THURSDAY, 13 AUGUST 2026

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PROCEEDINGS OF VIRTUAL (OR HYBRID) NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

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The Council met at 14:00.

The Chairperson took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayers or meditation.

The Chairperson announced that the virtual sitting constituted a sitting of the National Council of Provinces.

QUESTIONS FOR ORAL REPLY

CLUSTER 2A - SOCIAL SERVICES

Question 10:

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Hon House Chairperson, yes, the government introduced the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, loan scheme in 2024 to extend support to

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students whose combined household income is above R350 000, and not more than R600 000 a year. This was an important policy shift, which students above the bursary threshold but are unable to finance higher education from household income were brought into a public NSFAS loan mechanism.

The scheme was initially capitalised with R3,8 billion, comprising R1,5 billion from the National Skills Fund, and R2,3 billion from the Sector Education and Training Authorities, our Setas. There has been progress, although implementation has not yet reached the scale intended. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme records show that in 2025, it received 10 186 loan applications and approved 2 686.

So, for 2026, the latest position is that 53 575 applications were received, of which 3 102 applicants have been assessed as eligible. Subject to distinguish between an application and eligibility decision, a signed loan agreement and an actual disbursement. The increase in applications is encouraging, but the conversion of eligible applicants into concluded and disbursed loans remain too low and too slow.

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Implementation has been affected by outstanding institutional memoranda of agreement. The finalisation of the loan agreement form, qualification and document, verification, and the timely submission of registration information by institutions. Several institutions have signed the required agreement while engagement with the remaining institutions continue.

Our department and NSFAS are therefore taking corrective action to finalise the outstanding contractual instruments and institutional agreements, reconcile the complete 2024 to 2026 application to disbursement position, improve communication with students and institutions, but also review the eligibility and application process so that it is easier for qualifying students to complete.

So, the honest question and position is that government has established a funding instrument for the missing middle and demand for it has grown, but it has not yet achieved the operational maturity or reach which was originally intended. Our immediate task is to convert eligibility into actual funding more quickly while the broader work on a stable and sustainable student funding model continues.

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Mr M F MOKWELE: Minister, let me also thank you for answering my first question correctly. Hon Minister, my follow-up question is in this pattern, in light of the escalating cost of student accommodation and the competing needs to accommodate the missing middle, has any feasibility study on the sustainability of free higher education into the destined future been conducted? And if not, why not and if so, what are the relevant details and whether the department has considered any alternative funding model for the deserving student from poor families who are currently not eligible to NSFAS funding, Minister?

Thanks very much, House Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Thank you hon Mokwele, and my sincere apologies for the network glitches. I will now hand over to the Minister to respond to the question.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Thank you very much and welcome back.

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The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Good to see you. You look so confused, Minister. [Laughter.] I am in the rural areas. You know where I am.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Yes, I know where you are. I am also in Ugu, in KwaZulu-Natal. House Chairperson, the short answer to the hon Mokwele's follow-up question is that the sustainability of student funding is under review. And yes, there is no completed post-2017 feasibility study. That information before me does not identify one. But the policy change is broader than maintaining a single instrument.

I think we need to be able to speak about a progressive funding system that protects bursary support for poor and working-class students, that also improves the missing middle loan and mobilises an appropriate contribution from the state, institutions, employers and other partners without transferring unaffordable debt to families.

A broader funding model work must test fiscal affordability. We must look at projected enrolment growth. We must also look at the real cost of tuition and accommodation and income verification, the administrative capacity of an institution

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that should run something like this, fair loan and repayment agreements.

Those are some of the factors that we will have to look at for a comprehensive student funding model. A student from a poor or working-class household who meets the applicable NSFAS bursary criteria should be supported through the bursary scheme. There shouldn't be any question about that.

But for students outside the standard bursary criteria, I think the available routes should probably include NSFAS missing middle loan, university financial aid. We have, you know, profession-specific bursaries such as Funza Lushaka. Some of our Setas have been putting together a lot of money towards student bursaries.

The National Skills Fund itself, I think, has set aside about a billion rand for Doctor of Philosophy, PhDs, and postgrads. So, there are multiple - some may argue insufficient, but there are multiple interventions that cover students that are outside of the NSFAS coverage and missing middle. The idea has to be, how do we put all of this thing together for a single type of intervention.

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Thank you.

Ms J M ADRIAANSE: It’s the hon Adriaanse, Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Thank you hon Adriaanse, you may proceed.

Ms J M ADRIAANSE: Hon Minister, you're almost there answering my question, but for many years, government has acknowledged the plight of the missing middle. Yet, thousands of capable students still fall outside of the perimeter of the support of NSFAS. When can we expect your department to present this concrete, funded solution, rather than continuing to leave these students trapped between being too rich for aid and too poor to stay?

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: House Chairperson, our next step is Cabinet and our intention is to ensure that we roll out elements of a sustainable student funding model from next year, but it will take much longer to mature into a student funding model that is fit for our demands as a country. Our main target is 2027. There has to be elements of a sustainable

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student funding model that is quite inclusive and that covers all of these people.

Thank you.

Mr M M MAMPURU: Chair, and greetings, Minister. Minister, I will just go straight to the point. What steps have you taken to completely overhaul this current failing debt-inducing loan scheme?

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Hon Mampuru, can you hold on. Hon Nonkonyana, what Rule are you rising on?

Adv Inkosi M NONKONYANA: The hon member is not showing his face.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: He did, hon Nonkonyana. Maybe you have not seen him. He did. We saw him.

Adv Inkosi M NONKONYANA: Oh, thank you, Chair,

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: You may proceed, hon Mampuru.

