

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	PSA calls for urgent action to eliminate ghost workers from public service
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<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
<b>ENQUIRIES</b>	communication@psa.co.za

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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 245 000 public-sector employees, calls for immediate, decisive actions to eliminate ghost workers from South Africa's public service.

Ghost workers are fraudulent entries on government payrolls, receiving salaries without performing any work. This deep-rooted and systemic form of payroll fraud continues to drain billions from public coffers, severely undermining service delivery and robbing deserving South Africans, particularly the youth, of meaningful employment. These fictitious employees are inserted in the system through deliberate collusion between corrupt officials.

Recent investigations have highlighted the alarming extent of the problem. In 2024, the Mpumalanga Department of Education uncovered R6.4 million in such fraudulent payments. The Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa's payroll audit revealed nearly 3 000 ghost workers. Similar concerns emerged at the Gauteng Department of Health, which recently froze the salaries of over 200 unverified employees.

The PSA warns that if only 1% of the public-service workforce of 1.3 million employees, is compromised by ghost workers, the state could be losing over R3.9 billion annually. Such money should be used to employ qualified educators, nurses, social workers, and other critical positions or be invested in infrastructure and service delivery.

Equally troubling is the growing suspicion that early-retirement schemes may be exploited to discreetly remove ghost workers from payrolls, whilst corrupt officials cash out huge pension benefits. This theory remains unproven, but the lack of transparency in early-retirement processes raises legitimate concerns. The PSA therefore calls for rigorous audits of all such schemes, including biometric verification and cross-checking with payroll data.

To end this crisis, the PSA demands the immediate implementation of biometric and in-person verification of all public servants, digitisation of payroll systems with real-time oversight, and the imposition of harsh penalties for officials involved in payroll fraud. The PSA supports international best practices such as those adopted in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania, where digital verification systems have saved millions.

The PSA will continue to work closely with the Department of Public Service and Administration, National Treasury, and oversight bodies to strengthen public-service payroll integrity. The PSA will further pursue whistle-blower protection measures for the Union's members and intensify campaign to raise awareness amongst public servants about their role in identifying and reporting fraud.

The PSA is committed to building a transparent, professional, and future-ready public service. The ghost worker phenomenon is a financial crime as well as an attack on the integrity of government and the rights of citizens and should be rooted out as a matter of urgency.

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