

Minimum wage hobbles expanded public works programme

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PUBLIC Works Deputy Minister Jeremy Cronin said the implementation of the national minimum wage policy to the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) could result in at least 300 000 beneficiaries losing their work.

The minimum wage policy stipulated that employers are legally obliged to pay at least R20 per hour to their workers. The EPWP rate stood at R9.28.

Deputy President Cyril

Ramaphosa announced last month that the national minimum wage policy would come into effect in May next year.

But the threshold of R3 500 would not be affordable to the government if it were to be applied to public works programmes, Cronin said.

"It is not going to work. These are the radically unemployed, not in the labour market. We are dealing with the segment which is not in the labour market," he said.

Cronin was speaking at the

opening of a five-day training workshop for government and non-governmental officials in Sunnyside, Pretoria, yesterday.

The workshop is aimed at empowering officials with knowledge to assist them to effectively manage the programme.

Participants will deliberate on the EPWP reporting system, compliance with the ministerial determination, and recruitment guidelines.

Cronin said the intention of the EPWP beneficiaries was

300 000 could lose their jobs, minister warns

to deal with the problem of chronic poverty and unemployment.

"The Freedom Charter says everyone has the right to work, but to implement that in our country is very difficult," he said.

He lauded the EPWP for its positive impact on the lives of

people in the country by citing the 2011 statistics of Stats SA, which showed that 12.4% of people who had previously participated in the programme had permanent jobs.

The statistics also showed that 4.8% of former beneficiaries ended up starting their own businesses.

"Half of them have temporary work like plumbing," Cronin pointed out.

He said the EPWP had also assisted in mitigating against the level of protests in the

country.

"If we didn't have the expanded public works programmes, the levels of tension resulting in protests would certainly be higher," he said.

The recruitment process into the EPWP projects was often marred by corruption by some local councillors.

Cronin said: "There are often allegations that the way people are recruited into the programme is based on one's political affiliation. This is corruption..."

He said the EPWP was a government programme aimed at creating more than 6 million work opportunities for the poor by 2019.

Cronin said the EPWP was meant to address the crisis of unemployment and poverty.

More than 70 percent of public works beneficiaries had qualifications below matric, he said. "All our beneficiaries should have work experience, and some rudimentary skills and training is vital; don't underestimate its importance."



WORRIED: Jeremy Cronin at the EPWP training workshop in Pretoria. PICTURE: JACQUES NAUDE