

<b>MEDIA RELEASE</b>	PSA warns of surge to 3.7 million discouraged job seekers exposes deep systemic failures
<b>DATE</b>	18 February 2026
<b>EMBARGO</b>	None
<b>ENQUIRIES</b>	<a href="mailto:communication@psa.co.za">communication@psa.co.za</a>

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) notes the recent labour market data released for the fourth quarter of 2025, which shows a marginal improvement in employment levels but a deeply concerning rise in discouraged job seekers. While employment increased by 44,000, bringing the total number of employed persons to 17.1 million, the number of discouraged work-seekers surged by 233,000, reaching 3.7 million.

This trend indicates that although some South Africans have found work, a growing share of the population has completely abandoned the search for employment owing to persistent barriers and a lack of opportunities. The PSA is particularly troubled by the simultaneous decline of 172,000 in the number of unemployed persons actively seeking work, signalling that more citizens are becoming entirely disengaged from the labour market.

The increase in discouraged job seekers forms part of a broader expansion in the potential labour force, which rose by 82,000, while the number of people outside the labour force grew by 248,000, reaching 17.1 million. These figures highlight the structural nature of South Africa's jobs crisis, in which many citizens have lost hope of finding meaningful employment.

The PSA emphasises that rising employment figures cannot mask the reality that the quality, sustainability, and accessibility of jobs remain inadequate. Long-term unemployment remains entrenched, with 79.7% of jobless individuals facing extended periods without work over the past decade. Youth unemployment, especially among individuals aged 25–34, remains critically high at 44.3%.

The PSA calls on government and social partners to strengthen active labour market policies. This includes targeted training programmes, apprenticeship expansion, and bridging initiatives that connect job seekers to real opportunities. There is a need to invest in labour-absorbing sectors. Sectors such as manufacturing, construction, and community services, in which employment significantly declined in 2025, must receive targeted stimulus to reverse contractionary trends.



The need to address regional disparities cannot be overemphasised. Provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape, and Limpopo recorded some of the highest job losses, requiring differentiated interventions tailored to local economic conditions. Further, the growing number of citizens who have lost hope requires mental health support and reintegration strategies to rebuild confidence and participation in the labour market.

The PSA reiterates that economic recovery cannot be measured solely by employment gains; it must ensure dignity, inclusion, and opportunities for all South Africans. The rise in discouraged job seekers is a clear warning that more decisive, people-centred labour market reforms are urgently needed. Government's failure to fill over half a million vacancies has set a bad precedent and worsened the service delivery crisis. Subsequently, the private sector has followed suit, not creating many opportunities, and many are employing people on a contract and temporary basis with no benefits.

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