



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**MEC POLICY AND
BUDGET SPEECH
2026/27**





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EASTERN CAPE
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

POLICY AND BUDGET SPEECH TABLED BY

HONOURABLE MEC FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

MS. B. FANTA

AT THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

2026/27 FINANCIAL YEAR



***Somlomo Obekekileyo
Nkulumbuso yephondo ehloniphekileyo
Amalungu Wendlu yoWiso-Mthetho ahloniphekileyo
linkokheli zendlu yeeNkosi
Abefundisi beemvaba ngeemvaba
Zidwasha ne Zidwangube, Uluntu lweMpuma Kapa luphela
Molweni! Good afternoon! Goeie middag! Dumelang!***

Honourable Speaker, it is with great honour and responsibility that I stand before you today to present the budget and policy priorities for the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development for the upcoming financial year.

This year marks thirty years since the adoption of our world-renowned Constitution, a significant moment in our history. This milestone demonstrates how far we have come as a country and the steady maturity of our constitutional democracy. Additionally, this moment calls for us to reaffirm our commitment to the rule of law rooted in the promotion and protection of human rights, unity in diversity and social justice.

Spurred on by the Constitution and the responsibility to deliver on its provisions, as a department we will continue to advocate for the protection of the rights of children, women and vulnerable groups. Humanity enjoins us to do our utmost not only to contribute to the quality of life of our citizens, but also to ensure that the vulnerable groups in our society are provided with the necessary protection.

In light of the significant challenges posed by the socio-economic repercussions, this budget will also provide necessary resources to enhance our social safety nets and support services, ensuring that those in need receive timely assistance. One of the most pressing issues we must confront as a society is Gender-Based Violence (GBV). As pronounced by President Cyril Ramaphosa during his State of the Nation Address, GBV is now declared a disaster in our country. This declaration underscores the urgency and severity of the crisis we face.

In response, our department is committed to implementing comprehensive strategies to combat GBV. We will continue to enhance our support services for survivors, ensuring they receive the necessary counselling, legal aid, and rehabilitation. Furthermore, we will



engage in awareness campaigns that educate communities about the importance of preventing violence and promoting healthy relationships.

This department will expand outreach programs, providing support to those affected by GBV and advocating for systemic changes to prevent its occurrence. We must work collaboratively with law enforcement agencies, civil society, and community organizations to create a safer environment for all.

We have also expanded psychological support services for thousands of women who have endured the trauma of abuse. Addressing Gender-Based Violence requires more than emergency response; it requires sustained therapeutic care and counselling.

Our unwavering commitment will be on ensuring that we advance the social protection agenda through implementing developmental social welfare services to the marginalised and vulnerable communities prioritising prevention, early intervention, care, support and sustainable development.

I will now outline the actions we will take this year to advance the strategic priorities of our province.

PRIORITY 1: INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND JOB CREATION

Increasing the number of Social Service Practitioners

This year, more than R50.3 million is allocated for the employment of Social Service Practitioners and the provision of essential tools of trade. Recruiting additional Social Service Practitioners contributes to inclusive growth and job creation by expanding employment opportunities and strengthening social services in communities. Social Service Practitioners play a central role in addressing poverty, abuse, and inequality, supporting vulnerable populations, and promoting equitable participation in society. Through funded Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs), Social Service Practitioners will be appointed to provide social services across multiple sites, ensuring communities receive broader access to essential support services.



EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME

The department is a proponent of advancement of the rights of vulnerable groups in society as well as their participation in the economy of the country. That is why we support Youth, Women and Persons with Disabilities economically through the implementation of the EPWP and National Youth Service projects to provide a reliable source of income for participants. Additionally, the projects provide extensive exposure to work experiences and skills development, thus preparing unemployed youth, women, and persons with disabilities for successful job placements. The departmental allocation has increased from **R7.6 million** in 2025/26 to **R8.7 million** in 2026/27, thus enabling more participants to be enrolled. A total of **3,644** work opportunities will be created as part of the EPWP and NYS projects during the 2026/27 financial year.

The allocated budget is R8.7 million.

PRIORITY 2 REDUCE POVERTY AND TACKLE THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

HIV /AIDS PREVENTION AND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Honourable Speaker, The Human Science Research Council HSRC 2024 survey reported that the province is faced with a significant HIV burden, with prevalence stabilizing around **14%** but remaining high, especially in the Chris Hani, Amathole, and Alfred Nzo districts among the **25–49** age group. Key challenges include risky sexual behaviour especially by young people, which exacerbates HIV infections and teenage pregnancy. This could pose significant challenges to the socioeconomic development of the affected individuals, their families, and their communities because it has the potential to prolong the cycle of poverty, interfere with schooling, resulting in school dropouts, and increase the number of child-headed households.