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Mr M M MAMPURU: I think the hon Nonkonyana needs eye-inducing glasses so that he can be able to see.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Hon Mampuru, hon Mampuru, you just had your video on. Hon Mampuru, can I come in, please? Can you switch on your video so that we can see you as you did earlier on, please? Thank you. You may proceed.

Mr M M MAMPURU: I hope my time will be added because the hon Nonkonyana wasted my time. Minister, as I've indicated, what steps have you taken to completely overhaul this current failing debt-inducing loan scheme so that it may be turned into a fully funded non-repayable bursary allocation before the commencement of the next academic year? I'm asking this because following your recent budget briefing where you acknowledge that government’s R3,8 billion missing middle loan scheme failed to reach its target with only a fraction of eligible students successfully funded, how do you justify the continued commercialisation of higher education through a loan-centric scheme rather than fulfilling the constitutional mandate of free higher education for the children of the poor and the working class?

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Thank you, Chair.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: House Chairperson, I don't know how the hon Mampuru calls this a loan-centric student funding scheme when close to 800 000 students are getting access to higher education for free and fewer of those have now – we have opened up doors for them in terms of applications for the missing middle.

This is not a loan-centric student funding model. It is a fee-free higher education model which has also introduced measures to ensure that it caters for what has been referred to as the missing middle. Yes, it may not have picked up the way in which we have anticipated.

As I said, there are a few things that we obviously also need to fix as the NSFAS to ensure that it can competently disburse loans to students who fall within that category of the missing middle. There are obviously going to be a whole range of revamp of that particular loan scheme because we believe it has to serve students ultimately. The 3 000 number is too little. The initial demand was in the forties of thousands of students who would have potentially taken up this loan.

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So, for the 2027 academic year, our plan is to ensure that we definitely have an effective working loan scheme at the NSFAS, but we also have a comprehensive student funding model.

Thank you.

Mr M FENI: Hon Chairperson, is this a follow-up on Question 11?

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Question 10 which has to do with the funding of students. The first question that's been asked by the hon Mokwele.

Mr M FENI: I don't have a question on that one, hon Chair.

Question 19:
The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Hon Chairperson, I think you are referring to Question 19. The hon member’s estimates of 50 to 60% national first-year dropout rate are not supported by the latest published departmental data. It would be interesting to check where the hon member has found the evidence of 50 to 60%. Because, if it so, it may conflate first-year dropouts with cumulative non-completion or with

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rates in particular institutions, programmes or student groups. I think it may need some further clarity.

Our own data, reports that among first-time entrants in three-year degrees in the 2020 core, indicates 8,6% of contact students and 30,3% of distance-learning students had dropped out after one year. These grades vary by mode, by qualification and also by institution. It does not obviously minimise the serious problem of long-term completion and delayed completion. Those we jocularly refer to them as lifelong students need to be encouraged to graduate out of our universities.

The first measure is financial and material support and National Student Financial Aid Scheme, Nsfas, bursaries cover tuition and approved living learning material ... [Inaudible.] This is meant to give first years that kind of wraparound support.

The second measure is obviously academic support with universities having implemented extended curriculum programmes and foundation provision for students who require additional academic programmes. Our university capacity development

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programme and grant also supports advising, tutoring, mentoring and improved teaching. So those are some of the points.

The third measure is earlier intervention where universities are strengthening orientation, first-year experience programmes and early warning system using attendance, assessments and information about online learning platforms, such as Massive Open Online Courses, Moocs, and so on. Referral to academic and financial support, as well as SA Qualifications Authority, SAQA-related support also form part of all of this. Where students appear to be disengaged, the response includes interpersonal support, such as counselling, mental health services, disability support and health-and-wellness programmes.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Minister, we have lost you, your network seems not to be stable.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Often is that ...

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The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Yes, you are getting better if you can just try and get a better spot. Just try and shift the desk.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Okay? Alright. I was saying our position is that the retention challenge has been solved. The national first-year rate is slower than the estimate in the question that has been asked by hon Du Plessis. But every preventable dropout for us is a loss to student, to the student to the family but also to the country. So, access without success is incomplete transformation and we need to ensure that every one of our student is supported so that they succeed.

Ms N S DU PLESSIS: Hon Chairperson, hon Minister, thank you for your response. You have covered it largely. I do need to say, it is verified as of a year and a half ago by a business tech study done that it is between 50 and 60%. I would, however, appreciate if you could elaborate on what it is now and what improvement there is. However, the follow-up question that I do have as you mentioned, psychosocial support, however, there are very many students who claim that the psychosocial support that should be available on campus is not

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available on campus. On which campuses have you done to ensure that the psychosocial support is there to minimise and ensure that we retain as many students as possible to complete higher education? Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Thank you very much hon Du Plessis, meaning the Minister has given you the real-time response to the question. So, Minister, you may further clarify the matter?

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Yes, firstly, I think hon Du Plessis would do better to rely on our statistics and I am happy to share the link of the most and latest available data for her future reference. Secondly, in almost every university, there are sections that give professional mental health support, every university without an exception. If you show me any university or any of their campus that does not have that, I think we will have to work towards the children if that happens. So, that is the first thing.

The second thing is that we also have Higher Health, which is an agency of the Department of Higher Education. It has done tremendous work in recruiting students to work as peer

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educators, to work with their fellow students, to give them the support they need and to advise them on issues around HIV/Aids, wellness and so on and so forth. It also has an additional support, that of professional psychosocial support and you can find Higher Health on any of the campuses. If you ask any of the student, in fact, one of the student leaders has suggested that the contact details of Higher Health must appear behind every student card of every student because of the kind of services that they provide. That is something I think we need to take up. Thank you.

