is part of a broader strategy to build resilient industries capable of sustaining jobs in a competitive global environment.

At the same time, inclusive growth remains central to the Department's agenda. Through Supported Employment Enterprises, government continues to create opportunities for persons with disabilities, supported by a R205.9 million allocation across 13 factories nationwide. This intervention ensures that economic participation extends to those most often excluded from the labour market. Minister Meth underscored this approach by stating that "public procurement must become an instrument of social transformation, not merely a compliance exercise."

Deputy Minister Nemadzinga Tshabalala further

reinforced the broader vision of inclusion and transformation, emphasising that **"our responsibility in government is to ensure that these funds drive economic transformation, inclusive growth, and the protection of vulnerable groups."** This reflects a deliberate commitment to ensure that public investment yields real outcomes for communities, particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

Protecting workers remains a central priority, yet the scale of the challenge is considerable. With just 2,300 labour inspectors responsible for overseeing more than two million workplaces, enforcement capacity has come under strain. In response, government has launched Project 20,000, including the recruitment of 10,000 additional inspectors—one of the largest expansions of labour enforcement capacity in democratic South Africa. This initiative aims to ensure that labour rights are not merely theoretical, but actively enforced across workplaces, from factories and farms to restaurants and construction sites.

The labour market is also grappling with rising social tensions linked to undocumented migration and perceptions of job displacement. Government's response, however, is not exclusion but regulation. Through the National Labour Migration Policy, the state seeks to balance the protection of South African workers with the lawful and fair employment of foreign nationals in areas where



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skills are scarce. Deputy Minister Sibiya reiterated that labour laws apply equally to all workers, warning that exploitation—whether of migrants or citizens, undermines fairness and weakens labour standards.

Looking ahead, the Department is advancing reforms to modernise labour legislation in response to emerging challenges such as the gig economy and non-standard forms of work. These reforms are designed to extend protections, strengthen social security systems, and simplify compliance, ensuring that the labour framework remains responsive and inclusive.

Ultimately, the success of these interventions depends on collective action. Minister Meth has called on employers, social partners, and all sectors

of society to work together in expanding pathways into employment, particularly for young people. This is not a task for government alone, but a shared national responsibility.

What emerges from Budget Vote 31 is a clear and compelling message: this is not simply about economic policy; it is about people, dignity, and the future of South Africa. As emphasised during the NCOP debate, the conversation is fundamentally about the dignity of workers and the future of the country's youth. The Department's strategy marks a decisive step toward building an economy that is inclusive, fair, and sustainable. As Minister Meth concluded, "This Budget Vote is a statement of national purpose, to build a labour market and an economy that works for all our people."



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Snippets of the budget Vote Debate speeches.

Employment and Labour, Minister, Ms Nomakhosazana Meth

- “This Budget is an investment in the dignity of work and the protection of workers.”
- “We are building a labour market that works for all South Africans.”
- “Public procurement must become an instrument of social transformation.”

Jobs. Dignity. Opportunity.

This is what Budget Vote 31 is delivering.

- R4.5 billion invested in the future of South Africa’s workforce.
- We are turning policy into real jobs and real opportunities.
- Youth employment is no longer a plan, it’s a national priority.

YOUTH & JOB CREATION

- “2026 is the Year of Putting Young South Africans to Work.”
- 70% of opportunities are directed to young people.
- Opening doors for youth = investing in the future economy.
- 200,000 opportunities to connect South Africans to work.

EMPLOYMENT CRISIS & REALITY

- Only 40% of new entrants to the labour market secure stable jobs.
- Millions remain excluded from economic opportunity.

- Unemployment is not just a statistic; it is a national challenge.

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

- Growth must be inclusive to be meaningful.
- Stronger businesses = more jobs.
- Investment must translate into impact for communities.
- “We are directing resources where they can make the greatest impact.”

WORKER PROTECTION & ENFORCEMENT

- Rights must be enforced, not just written in law.
- Labour inspectors are the frontline of worker protection.
- Every workplace must comply with the law.
- “Labour rights must be defended across every workplace in our economy.”

INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

- No one must be left behind in our economy.
- Dignity for every worker, opportunity for every citizen.
- Economic inclusion is a national priority.

CALL TO ACTION

- “We call on employers to partner with us to create opportunities.”
- Building jobs is a shared responsibility.
- Together, we can create a working South Africa.
- “We are debating the dignity of the South African worker.
- “This is a statement of national purpose.”
- “A South Africa that works must work for all.”

Employment and Labour Deputy Minister, Mr Jomo Sibiya

Quotable Quotes

- “Labour laws are the heartbeat of a just, equitable, and productive South Africa.”
- “To attack our labour laws is to attack the Constitution itself.”
- “Workers’ rights are fundamental to our democracy and cannot be compromised.”
- Protect workers. Build the economy. Drive transformation.
- Labour rights = Human rights
- Dignity in work is non-negotiable.
- Inclusive growth starts with fair labour laws.

RIGHTS & CONSTITUTION

- The Constitution guarantees fair labour practices for all.
- Every worker has the right to organise and strike.
- Labour rights are protected both locally and globally.

COURT & LEGAL VICTORY

- Courts have consistently upheld South Africa’s labour laws.
- Employment Equity reforms have passed legal scrutiny.
- No reasonable legal basis exists to overturn transformation laws.

TRANSFORMATION & EQUITY

- Employment Equity drives transformation and fairness.
- Discrimination has no place in a democratic workplace.

- Fair workplaces build a stronger economy.

GLOBAL & INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- South Africa’s labour laws align with global standards.
- The right to strike is recognised internationally.
- Labour rights are backed by international law.

MODERN WORK CHALLENGES

- The world of work is changing—laws must keep up.
- Gig workers and contract workers need protection.
- No worker should fall outside legal protection.

REFORM & FUTURE READY

- New labour reforms will strengthen worker protections.
- Stronger dispute resolution, better protection, fairer workplaces.
- Reforms aim to make the system fair and effective.
- “Labour laws protect dignity, fairness and opportunity for all.”
- “A just economy begins with protecting workers.”
- “No transformation without fair labour practices.”
- Fair labour = Strong economy
- Workers’ dignity is a national priority
- Transformation is not optional, it is constitutional



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Employment and Labour Deputy Minister, Ms Judith Nemadzinga-Tshabalala

- “Our mandate is clear: reduce unemployment, poverty and inequality.”
- “Dignity and security for every worker is a constitutional mandate.”
- “This Budget Vote is a commitment to inclusive growth and economic transformation.”
- 30 years of democracy. Now delivering jobs and dignity.
- R4.5 billion invested in building South Africa’s workforce.
- Transforming the labour market, one opportunity at a time.
- Work must bring dignity, security and opportunity.

ECONOMY & INVESTMENT

- R13 billion investment in the future of South African workers.
- Driving inclusive growth and economic transformation.
- Investment that protects the vulnerable and grows opportunity.

PRODUCTIVITY & BUSINESS SUPPORT

- 4,000 jobs targeted for preservation.
- 1,313 small businesses supported.
- 2,500 workers and entrepreneurs capacitated for growth.
- Stronger businesses = more sustainable jobs

INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

- Inclusive growth means opportunity for persons with disabilities.
- 13 factories supporting jobs across 8 provinces.
- No province, no community, no citizen must be left behind.

WORKER PROTECTION & RIGHTS

- Labour protection is central to economic justice.
- Expanding compliance and enforcement across all sectors.
- Protecting workers in high-risk industries and vulnerable sectors.

LABOUR MIGRATION & JOB SECURITY

- Regulating labour migration to protect local jobs.
- Addressing social tensions through fairness and regulation.
- Prioritising South African job seekers.
- “We must ensure growth is inclusive and protects the most vulnerable.”
- “The dignity of workers is at the centre of our economic agenda.”
- “Economic transformation must deliver real opportunities.”
- A labour market that works for all
- Justice in the workplace = growth in the economy
- Building a future where every worker matters

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



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