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EPWP Reform Prioritised in 2026/27 Public Works Budget Vote

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Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, tabled the Department's 2026/27 Budget Vote in Parliament on Wednesday, 13 May 2026, accompanied by the Deputy Minister, Director-General, Chief Financial Officer, senior departmental officials, and Heads of Entities within the public works and infrastructure portfolio.

A key focus of the Budget Vote was the reform of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), which has been identified as a priority for the year ahead.

As part of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure's R7.8 billion allocation for the 2026/27 financial year, approximately R6.4 billion has been directed towards transfers and subsidies, including conditional grants to provinces and municipalities in support of EPWP implementation.

The Minister outlined government's commitment to building a more transparent, fair, and skills-driven public employment programme that responds meaningfully to South Africa's unemployment and infrastructure challenges. This includes strengthening implementation and oversight to improve service delivery and restore public confidence in the programme.

Reflecting on the extensive EPWP Listening Tours conducted across the country, the Minister noted that nearly 4,000 participants and community members raised concerns related to political gatekeeping, manipulated recruitment processes, ghost beneficiaries, unfair access to opportunities, and abuse within certain programmes.

"These consultations highlighted the urgent need to reform EPWP into a programme that restores dignity through fair access to work opportunities and meaningful skills development," the Minister said. A major highlight of the Budget Vote was the launch of the "Working on Infrastructure" pilot programme, which aims to directly link public employment opportunities with infrastructure maintenance, skills transfer, and pathways into long-term employment.

The pilot programme will provide participants with structured work opportunities lasting between eight and ten months, combined with workplace experience, mentorship, and skills development to improve employability and support future economic participation.

Following its initial rollout in KwaZulu-Natal, the programme is set to expand to Limpopo, with further expansion planned.

As part of the broader reform process, the Department will introduce digital recruitment systems to enhance transparency and reduce opportunities for gatekeeping in participant selection.

The Budget Vote further outlined key priorities for the year ahead, including:

- Strengthening participant verification systems
- Investigating allegations of abuse and irregularities
- Improving oversight and accountability
- Finalising revised EPWP Recruitment Guidelines for consultation
- Expanding the "Working on Infrastructure" pilot programme to additional provinces

The Department remains committed to repositioning EPWP as a catalyst for economic inclusion, skills development, and sustainable livelihood opportunities, while contributing to infrastructure delivery and community development across South Africa.