Mr M F MOKWELE: Hon Chairperson, let me switch off my video. In the main, the Minister nearly covered me on the question that I wanted to ask. For the benefit of this sitting maybe my follow-up question to the Minister is that, has the department conducted any diagnostic study of the underlying causes of high dropout rates among the first-year students? if not, why not and if so, what are the relevant details? I thank you, Minister.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Look, we maintain the which is the Higher Education Management Information System, Hamis, which gives us constant updates on how our students are

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performing, what programmes are they doing and where are they lagging. This also means that if we can target a particular university or a particular faculty or a particular school or something like that, we are then able to make the necessary intervention. So, that data is available and as I said, a little bit different from what hon Du Plessis has indicated. But it is important because it constantly reminds us of the need to continuously support students so that they can be academically successful. Thank you so much for that question.

Mr M M MAMPURU: Hon Chairperson, let me welcome the response that Minister gave to the question of hon Mokwele. It also covered partially my question. However, let me pose this question to the Minister and say, what further assessment has he conducted to determine whether some of the challenges which might participate into the dropout of a student might be that of financial exclusion, lack of student accommodation, academic support programmes or mental services? If such assessment was conducted, what were the outcomes? If not, what is he going to do to ensure that he intervenes in such challenges to curb the number of students who are ...

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Hon Mampuru, we have lost you.

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Mr M M MAMPURU: There are issues of network here. I think the whole country have a problem of network. As I said, I was saying to the Minister that he partially responded to my question. However, I believe it is important for me to further raise this question to say, was there any further assessment that he conducted to determine those courses which compel students to drop out of the system, in particular those who are facing financial exclusion, lack of accommodation, academic support and also mental health services?

Minister, if such assessment was made, what were the conclusive outcomes and if not, what steps is he going to take to address each and every challenge to improve student retention in higher education? Thank you, Minister, and you, Chair.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Hon Chairperson, two things, I mean this is obviously a new question but firstly maybe that kind of a study is due. The last time we did this study was in 2017 through Higher Health, which I referred to earlier, the study or survey they did at that time. But now, we might have to expand the variables that they will have to look at because

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at that time they looked at student wellness, mental health and HIV/AIDS. So, we can extend that to include these factors.

The second point, which is a very important point, is that around the same period, an independent study was conducted by one of the universities and I will have to look for the study and pass it on to hon Mampuru. The study showed that because of the intervention we have made through the Nsfas, many of the students who are performing much better in our campuses are those who are financially assisted by the state. I mean, which also speaks against the whole notion that students who are on financial support, would not take up that opportunity quite seriously. So that is a very important indicator.

But I suppose that we will have to check if a study that shows what hon Mampuru is asking for does not exist. I think it would give us an interesting picture of what changes have happened since the introduction of fee-free high education. We have a glimpse of where we are and the kind of impact. But to the extent of what hon Mampuru is asking for, I am not sure if that study exists. If it does, we will send it to him. If it does not, we will have to work on one.

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The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Thank you very much, hon Minister and thank you for responding to the question. It was indeed a new question that hon Mampuru posed. Nonetheless, thank you for your response. And the next follow-up question is from hon Mokwele. I know that he did pose a question earlier on. He was standing for the member of the ANC then, so this is his turn to ask his question if he so wishes.

Mr M F MOKWELE: Hon Chair, maybe the Minister wanted to elaborate further. From my side, I should think that I am covered by the response from the Minister and I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Thank you. Let us proceed to the next question, which is Question 11.

Question 11:
The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Hon Chairperson and to hon Feni, yes, councils of public universities and colleges exercise important governance responsibilities, but institutional autonomy obviously does not mean immunity from accountability. Our department monitors governance across the postschool education and training system through statutory reporting.

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We also look at the audited annual financial statements. We look at the AG's reports, council and management reports. We also look at governance assessment. We do site visits, just as Members of Parliament also do, but we also do targeted investigations where we believe that there are risks. So, for universities, this oversight is exercised under the Higher Education Act of 1997, together with the regulations for reporting by public higher education institutions. So, for Tvet colleges, it is exercised under the Continuing Education and Training Act of 2006.

We have also introduced governance performance indicators for Tvet colleges, supported by a council assessment tool, so that weaknesses can be identified earlier and addressed through formal remedial plans. The accountability approach is progressive, but it's also firm. When monitoring identifies a weakness, the first response may include requiring additional information, setting a remedial plan with clear timeframes, and monitoring its implementation.

Where failure is serious or persistent, the Minister may use the applicable statutory powers to issue a directive or appoint an independent assessor or investigator, as is the

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case now with the University of Venda, or appoint an administrator, as we just did. I think the last one was Mangosuthu University of Technology, to restore lawful and effective governance. Now, consequence management must also distinguish between correcting an institution and holding individuals accountable.

So, an intervention or administration protects the institution and its students. It does not on its own dispose of the accountability of individual council members or executives. Where there has been evidence that supports individual action, the relevant authority does consider disciplinary proceedings, go through the whole legal process, recovering losses, civil action, disqualification from future council service, where legislation permits or even refer that to law enforcement ... and other competent bodies.

I think, as you said, with regards to the College of Cape Town, this is something that we've done, where I've appointed a stabilisation and governance support team to investigate its support, its affairs, and due to its report, we then appointed an administrator acting under section 46 of the Continuing Act. They've done exactly that, refer the matters for criminal

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investigation, engage with the AG, do all of those things, so that there has to be consequence management for each and every person who we believe may have, in one way or another, committed illegal activities against any of our public institutions. Thank you.