To address this challenge, the department will strengthen the implementation of Social and Behaviour Change Programme as one of the high – impact programmes to prevent HIV infections. The special focus will be on awareness programme on risky sexual behaviour targeting children between **10 – 19** years. In addition, psychosocial support services for infected and affected individuals and their families will be intensified. This is done in partnership with department of Health and NPOs funded by the department in all districts. The programme is targeting **84 885** beneficiaries.

The allocated budget is R 39. 2 million



CARE AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO OLDER PERSONS

The abuse of older persons in the province remains persistent and poses physical, financial and emotional harm. The sad and disturbing part is that the perpetrators of these despicable actions are in the main family members as well as those close to victims. The Department is mandated by the Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 to create an environment and render services which are more inclusive, accessible and protective to older persons. As part of realising this mandate, the department will focus on intensifying community-based services which are aimed prevention, early intervention, care and support of older persons within communities through funded community-based service centres. In addition, residential care facilities will be funded to provide daily support, medical care and special services to older persons who need care and support.

The allocated budget is R101.5 million.

SERVICES TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to congratulate APD-NMB Textile Factory in Gqeberha as a living example of the impact of our efforts in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. The Department recently launched the APD-NMB Textile Factory which has successfully secured a contract to manufacture denim clothing for the renowned Foschini Group. It is worth mentioning that the majority its employees are persons with disabilities. In addition, this initiative has been sealed with a memorandum of action with Technology Innovation Agency which will support with technology diffusion to persons with disabilities.

Honourable Members, we are determined to implement integrated programmes and services that facilitate the promotion of the well-being and the socio-economic empowerment of persons with disabilities. Through Protective workshops programme, the department provides skills development and sheltered employment, that aims at equipping persons with disabilities, thereby improving their prospects for dignified livelihoods and integration into mainstream labour markets. During 2026/27 financial year, we will fund twenty – six (26) protective workshops to promote skilling of persons with disabilities to increase access to employment opportunities. Six hundred and thirty – three (633) persons with disabilities are targeted to benefit from the programme.

The budget allocated for this programme is R32. 6 million.



SOCIAL RELIEF OF DISTRESS

Our mandate requires that we provide assistance to individuals and families experiencing undue hardship and those affected by natural disasters in the province to prevent further vulnerability and prevent distress in crisis. To mitigate distress and immediate hunger and alleviate poverty, the department will continue providing Social Relief of Distress, which will include the provision of groceries, school uniforms, blankets, mattresses, and psychosocial support services, especially to the individuals, families, and communities affected by natural disasters.

The allocated budget is R11. 2 million.

SANITARY DIGNITY PROGRAMME

Honourable Members, we are committed to promoting access to safe, hygienic, and protective sanitary dignity products to eligible indigent girls within our province. Our continuous provision of sanitary dignity packs indicates our resolve to improve educational participation, academic performance, and school attendance of girl learners. In the 2026/27 financial year, we will intensify the provision of menstrual products to **240,157** girl learners in quintile 1–3 schools, farm schools, and special schools. This service will enable them to manage their menstruation cycle in a healthy and hygienic environment.

We have also implemented modifications to strengthen this programme, through appointing service providers in the six districts and two Metros for a three-year period to ensure seamless distribution of Sanitary Dignity Packs to qualified students. The contract will last from 2026/27 to the end of the 2027/28 financial year.

The allocated budget is R46.2 million



IMPROVING ACCESS TO QUALITY CHILD PROTECTION AND FAMILY SERVICES

Somlomo Obekekileyo, a number of our children continue to face poverty, neglect, abuse, and erosion of family support systems. Unemployment, substance abuse, gender-based violence, and migration continue to place pressure on families, increasing the demand for statutory interventions. Despite these challenges, there are also positive signs: increased community awareness of child protection, improved reporting of abuse and neglect, and growing collaboration with non-profit organisations. Our task in 2026/27 is to consolidate these gains while addressing persistent gaps.

To advance the goal of protecting children and building resilient families, we will focus on strengthening family preservation and early intervention services for families at risk to prevent family disintegration and reduce the need for statutory removal of children. When prevention fails, the state must act swiftly and decisively to protect children from harm. As such, the department will prioritize the quality, timeliness, and sustainability of statutory services through the implementation of a 365-day child protection plan.

Children in need of care and protection requiring residential care programmes will be catered for through **28** Child and Youth Care Centers (25 NPO-run and 3 state-owned), benefiting **1413** children. The department will also collaborate with NPOs to improve partial care services, offering respite care for **870** children with disabilities in funded special day care centers, to promote well-being of children against vulnerability. Working with NPOs we will ensure the provision of community-based prevention and early intervention services to **20 608** vulnerable children through funded Drop-in Centers and RISIHA Programmes.

