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TRAINING

Rights and benefits of EPWP employees

UNEMPLOYMENT is probably the greatest challenge facing South Africa today. It was necessary to undertake a number of initiatives to address unemployment and poverty.

One initiative that has been going on for almost 20 years is the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

A list of these programmes is available from the Department of Public Works. The idea is to take unemployed, unskilled individuals who are unable to find alternative employment and to give them a minimal salary and to try to impart some training and skills.

The EPWP is subject to a Code of Good Practice which outlines how the programme has to work. This Code of Good Practice is published in the Government Gazette.

The individuals have the protection of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, the Labour Relations Act, Employment Equity Act, Occupational Health and Safety Act, Unemployment Insurance Act and the Skills Development Act.

The EPWP recipients are in fact employees and the code must be read with the Ministerial Determination for Expanded Public works.

The government has proposed 55% women, 40% youth (ages 16 to 35 years old) and 2% people with disabilities. Persons under 16 years of age may not be employed on the programme.

People are chosen when the head of the household has less than a primary school education and the household earns less than one full-time person earning a minimum wage.

The ministerial determination will outline the minimum rate and the workers are paid on the basis of the amount of time worked. They are referred to as "time rated workers".

Workers are also paid a training allowance in cases where they are required to attend training programmes. This allowance must be equal to a 100% of the daily task rates.

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Over and above this, all costs of training such as travel, training, material and tuition fees will be covered.

Normal hours of work are applicable and normally limited to 40 hours a week. Workers work five eight-hour days per week excluding time spent travelling to and from work.

If a worker is absent due to illness or injury, they are paid a maximum of one day sick leave for every full month worked and if the worker reports for work and is unable to work due to the fault of the employer, then they should be paid the normal daily allowance.

This concept was successful many years ago in the US under president Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal. I strongly believe the training component is the biggest benefit.

Workers do obtain skills and invariably can use those skills to embark upon a career path in the future. Unfortunately, some workers step out of line and the Code of Good Practice for EPWP does have a disciplinary code and a grievance procedure.

The employer will under certain circumstances exercise discipline which could lead to dismissal.

An employee who is dissatisfied can lodge a grievance. This grievance must be brought to the attention of the employer and must be followed up in terms of the code.

For employees unable to obtain employment, EPWP has at least been able to restore some dignity and put some bread on the table.



A WOMAN gives water to her child at a camp for internally displaced persons in Baidoa, Somalia. | AFP