Mr M FENI: Thank you very much, once again, hon Chair and thank you also to the hon Minister for the response. Hon Minister, I'm sure you will agree that the persistence of governance and accountability that lapses in our higher education system is not about the leadership issues but relates to the challenges of fundamental transformation of the sector. In this regard, has the Department considered the coherent and integrated vision on the transformation of the sector in the medium and long term? If not, why not and if so, where are the relevant details? Thank you very much.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Thank you very much, hon Feni. Let me give you this picture. So, 26 universities, each one of them with a council, 50 Tvet colleges, each one of them with a council, 21 sector education and training authority, Setas, each one of them with a council. We have got, I think, about three or four quality councils. So, you have this

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multiplicity of institutions, all of them having chairs of boards and chief executive officers, CEOs, accounting authorities, and executive authorities. You're bound to have challenges, which is what we've seen. So, it's not just about leadership. In some instances, it is.

Chairpersons of councils wanting to get in the way of the vice-chancellor, or in some instances, CEOs of Setas wanting to undermine chairpersons of those Setas. So, it could be around leadership. It could be around people serving their own interests. It could also be about the lack of capacity of the people that have been deployed. So, the CV does not relate to the individual. So, it could be a whole range of things.

One of the things that we've been looking at in the department together with some of our universities is the establishment of a capacity-building institute that is based in a university that will help us to give leadership and governance support to each one of our councils, but also to the leaders of our institutions.

We really have to rethink with all of these many institutions that we're governing in the postschool education and training,

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the Pset system. We have to think around how we can rationalise some of these governance structures. But I suppose that's an issue for another day, and especially for yourself, as Members of Parliament and of the NCOP.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP: Now, thank you very much, Minister. You left us with an assignment.

Mr O J MOKAE: Thank you very much, hon Refilwe Mtshweni-Tsipane, our Chairperson in the NCOP. Good afternoon also to colleagues and the Minister for availing yourself for this Question session.

Chair, indeed the Minister gave us that assignment to relook these matters and to delve deeper into the challenges that the Tvet sector is faced with. But I just want to find out from the Minister, given the magnitude of these irregular appointments, questionable procurement, and dysfunctional governance getting this far, especially in the government-controlled Tvet institution, such as the case with the College of Cape Town, the Motel Artisan College in Blue Fountain, before this decisive intervention occurred. What could be some of those issues, underlying issues, that prompt these

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irregular appointments and questionable procurement? So just to give us a picture in terms of how we arrived at where we are right now. Thank you very much, hon Chairperson for the opportunity.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Chairperson and hon Mokae, thank you. I mean, we need to remember that most of our accounting authorities are a combination of people who possess the expertise, but also people who come from constituencies. In our councils we have people who sit there on the basis of the positions they occupy in the university. There are those who sit there on the basis of their expertise, your SRCs, your unions, and so forth. But they are experts in their constituencies and in their interests.

So given all of that, you're bound to have some of the challenges that we have. The solution is obviously not to exclude people from participating in these democratic structures, because they're democratic structures. But I think the ultimate objective is to identify what the persistent causes of governance collapse in this institution are.

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How do we tailor make some interventions for Setas, for universities, for Tvet council. I mean, one of the major problems, you're absolutely right, that, we have Tvet councils positioned where they are. Some of the Tvet colleges are being unequal if you compare all of them. It's because of the different types of leadership that each of the institutions has. So, leadership does play an important role and we think we need to support it.

But one of the bigger challenges is exactly that. Do we have proper councils in place? Do they know what they are supposed to be doing? Are they keeping within the framework of the law and allowing managers of institutions to manage the relationship and it also goes the other way around. But this is definitely something that we have to consistently be on the lookout for. Thank you so much.

Mr V GERICKE: Yes, good afternoon, Chairperson and comrades. Minister Buti Manamela, I think you are youthful enough honestly to fight this question that I bring to you now. Minister, why do you remain purely reactive, relying on slow-moving, independent assessor-administrators, ... instead of enforcing permanent real-time oversight mechanisms to monitor

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and evaluate council decisions? How do you justify the ongoing retention of compromise council and executive members at the College of Cape Town, who oversaw severe institutional failures? What specific steps are being taken to blacklist these individuals from ever serving in the South African higher education sector again? Thank you, Chair and Minister.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: So, the council at the College of Cape Town has been dissolved consequent to the appointment of the administrator. That's the first.

The second thing is that administration is an available instrument to be utilised in instances where we believe there's governance failure. It's not something that we just ... [Inaudible.] out. Thirdly, we do as much as we can to ensure that we give support to each of our institutions.

Let me give an example, for instance, with the NSFAS. Before we placed the institution under administration, we had consistent engagement with them. I had several meetings; I think about five or six meetings with the board.

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The team in the department had several meetings with the board itself, the senior managers in a very short space of time in under a year, and the intention was to provide support. I think where we came to realise that we are finding ourselves with no movement, some intervention has to be made.

So, legislators saw it in their wisdom to introduce administration as an important element in cases where normal governance failed. The trick, however, is to ensure that we have clear guidelines, clear parameters of operation, but also a clear lifespan for each of the administrations. Also, to keep a watch on them. I can assure you that whatever issues that the administrator, the College of Cape Town has found, they will take those issues up with the necessary law enforcement and authorities. Thank you very much, hon member.

IsiZulu:

USIHLALO WENDLU YOMKHANDLU KAZWELONKE WEZIFUNDAZWE: Lungu elihloniphekile Mhlongo bengifuna ukukubongelela njengoNgongqoshe izolo, manje ngikhohliwe ukuthi uyintombi yakuphi emhlophe. Ngiphelela lapho.