A stable family is a conducive environment for the protection of children. For this reason, the department will upscale parenting programmes and family strengthening initiatives, as well as strengthening community-based care services, including Drop-in Centers, Risiha as well as child and youth care programmes and promoting positive parenting, psychosocial support, and life-skills development. The Department is targeting **29 467** families to participate in family enrichment Programmes.

The allocated budget is R149,4 million.



SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION AND REHABILITATION

Drug abuse is not only a social ill but also a developmental, public health, and community safety challenge that requires a coordinated, evidence-based, and community-driven response. Through the implementation of the Provincial Drug Master Plan, the department continues to strengthen prevention, treatment, and aftercare services aimed at protecting children and vulnerable communities.

During the 2026/27 financial year, the department will intensify the implementation of the “Ke Moja Drug Prevention Programme” with a particular focus on schools to address underage drinking. These interventions will be implemented in partnership with the Department of Education, Eastern Cape Liquor Board, and other key stakeholders participating in Local Drug Action Committees in Municipalities. The department will provide funding to organizations rendering substance-abuse prevention and inpatient/outpatient treatment services in order to increase access to these services across the province.

The allocated budget is R12.4 million

CRIME PREVENTION AND SUPPORT

The Eastern Cape continues to experience high levels of crime, with a growing number of children becoming involved as offenders, underscoring the urgent need for intensification of social crime prevention programmes and developmental interventions. In contributing to the government’s overall war on crime, the department will implement integrated social crime and anti-gang prevention programmes in identified crime hotspot areas (Gqeberha and OR Tambo districts), targeting children at risk and their families through coordinated and multi-sectoral interventions. In addition, the department will ensure that all children in conflict with the law who are eligible for diversion have access to accredited diversion services through the implementation of block diversion programmes during school holidays, aimed at reaching children who are unable to access diversion services through conventional means.

The allocated budget is R2.9 million.



VICTIM EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

The government has declared gender-based violence and femicide a national disaster in recognition of their devastating and far-reaching impact on society. Gender-based violence remains a deeply entrenched and pervasive crisis that continues to rob women, children, and other vulnerable groups of their safety, dignity, and fundamental human rights.

Despite sustained government interventions to address this scourge, the number of victims of crime and violence rates remain unacceptably high, underscoring the urgent need for strengthened, integrated, and well-coordinated responses across all spheres of government and society.

In response to this declaration, the department will continue to lead Pillar 4 of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP GBVF) **2020–2030**, which focuses on response, care, support, and healing. The department will ensure that survivors of crime and violence access timely, victim-centered, and trauma-informed services that promote recovery, protection, and long-term resilience, while preventing secondary victimization. Furthermore, the department will strengthen the provision of alternative care through the expansion and support of shelter services for victims referred to for safety and protection to give effect to these interventions.

The allocated budget is R36.1 million

POVERTY, FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION

Honorable Speaker, according to the Stats-SA 2022 Report, the Eastern Cape has high levels of poverty that affect **67%** of its population, the majority of whom are youth, women, and children. **65.6%** of households depend on social grants for their livelihoods. Furthermore, the province ranks second nationally with the highest number of households experiencing food insecurity, standing at **31.3%**. The Department of Social Development is mandated to provide community development services to uplift communities and people from poverty and vulnerability in a sustainable manner.

During the 2026/27 financial year, the department will strengthen community development interventions to promote sustainable livelihoods to assist households to participate in food production activities to meet their needs. To achieve this objective, we will continue



to implement community mobilization programmes to reach **37 090** people and profile **215** communities to inform planning. These interventions assist the department to identify households that are affected severely by poverty and food insecurity. Communities are also assisted with planning their own interventions such as household community gardens and Centre-based feeding initiatives known as CNDs. Centre-based services will feed **6 642** vulnerable people, and **260** households will be supported through community and household vegetable gardens to fight poverty and promote food security in the province.

These interventions will be implemented in the Nelson Mandela Metro, Buffalo City Metro, Alfred Nzo, OR Tambo, Joe Gqabi, and Sarah Baartman districts which were identified as severe food insecurity hotspots. In each of these districts, the department will prioritize poorest wards and hotspots of malnutrition which are identified through the Provincial Integrated Anti-Poverty Strategy. The department's food security interventions outlined above, are aligned to the Eastern Cape Food and Nutrition Security Plan, 2026-2030 which is implemented in partnership with various government departments and agencies to promote food production and proper nutrition across the province.

The allocated budget is R14. 4 million.

