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UNION WELCOMES PLAN TO EXPOSE STATE'S GHOST WORKERS

Non-existent employees on the state's payroll that was created using fake profiles cost South Africa R3,9 billion in 2025 alone.

Journalist Ilse Schoonraad

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Home Affairs minister, Leon Schreiber Photo: x.com

Association (PSA) has welcomed the planned clamp down on "ghost workers" in the public sector.

To combat the scourge of payroll fraud through fake worker profiles, the Department of Home Affairs has launched a biometric employee verification portal.

The platform will go live on 15 June, with the verification process scheduled to run for an initial two-month period across national and provincial departments.

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Biometric Verification portal

Home Affairs minister, Leon Schreiber, says it was built using the department's cutting-edge digital identity verification capabilities.

Linked to the population register, the platform enables liveness tests and biometric real-time verification of employee records to ensure that government personnel information is accurate, current and reliable.

Schreiber said if used consistently, the platform has the power to save South African taxpayers billions of rands by leveraging the power of enhanced biometric systems to identify ghost employees and others involved in defrauding government payrolls.

The PSA says the scale of the reported losses is extremely concerning and underscores the urgent need for robust and modernised systems to ensure that only legitimately employed public servants receive remuneration.

"At a time when government departments are under severe budget constraints, every rand lost to corruption directly impacts on service delivery to citizens," the union states.

Implement portal responsibly

But, the PSA stresses that implementation must be conducted responsibly and in consultation with organised labour.

"In particular, the PSA calls for full consultation with labour stakeholders prior to rollout to ensure the protection of employees' personal and biometric data in line with the Protection of Personal Information Act.

"There should be clear guidelines and transparency on how the system will operate as well as assurance that legitimate employees are not unfairly prejudiced or excluded owing to administrative or technical errors."

The union further says that technological solutions alone will not fully resolve the problem. "Payroll fraud is often enabled by weak internal controls, poor oversight and collusion.

"Accordingly, government must strengthen internal audit and risk-management systems, hold officials accountable for negligence or misconduct and enhance consequence management across all departments."

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