English:

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Over to you. Hon Mhlongo! It looks like she's got network challenges. She has just been kicked off by the network.

Mr S A ZULU: It must be a sabotage, Chairperson.

IsiZulu:

USIHLALO WENDLU YOMKHANDLU KAZWELONKE WEZIFUNDAZWE: Yilezi zibongo zami ezingaphelele. Yizo lezi ezmshiya enkingeni. Angenzanga ubulungiswa kulezibongo. Yingakho elahlekile.

English:

Hon Mhlongo, are you back? Is there anyone who can stand in for her from the MK party? If not, I am afraid she'll have to forfeit this question. However, she is more than welcome to send her follow-up question to the Minister directly for a written response to whatever she may have wanted to say to the Minister. Having said that, thank you, Minister. From my side I now hand over to hon Modise, he will take from here. Thank you so much, over to you, hon Modise.

IsiZulu:

USIHLALO (Mnu M G Modise): Siyabonga, Sihlalo!

English:

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I hope that I am audible. Minister, I hope you are not in the car because the network keeps on buffing when you speak. I don't know what is wrong. I was worried because these things are recorded and someone will be watching them and say, "Aaah, what is wrong with the Minister now?" [Laughter.] Let's go straight to it, Minister. Let's take Question 3, which will be asked by hon Kennedy from Limpopo.

Question 3:

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Maybe I should start with reading the response or ...?

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Please give us the response. Sorry, she will do the follow up?

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Yes! Thank you so much, Chairperson. Yes, I have been informed of the challenges in the management and accreditation of NSFAS-funded student accommodation. The department does not regard the accreditation of unsafe or uninhabitable accommodation as a major administrative failure because this places students at risk and undermines confidence in the student funding system.

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However, accommodation must be assessed against the applicable minimum norms and standards and the NSFAS accreditation requirements. Monitoring includes fiscal inspection, grading, verification of approved bed capacity, and also the relevant health, safety and municipal compliance documentation. Complaints from students and institutions must trigger re-inspection.

So, if any student complains anywhere in the country and that complaint reaches the NSFAS, there has to be re-inspection while a provider may be suspended, or their accreditation withdrawn where the required standard is not met. We have not, through the NSFAS, commenced with a national audit of previously accredited accommodation supported by institutions and student representatives.

Also, the weakness is also that fragmented responsibility and incomplete building-level data have made it difficult to confirm in real time that every funded property remains compliant after initial accreditation. The audit must therefore establish a single verified property register dealing with ownership, with capacity and all those other points that we have mentioned.

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The NSFAS has not yet produced a verified building-level count of properties that were accredited despite being noncompliant since 2023. So, we don’t have that actual number that the hon member is asking for but the picture that we have is that about 63 000 students are being funded in accommodation recorded as nonaccredited.

Now, this is important. There are areas where we do not have it at all. For instance, Greenfields accommodation could be regarded as qualifying the minimum standards. So, this obviously speaks to the work that we need to do as the department in ensuring that we have a student accommodation spread across wherever student accommodation is in demand.

The other point that I would like to mention in response to this is that we do not have before us disciplinary funding against an individual or official specifically for approving a noncompliant building since 2023. This is obviously something that we need to look at, and I want to use this opportunity to call on students who may be in distress: Either you don’t know the status of your accommodation, especially those who are in private accommodation; whether that accommodation has been

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paid; whether you have been threatened with being kicked out; and whether the accommodation is what was promised.

Some accommodation providers provide a five-star treatment and when you get there, it is just one star. If the conditions in that accommodation at which you stay are not proper, they are not safe and are not conducive for a student, please complain; go and cry to the university student accommodation people; call the NSFAS helpline; talk to your SRCs; talk to your Sasco or EFF Student Command; talk to Daso; and talk to anyone and everyone on campus who are your student leaders.

Talk to them and complain if you are not happy with your student accommodation until someone gets to attend to it. However, the gold standard is that there has to be zero complaints, but as we know, even some of the five-star hotels have their doors and windows stretched just because they don't provide what they have promised. So, we will strive for that gold standard. Thank you, hon Chair.

Ms M KENNEDY: Hon Chairperson, greetings to the Minister and members on the platform. Minister, given that the NSFAS student accommodation pilot project continues to be a multi-

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billion-rand hub of corruption, where corrupt officials routinely pocket bribes to accredit hazardous and structurally compromised death traps that violate basic human dignity and the prescribed minimum norms and standards for student housing: How do you explain this catastrophic failure of the department's current inspection framework, which allowed noncompliant buildings lacking basic security, lacking functional plumbing and lacking reliable electricity to be accredited and paid for using public funds since that year of 2023; and what emergency real-time safety audit is your department co-ordinating alongside municipalities to immediately inspect all NSFAS-funded buildings and evict corrupt landlords before students lose their lives to these structurally risky or fire-hazard buildings? Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, hon Kennedy. Hon members who are going to speak are making requests: Please remember, it is a follow-up question and not follow-up questions. Hon Minister, please respond.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: I think just two things: One, let me get the list from hon Kennedy. When I say let me get the list, I am not suggesting that what she is saying is

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not there. However, we want the list so that we go to specifically attend to those student accommodation or residences, or send NSFAS people, or send everyone who is responsible - the universities themselves - to go and check those residences and ensure that action is being taken.

