

MEDIA RELEASE	Ghost employees and high sick-leave costs: PSA troubled by state of governance
DATE	6 June 2025
EMBARGO	None
ENQUIRIES	communication@psa.co.za

The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely troubled by general lax human resources management in the public service, resulting in the South African government losing vast amounts that could have supported service delivery and infrastructure development.

Besides corruption related to the procurement of goods and services, the lack of human resources control has turned lucrative for criminally minded persons who are drawing salaries without being employed. All levels of government and parastatals are paying millions of rands to ghost employees, which raises further questions regarding the accuracy of the total number of employees as provided by these departments and organisations.

The Mpumalanga Department of Education, for example, paid R6.4 million to ghost employees, whilst also having procured only 22 computers for an astounding amount of R2 million. The City of Tshwane could not account for more than 5 000 employees on the Extended Public Work Programme. The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure paid more than 5 000 persons who do not work for the Department. At PRASA, it was discovered that more than 5 000 ghost employees were being paid. The entity recently announced that it saved about R200 million by rooting out ghost employees. No one was held accountable, and no arrests were made, with the SA Police Service also being pointed out to be victim of ghost employees.

Reported payments to suspended employees of more than R100 million, where many of the cases are not finalised within the required period, represent another major expense. In addition, the Department of Public Service Administration and the Public Service Commission recently painted a worrisome picture in that between 2020 and 2023, public servants took between 5.4 million and 7.6 million days of sick leave. The cost of sick leave rose from R8 billion in 2020 to R11.5 billion in 2022, before slightly dropping to R10.1 billion in 2023. The sick-leave pattern could be attributed to fatigue and exhaustion owing to the non-filling of positions in government and prolonged suspensions.

The PSA urges government to strengthen controls, hold those who captured non-existent employees accountable, and report fraud to the police to ensure consequence management. There is an urgent need for forensic audits in entities and departments to root out this problem, with the SIU and other agencies being engaged in this regard.

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