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BENCHMARK

SweepSouth appeals for robust enforcement of new minimum wage

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SWEEPSOUTH, a leading home cleaning service company, wants those who refuse to play by the rules and pay the new national minimum wage to face legal consequences.

SweepSouth managing director Luke Kannemeyer said in response to *Business Report* questions on Friday that the country would also need to guard against employers who may reduce days or hours of work, but then place unreasonable demands on their employees to still complete the same amount of work in a reduced time period.

"This highlights the importance of not viewing the national minimum wage in isolation as a benchmark to improve the sector. Fair treatment is as important as fair pay," Kannemeyer said.

Last month, Employment and Labour Minister Thulas Nxesi raised the minimum wage for farmworkers and domestic workers by a whopping 9.6%, with effect from the beginning of this month.

The increase will also cover workers employed in the expanded public works programme, as well as the cleaning, wholesale and retail sectors. It will also extend to learnership allowances.

The percentage increase for farmworkers and domestic workers will mean pay of R25.42 an hour, whereas public works employees will receive R13.97 for the same duration.

The department said workers in the cleaning sector in metropolitan areas would receive hourly pay of R27.97, while for the rest of the country the figure would be R25.50.

Nxesi said the National Minimum Wage Act was intended to protect low-earning workers and provide a platform for inequality reduction.



DOMESTIC workers march to the Department of Employment and Labour demanding to be registered with UIF and to receive outstanding funds. | **TOBILE MATHONSI** African News Agency (ANA)

He said the minimum wage was a significant labour market intervention that had benefited about 6 million workers.

Nxesi said these workers were generally unorganised and vulnerable, and without the National Minimum Wage Act would have continued to endure exceedingly low wages and poverty.

"This significant increase will benefit 892 000 domestic workers, who are overwhelmingly women, and 800 000 farmworkers."

SweepSouth said it celebrated the announcement of the increase to the national minimum wage. It said the increase was the culmination of tireless work done by civil society, unions, socially conscious businesses like SweepSouth, and the workers themselves.

"With year-on-year increases to the national minimum wage, we are seeing

progress towards establishing a living wage for all workers in South Africa.

"We also see the 9.7% increase as a positive sign that inflation is no longer being viewed in isolation, as the poor and the working class have experienced far higher inflation in the past year than consumer price index would suggest, with some food items escalating by over 30%. However, it is vitally important that we see follow-through from the government to ensure that workers and employers are educated, and that regulations are enforced in both the formal and informal sectors.

"We also hope to see an improvement in access to existing legislated benefits, to ensure that dignified working conditions accompany better pay."

Kannemeyer said SweepSouth already paid significantly more than

the national minimum wage, but closing the gap between the minimum wage and a living wage enabled companies like theirs to push customers to better remunerate their workers and also set a baseline for private employers, who often struggled to gauge how much to pay their workers.

"We expect to see better pay across the sector and, contrary to certain narratives, we do not see an increase in pay of less than R20 per day to be a deciding factor around affordability to a customer. We cannot ignore the reality that domestic employers are facing tough economic times themselves, but we believe that most households will not be willing to give up the incredible value that domestic workers bring to our lives."

In July last year, the home cleaning service company released its "2022 SweepSouth Report on Pay and Working Conditions for Domestic Workers for South Africa and Kenya". In the last year, the survey was sent to more than 25 000 domestic workers in South Africa, and more than 1 000 in Kenya.

The report showed that 25% of domestic workers had lost their jobs in the previous year; that domestic workers were, on average, spending 8% more on food and 10% more on transport every month compared with the previous year; and that only 10% of SweepStars noted that they saved money every month. Just 2% of them had medical aid, 18% were part of a stokvel, 50% had a funeral plan, and a whopping 60% of South African domestic workers were in debt.

Kannemeyer said that, while they expected to see pay adjustments across the sector, to maximise the impact of the increase, all sectoral role-players should make an effort to educate domestic employers.