



#YAZINI

26 MAY 2026

SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC PETITIONS AND EXECUTIVE UNDERTAKINGS

THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPRESS PETITION HEARING

The Department of Employment and Labour, led by Minister Nomakhosazana Meth, appeared before Parliament's Select Committee on Public Petitions and Executive Undertakings on 26 May 2026, to assist in resolving a petition lodged on behalf of former employees of South African Express Airways. With the aim to assist in responding to some of the queries and to make submissions that will help the Committee finalise the petition and provide the petitioners with the best relief possible.

Addressing the committee in her opening remarks, Minister Meth said the Department's appearance forms part of government's responsibility to remain accountable and responsive to citizens affected by public sector failures.



**Minister of Employment and Labour:
Nomakhosazana Meth**

Minister Meth confirmed that the airline had been registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund and that employees whose contracts ended because of insolvency qualify for unemployment benefits under Section 66 of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Minister Meth added that bulk terminations at SA Express took place in August 2020, while the last UIF declaration reflected one employee in November 2021.

On pension and provident fund benefits, Minister Meth, clarified that these do not fall under the Department of Employment and Labour's administration. However, she said workers' retirement savings remain protected under the Pension Funds Act and may be claimed once the liquidation process is completed.

Minister Meth further highlighted that SA Express had allegedly deducted employee taxes, UIF and PAYE contributions from workers' salaries without consistently submitting them to the South African Revenue Service for almost 18 months. Minister Meth confirmed that the airline had been registered with the Unemployment Insurance Fund and that employees whose contracts ended because of insolvency qualify for unemployment benefits under Section 66 of the Unemployment Insurance Act.



DEPARTMENT OUTLINES PROTECTIONS AVAILABLE TO FORMER SA EXPRESS EMPLOYEES

The Department of Employment and Labour says it will investigate whether former employees of South African Express Airways received all benefits due to them following the airline's liquidation.

Advocate Michael Msiza, the Acting Chief Director of Statutory and Advocacy Services within the Inspection and Enforcement Services, told the committee that most of the labour-related complaints raised in the petition fall within the mandate of the Department of Employment and Labour, except matters relating to insolvency administration and pension fund management, which are handled by other authorities.

He said the department administers legislation aimed at protecting workers' rights, promoting fair labour practices, ensuring social security and enforcing employment standards.

Providing background to the collapse of SA Express, Advocate Msiza said the airline entered business rescue in February 2020 after prolonged financial and operational difficulties. Attempts to rescue the company failed, leading to liquidation proceedings in November 2020 and the sale of company assets.

He explained that under the Insolvency Act, employees are classified as "preferent creditors", placing them ahead of ordinary concurrent creditors during the distribution of proceeds from the liquidation process.

Advocate Msiza said, the law protects workers by ensuring that unpaid salaries, wages, leave pay, severance packages

and certain employee-related contributions are prioritised during insolvency proceedings. Advocate Msiza further stated that pension and provident fund savings remain protected under the Pension Funds Act, although such benefits can only be accessed once the liquidation process has been finalised.

He told the Committee that the Department would now verify whether former employees had received severance pay, Unemployment Insurance benefits and pension-related contributions due to them.

Advocate Msiza added that the Department may issue compliance orders if investigations reveal that severance pay or other statutory obligations were not honoured.

He also said the Department would engage with pension fund administrators to ensure that workers are able to claim their retirement benefits without suffering further prejudice as a result of the airline's liquidation.

Labour Relations Act, 66 of 1995 (LRA), as amended

The Labour Relations Act (LRA), Act 66 of 1995 aims to promote economic development, social justice, labour peace and democracy in the workplace.

Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 75 of 1997 (BCEA), as amended

The purpose of this Act is to advance economic development and social justice by fulfilling the primary objects of this Act which are:

- (a) To give effect to and regulate the right to fair labour practices conferred by section 23(1) of the Constitution by:
 - (i) Establishing and enforcing basic conditions of employment
 - (ii) Regulating the variation of basic conditions of employment
- (b) To give effect to obligations incurred by the Republic as a member state of the International Labour Organisation

DISCUSSION (Registration)

The Committee expects the Ministry of Employment and Labour, in its presentation, to outline the following issues raised in the petition:

SOUTH AFRICAN EXPRESS AIRLINES PTY LTD

- The Company was registered with UIF.
- The last declaration was for **November 2021** (for 1 Employee).
- The bulk of terminations were done in August 2020.
- The next slide highlights number of employees declared every month from **January 2008 till 1 November 2021**.
- The full report of declaration from Year 1994 is maintained in the system.

18



employment & labour

Department:
Employment and Labour
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A NATION
THAT WORKS
FOR ALL



UIF CONFIRMS SA EXPRESS WAS REGISTERED EMPLOYER

The Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) has confirmed that South African Express Airways was a registered employer that contributed to the fund before the airline's liquidation.

Acting UIF Commissioner Dr Malebo Mabitje-Thomson told the committee that the Fund would respond to questions relating to SA Express's UIF contributions, employee benefit payments and claims lodged by workers.

