

South Africa advances Africa's employment and social development agenda at AU STC-SDLE-6



**Windhoek,
Namibia | 27–31
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The Department of Employment and Labour, together with South Africa's tripartite social partners, participated in the Sixth Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment (STC-SDLE-6), held in Windhoek, Namibia.

The five-day meeting brought together senior officials, technical experts, organised labour, business representatives and Ministers responsible for employment, labour and social development from AU Member States to deliberate on continental strategies aimed at advancing decent work, social protection and inclusive economic growth.

South Africa's delegation was led during the technical segment by Deputy Director-General for Public Employment Services, Mr Sam Morotoba, while Employment and Labour Deputy Minister Judith Nemadzinga-Tshabalala led the South African delegation during the Ministerial Session.

The African Union (AU) Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment (STC-SDLE) is one of the AU's key policy platforms for advancing cooperation among African countries on social protection, labour, employment, productivity and poverty alleviation. The STC provides a forum for Member States to review and align policies and legislation, coordinate common African positions, and promote fundamental labour principles such as tripartism, freedom of association, collective bargaining and decent work. It also assesses progress made by Member States and Regional Economic Communities in implementing continental instruments and policies aimed at strengthening social protection and improving livelihoods across Africa.

The Technical Experts Meeting, held from 27 to 29 July 2026, focused on reviewing reports, policy proposals and recommendations that will guide Africa's labour and social development agenda over the coming years.

Delegates conducted intensive deliberations on employment creation, labour migration governance, social protection, social dialogue, skills development, occupational safety and health, labour market information systems and the formalisation of the informal economy.

The technical discussions culminated in the drafting, refinement and adoption of the STC-SDLE-6 Declaration, which was subsequently presented to Ministers for consideration and adoption during the Ministerial Session.

Throughout the discussions, South Africa actively contributed its experience on labour market governance, employment services, social protection and social dialogue, reaffirming its commitment to advancing the aspirations of Agenda 2063 through collaborative, evidence-based policy development.



South Africa calls for integrated social protection and future-ready skills

Addressing the Ministerial Session, Deputy Minister Judith Nemadzinga-Tshabalala emphasised that social protection should not be viewed merely as social expenditure, but as a productive investment that promotes resilience, economic participation and sustainable employment.

She highlighted South Africa's integrated approach, in which social protection is linked to active labour market policies, employment services and skills development to improve opportunities for vulnerable groups, including young people, women and persons with disabilities.

Deputy Minister further outlined South Africa's comprehensive legislative framework that safeguards fair labour practices, equality, occupational health and safety, decent wages, social security and skills development.

She also highlighted government investments in apprenticeships, learnerships, internships and artisan development through the National Skills Fund and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), with increasing emphasis on preparing workers for emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence, digital technologies, renewable energy, advanced manufacturing and the green economy.

Partnerships remain central to inclusive growth

The Deputy Minister reaffirmed the importance of social dialogue and collaboration between governments, organised labour, business, community organisations and international institutions such as the African Union and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

She noted that effective implementation of employment interventions depends on coordinated action at national, provincial and district levels through labour centres, municipalities, educational institutions and community-based organisations.



Ministers adopt Declaration to strengthen employment and social development

The Ministerial Session, held from 30 to 31 July, considered recommendations submitted by the Technical Experts Meeting before adopting the Sixth Ordinary Session Declaration.

The Declaration reflects a shared continental commitment to strengthening employment creation, expanding social protection, promoting decent work, improving labour migration governance and enhancing cooperation among Member States in responding to emerging labour market challenges.

Strengthening strategic partnerships to advance employment and social protection

On the margins of the (STC-SDLE-6) conference, Deputy Minister Judith Nemadzinga-Tshabalala held bilateral engagements with the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) to strengthen collaboration on key areas supporting South Africa's employment and social development agenda.

Expanding cooperation with AUDA-NEPAD



The Deputy Minister also met with Ms Zuzana Schwidrowski, Director of the Socio-economic Development Division at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), to discuss opportunities for enhanced technical cooperation.

The discussions focused on shared priorities, including youth employment, women's economic empowerment, social protection, and innovative approaches to measuring multidimensional poverty and inequality, including the application of South Africa's Multidimensional Poverty Index (SAMPI). UNECA further presented a governance tool that integrates geo-located socio-economic data to support evidence-based planning, targeted interventions and informed policy decision-making.



Welcoming UNECA's offer of technical support, the Deputy Minister called for continued engagement to identify collaborative initiatives that align with the Department's priorities of employment creation, labour market development and strengthening social protection systems.

These bilateral engagements reaffirm South Africa's commitment to forging strategic partnerships with continental and international institutions to accelerate inclusive growth, improve livelihoods and advance sustainable employment across Africa.

Deepening collaboration with UNECA



The Deputy Minister additionally met with representatives of AUDA-NEPAD to explore opportunities for deepening cooperation on skills development and social protection. Discussions centred on preparations for the 2026 Intra-African Skills Week (ISWA), to be hosted in Accra, Ghana, as well as the Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA), which aims to strengthen technical and vocational skills, particularly in construction and business incubation.

The meeting also explored opportunities under the Team Europe Initiative on Social Protection, with both parties recognising the importance of strengthening social protection systems that support inclusive economic growth and labour market participation.

To ensure continued collaboration, the Deputy Minister requested a follow-up engagement between the Department and AUDA-NEPAD to identify practical areas of cooperation and develop concrete initiatives that will advance skills development and social protection priorities.

A United South African Delegation - Driving Continental Policy Dialogue



South Africa's delegation made a significant contribution to the Specialised Technical Committee on Social Development, Labour and Employment (STC-SDLE-6), (STC-SDLE-6), demonstrating a coordinated approach and strong commitment to advancing Africa's employment and social development priorities.

From the Technical Experts Meeting to the Ministerial Segment, the delegation engaged constructively in policy deliberations that shaped the final Declaration adopted by Member States on 31 July 2026. Representing government alongside organised labour and business, the South African delegation embodied the country's longstanding commitment to tripartism, social dialogue and collaborative policymaking.

Deputy Director-General for Public Employment Services, Mr Sam Morotoba, while leading during the Technical Experts Meeting, displayed practical and forward-looking contributions that enriched discussions on labour migration governance and employment policies. His interventions reinforced the importance of coordinated, rights-based approaches that balance labour market needs with the protection of migrant workers, while promoting regional cooperation and sustainable development across the continent.

Advancing social protection across Africa

Led by the Department of Social Development, the social development agenda reaffirmed the importance of comprehensive social protection as a catalyst for inclusion, resilience and sustainable development. Delegates called for expanded social

protection coverage, particularly for women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and workers in the informal economy.

A key outcome was the recommendation that the Comprehensive African Social Protection Framework (CASPF) be adopted as the continent's guiding framework for strengthening national social protection systems. Experts also advanced initiatives to improve child protection, disability inclusion, support for older persons and the integration of the care economy into social protection policies.

The discussions further highlighted the importance of linking social protection with employment, education and skills development to accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2063. These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by Ministers during the Ministerial Segment.