Secondly, some of the issues that hon Kennedy is raising are things that do not occur in normal contractual agreements. They are just pure criminality, and I think we need to treat it as that. So, some of the issues do not only just need to be reported to me; they also need to be reported to the police, especially if there is fraud, or if there is abuse, or if the people are taking bribes and we know who those people are and so forth.

Let us ensure that those people are arrested because that is part of what is dealing with the state’s aspiration of providing quality accommodation to everyone. It is all these middlemen and middlemen of middlemen of middlemen who keep on peeling off the fat of the NSFAS budget. Student accommodation has actually now surpassed tuition as a cost. That should worry us! Thank you, House Chair.

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Mr M P SIBANDE: Thank you very much, hon Minister, for your fabulous responses. Nevertheless, the hon Minister will agree that most of our towns are facing the challenges of ageing residential infrastructure, with landlords prioritising the maximisation of profit at the expense of proper maintenance and refurbishment of residential complexes. This is compounded by the poor regulatory standards and enforcement of municipal bylaws.

Minister, in this regard, what are the plans of the department over the current Medium-Term Expenditure Framework in terms of the rollout of student accommodation; and whether the department has considered introducing a hybrid system of learning that consists of contact and online learning, especially in the current rapidly evolving digital age, to mitigate the department’s challenges for more classrooms and student accommodation? I thank you.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Thank you very much, hon Sibande. It is actually two questions that you are raising: One being the student accommodation program over the medium term; and what our immediate responsibility is. This means we

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have to ensure that the existing funded stock is safe and credible while expanding supply against verified demand.

So, we already have available stock. Some of it is very good, which is private accommodation. Some of it cannot be used. So, we have to improve that. However, we are also investing in the institutions themselves. The President's mandate at the 2026 State of the Nation Address was to look at how we can improve student accommodation that is based on campuses. That, for us, is what our goal is.

Of course, it will have to be mixed. It will have to include elements of private accommodation providers initially and so on and so forth. Yes, there may be big capital that has invested in student accommodation, but also, we must not underestimate the transformative nature of what this income has done in our communities - in those single households.

As long as they are compliant; as long as they have got a good room; and as long as they can afford these students to study, that injection into that household, into that community is going a long way. So, we have got to try and see how this

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transition protects students, but also that we value its intervention.

So, there are projects in the pipeline currently that exist. The shortage, if we are to build student accommodation in every university, is about 200 000 beds. The estimate for each bed ranges from anything between R285 000 to R350 000 for a single bed. To construct a single bed in a new university essentially means that we need about R60 billion to 70 billion to fully construct student accommodation.

So, it is a discussion that we need to really think deeply about. I think there seems to be this aspiration expressed, which is not realistic and which is also not practical, where we think that each and every student who goes into a university or college must be accommodated and must be accommodated on campus. That is unsustainable!

I think our priority has to redirect those resources towards actual tuition and towards actual learning facility, as opposed to currently, where student accommodation, as I said, far surpasses tuition and so on. It has actually become the priority. The NSFAS administrator has to prioritise paying

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student accommodation providers as opposed to paying tuition to institutions, which is quite a worrying trend.

I think it is a discussion that we need to have. However, whilst we are having that discussion, our responsibility is to make sure that every student is accommodated safely and supported properly so that they are able to complete their studies on time.

Mr N H PIENAAR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, you just spoke of a shortcut of funds. However, Minister, NSFAS is a prime example of the government’s abuse and misuse of taxpayers' money. Just down the street from Parliament on the beachfront, they are leasing parking bays for almost R90 million and office space for R166 million over five years instead of student accommodation.

You have indicated that you are working to end the lease. Can you please indicate whether it has ended; and if not, when can we expect the last payment from taxpayers' money for this oceanfront property that adds no value to the lives of students? Thank you, Chair.

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The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Thank you, hon Pienaar. You and I are from Limpopo, and that building is too far from Limpopo. You need to go see it. However, the rental contact is actually coming to an end, I think, sometime next year. It is under investigation by the Special Investigation Unit with regard to the procurement that happened in that building.

Lastly, yes, the NSFAS is looking into moving out of that building. It doesn't make sense for them to move out now. It is impractical because there are also contractual obligations to be considered until such time that the contract is set aside. It is something that we are willing to pursue to make sure that if in any way a cent has been lost during that procurement process, that every cent of that contract is paid back. So, I am with you on that one. Thank you.

Mr M F MOKWELE: Chairperson, I think I got a reply on the question that I needed to ask from the Minister on behalf of hon Fienies. So, I am covered, Chair. Maybe we can just pass because when the Minister was responding, he also covered what I wanted to ask on behalf of hon Fienies. Thank you very much, Chair.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, hon Mokwele. I was worried about how hon Fienies is looking like you now. We will move to Question 24. Minister, may you please kindly respond to Question 24?

Question 24:

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: House Chairperson, the answer is no. We don't conduct and haven't conducted an audit, either national audit or provincial audits to determine whether every public university or Technical and Vocational Education and Training, Tvet, programme is aligned with provincial economic development priorities. Therefore, no such audit findings or a date for their tabling. So, we cannot provide those because they do not exist.

What's important is that programme alignment is assessed through a completely separate process. So, it doesn't mean that if there's no audit, we don't do that assessment. So, in universities, this includes enrolment planning, the approval of programmes, qualification mix, the role of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation and Review. So, we don't just pass a qualification. The council has to say, yes, this qualification can go.

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With regards to Tvet colleges, it's the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations, QCTO, which accredits. It looks at the college plans. It looks at the centres of specialisation, but we also look at the national list of occupations in high demand. And, of course, these do not necessarily constitute a cross system with provincial audits as contemplated but obviously, the logic is national study, research, and so on, will then permeate into provinces. And this helps us to identify if there are any systems gap, if we need to strengthen, if we need an integrated programme that we should map across universities and Tvet colleges. All of those things happen.