YOUTH AND WOMEN DEVELOPMENT

Youth and Women development remain a priority for the department. The 2022 Stats-SA Report reveals that, youth and women in the Eastern Cape experience highest levels of economic exclusion with 54.3% unemployment levels amongst youth (15 – 34 years) and 65.6% female-headed households dependent on grants. In pursuit of its commitment to promote empowerment and economic inclusion of youth and women the department encourages the establishment of cooperatives, funding of income-generation initiatives, skills development as well as implementation of advocacy programmes to raise awareness on the rights of youth and women. During the 2026/27 financial year, we will mobilize **12 558** youth and support **137** youth structures across the province. In addition, **2 605** young people will benefit from skills development programmes in line with priorities of the youth development strategy. The department will also be implementing skills development programmes reaching **2 189** women, **1 576** child support grant beneficiaries will be linked with sustainable livelihood opportunities to reduce dependency on SASSA grants. Twenty-four (24) women-owned sustainable livelihoods initiatives will be funded to promote entrepreneurship and self-sustenance. The department will prioritize poorest wards across the province to mitigate the impact of poverty and vulnerability.

The allocated budget is R12. 9 million



EMPOWERING THE NPO SECTOR THROUGH SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Social development and anti-poverty interventions cannot be implemented successfully without the involvement of communities through their NPOs and CBOs. To promote effective participation of communities in their own development, the department is required to capacitate and develop NPOs to be resilient and sustainable. This financial year we will provide an integrated capacity building and support service to benefit **453** NPOs and **211** cooperatives to strengthen civil society participation across the province.

The allocated budget is R1 million.

PROMOTING ACCESS OF COMMUNITIES TO SERVICES

Most communities affected by poverty and high levels of food insecurity in the province reside in remote rural areas and informal settlements that struggle to access government services and programmes due to poor infrastructure. To respond to their plight, the department facilitates implementation of the Integrated Community Outreach Programme (ICROP) by taking services directly to communities as one-stop mobile services provided by different departments and agencies. Working closely with SASSA, NDA, DoH, DoE, DHA, DoA, local municipalities, we bring services to communities without the need for them to travel. The department will implement **52** ICROP events during the 2026/27 financial year.



PRIORITY 3 BUILDING A CAPABLE AND DEVELOPMENTAL STATE

In line with priority 3 of the MTDP 2024 - 2029, the department will implement several Human Resource Development (HRD) initiatives that are designed to effectively respond to the national and provincial government transformative and developmental policy agenda. In addition, the department will provide career management and skills development opportunities for employees through various developmental pathways.

To give effect on the professionalization of public service and the enhancement of technical skills for Social Services Professionals (SSPs), the department will implement continuous development programmes (CDP) for SSPs. The Programmes will cover various thematic areas including but not limited to trauma debriefing, psycho-social support, substance abuse, victim empowerment as well as human trafficking. A minimum of **800** SSPs will participate in the continuous development programmes.

The allocated budget is R14. 6 million

The nature of Social Service Professionals (SSP) jobs exposes them to traumatic situations which lead to emotional and psychological distress. To alleviate this, the department will conduct mental health and debriefing sessions for staff members. These sessions will include psychosocial stress assessment and referrals for wellness interventions.

The allocated budget is R3.7 million

To improve access to our services, the department is building and renovating offices around the province. During the 2026/27 financial year the department will renovate Somerset East, Mount Ayliff and Willowvale service offices as well as Sarah Baartman district office. Butterworth, Indwe and Jansenville service offices will be handed over during this financial year.



CONCLUSION

Honourable Speaker, In conclusion, the **R3.3 billion** budget for the Eastern Cape Department of Social Development underscores our commitment to creating a just and equitable society. With more than **R50.3 million** allocated for the employment of SSPs, we are enhancing our capacity to serve our communities effectively. As we continue to fight against GBV, provide sanitary dignity packs to young girls, combat malnutrition, and address teenage pregnancy, let us remember that our collective efforts are vital in creating a society where every individual can thrive. I urge all stakeholders, government agencies, civil society, and community members to join us in this mission. Together, we can build a future where every woman, girl, and child in the Eastern Cape has the opportunity to live with dignity, health, and hope.

As a department we will continue to advance the interests of vulnerable members of society for the realization of a society that provides them with a realistic opportunity to succeed in life. This can only be achieved when we place our social partners and beneficiaries at the center of our developmental initiatives. We will never abandon or neglect our quest to create an equal society that affords everyone equal access to opportunities.



BUDGET VOTE 4: DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

I now table the Budget for the Department of Social Development.

| Programmes | 2026/27 | 2027/28 | 2028/29 |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | (R0'00) | (R0'00) | (R0'00) |
| Administration | 642 585 | 676 968 | 696 757 |
| Social Welfare Services | 977 099 | 993 638 | 1 010 804 |
| Children and Families | 757 103 | 771 706 | 809 001 |
| Restorative Services | 566 099 | 574 982 | 577 584 |
| Development and Research | 328 582 | 334 065 | 346 106 |
| Subtotal | 3 271 468 | 3 351 359 | 3 440 252 |

Enkosi Kakhulu!





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