

Public works embraces technology

Facial recognition to help tackle fraud

By **Karabo Ledwaba**

Gauteng expanded public works programme (EPWP) employees are now able to clock in and out of their work sites across the province using fingerprint and facial recognition – thanks to a R40m fraud prevention initiative.

The Gauteng infrastructure development department yesterday launched the biometric and facial recognition system to tackle fraudulent claims on the programme that is aimed at alleviating poverty.

The programme is a national initiative that involves creating temporary work opportunities for the unemployed, using public sector expenditure.

In March, a forensic investigative report released by the eThekweni municipality's city integrity and investigations unit found that fraudsters had received more than R1.2m for work they never did in the KwaZulu-Natal metro.

Speaking at the launch of the system in Johannesburg, MEC Jacob Mamabolo said the biometric system was needed to deal with a range of problems the programme has faced.

"The auditor-general has consistently highlighted concerns that the EPWP system was not secure enough and had too many loopholes for it to be manipulated.

"Many crooks have benefited from this system, and we need to put an end to this," he said.

The system allows for beneficiaries' information to be safeguarded, with beneficiaries being able to clock in and out at the 658 sites using fingerprint and facial recognition to authenticate their legitimacy, among others.

This means that only beneficiaries that are approved to work in certain areas will have access to those areas.

"In the past, our EPWP facilitators spent at least three days a month trying to create manual time sheets.

"This new system will generate time sheets daily, weekly or monthly," Mamabolo said.

"This will allow the administration team to focus on the objectives and the improvement of the lives of the people of Gauteng."

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