Secondly, we do not have a verified consolidated data set citing how many institutions in each province introduce new programmes. What I can tell you though, okay, maybe let me deal with this part. University and Tvet data is held separately and it covers full qualifications, curriculum amendments, occupational and short courses. So, we have that data decentralised in each of our universities and Tvet colleges but these categories, obviously, cannot responsibly be added together as equivalent programme.

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For Tvet, the figures applied in terms of new programmes includes renewable energy, digital skills initiatives. The opportunity to face out legacy projects also opened up a window for the introduction of some of the new programme. And then the expression fully equipped in the question does not have a uniform college level measure. So readiness must be assessed at campus and trade level against the requirements of a particular qualification. Do we have a workshop infrastructure? Do we have the equipment? Do we have a qualified lecturer? Do we have accreditation? Do we have workplace partnership? And also, what are the trade test arrangements? So, that entire journey has completely become different for the institution and therefore for the students who are participating in this institution.

We do not currently have a verified province, just aggregated measures of the graduates who secure employment within 12 months. This is one of the things that we need to measure. Our system is designed to measure enrolments. It is not designed to determine success. It is not designed to determine competence. It is not designed to determine absorption, and so on and so forth. Some of those are left to the vices of the individual students themselves. So, this is one area that we

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need to look to look at. So, I hope that answers the question, hon member.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, Minister. Let's go back to the province of KwaZulu-Natal and get hon Mhlongo for a follow-up question. Hon Mhlongo, going once, twice, gone. We will move to the province of Limpopo and get hon Mokwele to ask a follow-up question. Unmute, hon Mokwele. There you are.

Mr M F MOKWELE: House Chair of the session, hon Modise, my follow-up question to the Minister is that - thank you very much, Minister, for your comprehensive response to this important question - whether South Africa has produced sufficient postdoctoral graduates in this case, critical skills identified by hon members? And if not, what are the plans going forward? And whether the department is aware of the overall contribution of the corporate sector toward the funding of this scarce critical skill? And if so, what is the situation now, Minister? I thank you.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: House Chair, I know this was a question being read on behalf of hon Feni, but just to clarify that a postdoctoral fellow is a researcher who has

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already completed a doctorate. So it's not a separate category of a graduate. And we do not have a verified national benchmark for that field. So, we don't have a doctor and then postdoctoral. So everyone, even if you do postdoctoral, you are still just a doctor. You just studied a little bit deeper than the rest of us.

We don't keep that information, but I think the crux of it is that we have National Development Plan targets which I think 70% of our academic staff in universities should have post-graduate qualifications, Master's and PhDs. It's still an ambition, an important one, nevertheless. And we've done everything that we can to make sure that we invest into postdoctoral studies. The corporate sector also contributes through the skills levy, workplace learning, and so on and so forth.

I think we need to do more in mobilizing private rent value into public institutions. We must also make a distinction between skills development funding from voluntary corporate investment against statutory investment. And I think the objective has to be to mobilize all sources of funding towards

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investment into our critical and scarce skills list. Thank you very much, hon Chair.

Ms J M ADRIAANSE: Hon Minister, recent discussions on South Africa's energy transition and digital economy highlight the urgent need for skills in areas such as renewable energy, artificial intelligence and green hydrogen. How many institutions have introduced programs in these fields? And does the department believe the current rollout is sufficient to meet national economic priorities? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Look, I mean, we have to do more. We are creating skills economic zones in Mpumalanga, the Northern Cape, Limpopo, to specifically target those economies in terms of the skills demanded and as part of the transition, but the reality is that we need much more than that.

The President's mandate of a skills revolution includes partly this work around what we need to do with all of the critical skills and how we prioritize those, how we get to train those, how do we organize that training.

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I noticed and with a few seconds, House Chair, just to acknowledge - I know it's his first time - our Deputy Minister Yusuf Cassim who has joined our delegation from the Ministry and also to acknowledge Deputy Minister Nzuza who is also part of this. Thank you. I know the hon member won't mind if I acknowledge Deputy Minister Cassim during a response to their question. Thank you so much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): No, we welcome both Deputy Ministers on the platform. Thank you for indicating that they have joined the meeting. As we move to the food basket of the country, the province of the Free State and get hon Makesini on the line. Hon Makesini, going once, twice, gone. With that in mind, Minister, let's go to the last question for the day.

Ms J S MANANISO: The Minister left the platform.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Oh! Was he telling us that hon Cassim will continue with the question?

Ms J S MANANISO: I am not sure, Chairperson, but he's no longer on the platform.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Deputy Minister Cassim, can you hear us?

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Mr Y Cassim): Chair, I can hear you, but I don't believe I have the authority.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Have you been delegated to respond?

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Mr Y Cassim): No, I have not been, hon Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Okay! He mentioned two Deputy Ministers. I did not catch the second Deputy Minister.

Mr S A ZULU: Chair, he was mentioned, hon Nzuza, of the Department of Home Affairs.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Deputy Minister Nzuza. Oh, for the next set of questions.

IsiZulu:

Mshazi omnyama, ...

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English:

... welcome as well.

IsiZulu:

Ngiyabonga, Mageba, ...

English:

... for indicating that. What do we call it, the support team, IT? Deputy Minister, is there any way that we can get hold of the Minister? It is the last set of questions.

