

MEDIA RELEASE World Food Day: PSA calls for worker-centred Medium-Term Expenditure Framework amidst rising food and living costs

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) calls on government and the National Treasury to place food security, the cost of living, and the economic wellbeing of workers at the centre of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF).

World Food Day is a reminder that hunger is not only about the availability of food, but also about whether households can afford food. Public servants are increasingly under pressure from rising food, fuel, electricity, transport, and other household costs. Geopolitical conflicts, global supply-chain disruptions, energy-market volatility, and climate shocks are further contributing to economic uncertainty. Rising fuel prices have a direct impact on workers, whilst also increasing the cost of transporting food and other goods. Government and the National Treasury should take these realities into account when reviewing the MTEF. Fiscal sustainability cannot be achieved by continually transferring the burden of economic pressures onto workers.

The rapid introduction of automation and artificial intelligence presents opportunities to improve productivity and public services. Technological advancement must, however, not become a pathway to mass job losses and increased household poverty. Government must ensure that automation is accompanied by meaningful consultation with organised labour, reskilling, retraining, and redeployment, particularly where jobs and functions are affected. Public servants are not merely an expenditure item - they are the people who deliver essential services to South Africans.

The PSA further calls on government to make greater use of remote and hybrid work where operationally feasible. Where employees can effectively perform duties from home, unnecessary commuting places additional financial pressure on workers through fuel, public transport, vehicle maintenance, and other costs. It is concerning that some departments are recalling employees to offices despite the fact that certain functions can be performed effectively through remote or hybrid arrangements. Work-from-home is an achievable and immediate cost-of-living intervention. Government should adopt an evidence-based approach that considers operational requirements whilst recognising the financial impact of commuting on employees.

The PSA calls on government and the National Treasury to provide practical relief in the MTEF. Such steps should include wage adjustments that protect workers' purchasing power, measures to reduce employees' transport and commuting costs, expanded remote and hybrid work where operationally viable, reskilling and redeployment in response to automation and artificial intelligence, and stronger measures to protect household food security.



The PSA recognises the need for responsible management of public finances. Workers can, however, not continue to absorb the rising cost of food, fuel, and basic necessities whilst their disposable income is increasingly squeezed. On World Food Day, the PSA demands a people-centred MTEF that recognises that public servants are workers, breadwinners, consumers, and members of the communities they serve. Protecting the economic wellbeing of workers is an investment in a stable workforce, effective public services, and a more resilient South Africa.

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