UIF Chief Information Officer, Mr Raymond Makweya, confirmed that SA Express remained on the UIF database as a registered employer, with the last declaration submitted in November 2021.

According to Mr Makweya, records presented to the committee showed a dramatic reduction in employee numbers during the airline's collapse. In August 2020, SA Express declared 455 employees to the UIF, but this dropped to only three employees in September 2020 following mass terminations linked to the liquidation process.

Mr Makweya further revealed that the UIF had processed and paid 1,389 claims linked to SA Express employees between 1994 and 2021. Of those, 525 claims were submitted, approved and paid during 2020, the period surrounding the airline's liquidation.

He also disclosed that SA Express had received COVID-19 Temporary Employer-Employee Relief Scheme (TERS) support during the pandemic after submitting an application to the UIF, which was approved and paid.

COUNT(*)	DECLARATION PERIOD	COUNT(*)	DECLARATION PERIOD	COUNT(*)	DECLARATION PERIOD	COUNT(*)	DECLARATION PERIOD	COUNT(*)	DECLARATION PERIOD
1	01-Nov-2021	561	01-Dec-2019	650	01-Dec-2017	152	01-Dec-2014	1027	01-Dec-2011
1	01-Oct-2021	563	01-Nov-2019	649	01-Nov-2017	151	01-Nov-2014	999	01-Nov-2011
1	01-Sep-2021	571	01-Oct-2019	652	01-Oct-2017	148	01-Oct-2014	1044	01-Oct-2011
1	01-Aug-2021	778	01-Sep-2019	657	01-Sep-2017	136	01-Sep-2014	1014	01-Sep-2011
1	01-Jul-2021	647	01-Aug-2019	938	01-Aug-2017	1063	01-Aug-2014	1019	01-Aug-2011
1	01-Jun-2021	648	01-Jul-2019	935	01-Jul-2017	1075	01-Jul-2014	1008	01-Jul-2011
1	01-May-2021	645	01-Jun-2019	942	01-Jun-2017	133	01-Jun-2014	1009	01-May-2011
2	01-Apr-2021	642	01-May-2019	912	01-May-2017	1116	01-May-2014	988	01-Apr-2011
4	01-Mar-2021	645	01-Apr-2019	908	01-Apr-2017	1150	01-Apr-2014	976	01-Mar-2011
8	01-Feb-2021	642	01-Mar-2019	908	01-Mar-2017	1103	01-Mar-2014	956	01-Feb-2011
8	01-Jan-2021	639	01-Feb-2019	918	01-Feb-2017	1109	01-Feb-2014	951	01-Jan-2011
8	01-Dec-2020	638	01-Jan-2019	922	01-Jan-2017	1094	01-Jan-2014	955	01-Dec-2010
8	01-Nov-2020	641	01-Dec-2018	629	01-Dec-2016	1105	01-Dec-2013	963	01-Dec-2010
8	01-Oct-2020	643	01-Nov-2018	614	01-Nov-2016	1088	01-Nov-2013	950	01-Oct-2010
32	01-Sep-2020	645	01-Oct-2018	923	01-Oct-2016	1071	01-Oct-2013	925	01-Sep-2010
455	01-Aug-2020	645	01-Sep-2018	572	01-Sep-2016	1063	01-Sep-2013	909	01-Aug-2010
445	01-Jul-2020	646	01-Aug-2018	914	01-Aug-2016	1063	01-Aug-2013	908	01-Jul-2010
461	01-Jun-2020	646	01-Jul-2018	536	01-Jul-2016	1058	01-Jul-2013	950	01-Jun-2010
467	01-May-2020	647	01-Jun-2018	927	01-Jun-2016	1047	01-Jun-2013	952	01-May-2010
537	01-Apr-2020	873	01-May-2018	965	01-May-2016	1075	01-May-2013	99	01-Apr-2010
536	01-Mar-2020	651	01-Apr-2018	520	01-Apr-2016	1063	01-Apr-2013	853	01-Mar-2010
537	01-Feb-2020	650	01-Mar-2018	474	01-Mar-2016	1036	01-Mar-2013	94	01-Feb-2010
537	01-Jan-2020	651	01-Feb-2018	472	01-Feb-2016	1000	01-Feb-2013	830	01-Jan-2010

BACKGROUND

The Select Committee on Public Petitions and Executive Undertakings, having considered the South African Express Airways Petition (petition), received by the Office of the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) and referred to the Select Committee on Public Petitions and Executive Undertakings (Committee) for its consideration and resolution, reports as follows:

This publication is brought to you by the Department's Corporate Communication.



employment & labour

Department:
Employment and Labour
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



National Economic
Development and
Labour Council



**ONE DEPARTMENT
COMMUNICATING IN ONE VOICE**

Physical Address:

Laboria House: 215 Francis Baard Street, PRETORIA

Postal Address:

Private Bag X117, PRETORIA, 0001