



WORK IN PROGRESS. The largest number of employment opportunities, at 208 505, came from infrastructure. Picture: Moneyweb

Fewer jobs in public works

COVID: CONTRIBUTES TO SHARP REDUCTION

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Palesa Mofokeng

In the nine months to the end of December, the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) had spent just R9.5 million of its R68.2 million “allocated project budget (including professional fees)” for 2020/21.

The programme operates under the department of public works and infrastructure and provides work opportunities for the unskilled, unemployed, poor, and vulnerable (including the disabled).

Areas such as early childhood development, home/community-based care, community work and road maintenance are targeted.

The Covid-19 crisis contributed to a sharp reduction in the number of people who were able to participate last year.

Job opportunities

According to the programme’s Q3, 2020/21 report, it created 515 862 work opportunities between April and December 2020. This is 42.7% lower than the 837 689 work opportunities created between April and December 2019.

“Covid-19 did affect implementation of certain projects. Fewer numbers of projects were reported in quarter 3 of 2020/21 which could be attributed to the lockdown regulations,” says Carmen-Joy Abrahams, the programme’s acting deputy director-general.

President Cyril Ramaphosa mentioned the significant increase in unemployment in his State of The Nation Address on 11 February. “There were 1.7 million fewer

people employed in the third quarter of 2020 than there were in the first quarter, before the pandemic struck,” he said.

Despite the reduction in the number of job opportunities created, the EPWP remains a key part of the government’s plans to tackle the fallout of the crisis.

This can be seen in it being an essential part of the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan, the state’s effort to boost the economy.

The EPWP, which officially started on 1 April, 2004, is one of the government’s programmes aimed at reducing unemployment through the creation of work opportunities using labour-intensive methods. The programme implements employment via its four sectors: infrastructure, environment and culture, social and non-state.

The largest number of employment opportunities came from infrastructure with 208 505 opportunities, followed by social with 164 275, according to the report. KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape led in the creation of opportunities in the period under review, having created 144 614 and 108 279 opportunities, respectively.

“It is important to note that some of the EPWP sectors such as the social and non-state sectors undertook massification projects as a response to Covid-19 and provided much needed interventions,” says Abrahams. “For example, young people were recruited to assist with sanitisation at public health facilities, ensure Covid protocols are adhered to and create awareness about the virus.”

Participants received an average daily wage of R152.60 across all sectors, with infrastructure offering the highest rate at R174.34 per day according to the report.

Looking forward, Abrahams says the programme will continue to provide a variety of projects across its sectors to create work opportunities.

► Palesa Mofokeng is a Moneyweb intern.