The DEPUTY MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION (Mr Y Cassim): I will call him now. I think he might have believed, Chairperson, that the questions have been exhausted, so it might have been an error. Let me try and call him to reconnect.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Okay! [Interjections.] Thank you, Minister. We are on the last set of questions for you today: Question 12, as asked by hon Masumpa. Can you kindly respond?

Question 12:

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The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: My apologies, Chair. I don't know what happened, yeah, I had to try and reconnect back with Question 12, ... [Interjections.] ... yes. We are strengthening artisan development as a complete pathway from training to work and enterprise. And yes, it's not enough to enrol a learner at a college. The system must connect occupational learning, practical training, an accredited workplace, a trade test, and ultimately employment, or a viable business. So, the National Development Plan, NDP, target is to produce 30 000 qualified artisans a year by 2030. We are not yet at that level. Our numbers in 2024-25 dipped to about 16 000 after we peaked at 22 000 in 2019. And this is against a target of 26 500.

So, the immediate challenge is, therefore, to improve the conversion of trainees into qualified artisans, especially through access to accredited workplaces, employers, mentors, properly equipped workshops in our colleges and timely trade testing. And I want to use this opportunity to call on all employers and industry to open their doors. But as part of these interventions, just four areas that I want to mention. First, with strengthening employer-linked occupational programmes at public TVET colleges. We now have what we refer

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to as occupational programmes, and these include the centres of specialisation.

These programmes combine college-based theory and practical training with structured workplace learning in priority trades so that provision is aligned with occupations in demand and the needs of the provincial and local economy. So, a child spends a few hours in the classroom, then in the workshop, and then in the workplace. That will, we believe, help accelerate our artisan production programme. Secondly, Indlela, the National Artisan Development Chief Directorate, and the National Artisan Development Support Centre co-ordinate the artisan development system. And their role is obviously to include assisting colleges and Setas to place apprentices and TVET engineering graduates in accredited workplaces, to also monitor their progress towards trade testing and improve the tracking of certification and employment outcomes. That is one element that we obviously need to strengthen. The Recognition of Prior Learning, RPL, is also used. Of course, there are some challenges. We will talk to that some other day; that is not the question for today, where experienced workers have their skills assessed. So, then the third intervention is Setas and the National Skills Fund, NSF, where we're directing

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resources towards apprenticeship, towards workplace placements, mentoring, equipment and trade test readiness. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme, NSFAS, intervention in this regard has probably been one of the best.

It is one of the things we need to improve: their support to public institutions on all those things, and their support on the production of artisans. In fact, a long-standing programme on artisan massification is finally going to be rolled out sometime in the course of this quarter. Fourthly, we are also moving or extending beyond designated trades, to look at skills such as jewellery, skills such as weaving, and craft production. In other countries, human resource practitioners and receptionists, all of those, are classified as occupational trades. And I think that's the kind of level that we need to go to because we need to remove this mentality that artisans and occupational trades are only on the engineering side, and that human resources must be undermined. So, the whole country is in an uproar, and maybe we will have time to clarify that at Gert Sibande, where a head of human resources, HR, allegedly, well, which is now verified, had the qualifications for HR, contrary to the public claim and all sorts of stories. But we need a delicate balance of skills

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development in our country. We shouldn't bash any skill against another. Finally, artisan training must include an enterprise pathway where colleges and their partners are expected to link technical training with entrepreneurship support, costing, business compliance, and so on and so forth. So those are the elements of interventions, hon Masumpa, that we are looking at in terms of increasing the number and rate of our artisans. Thank you so much.

Ms S MASUMPA: Chairperson, good day, everyone. Greetings to the Minister, Deputy Ministers, to the Chairperson of the NCOP and all hon members, as well as everyone on the platform. Thank you, Minister, for your response. Hon Minister will agree that the TVET sector plays a critical role in the provision of these skills and has been underfunded for some time. Can the hon Minister, therefore, take the august House into confidence about the trajectory of average intake of students in these skills over the last three years? And secondly, whether the department has any plan to incentivise TVET colleges to attract more students in these critical skills. Thank you.

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The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Chairperson, look, I agree with hon Masumpa that TVET colleges are central and that we need to expand artisan and occupational skills, and obviously we need to verify some of the information that she's asking for, the three-year intake series for specific skills that are mentioned there, and I think that's information that we can provide. But the more details, which I think I've provided in the earlier questions, the number of artists in 16 200 against a target of 26 500. We are 10 000 short. And so, we're pulling our socks and asking the Setas and the NSF to pull up their purse strings so that we're able to mobilise more students towards a pathway of artisanship.

So that's something that we'll have to look at. We do have, to a certain extent, this data, but I think consolidating it and handing it over to hon member Masumpa would be helpful. Then, you know, we will continue to support centres of specialisation, Setas and the skills fund for apprenticeship, and a whole range of other activities that would lead us to massify artisans. There is an emerging scholarship that suggests that our emphasis on occupational trades, in particular engineering trades, may be misplaced. So that's something we've asked the intelligent people to look into and

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advise us. But it also speaks to the need for constant labour market intelligence, something that turned around Singapore in a very short space of time, something that Kazakhstan is also looking at, comparing their model to the German model, and how it can specifically fit into the conditions of Kazakhstan. But just using labour market intelligence to get to understand the movement of labour, the demand for skills, who do we need, where can we place them? That is the kind of work that we've been putting our minds into.

Yes, we have to incentivise colleges who perform better, and who contribute to the production of artisans and so on. So, I fully agree with you that we probably need to strengthen that part of the question. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, Minister. I did not want to disturb you. May you kindly switch on your video once more as we go to the ... [Interjections.] ... province of the Free State and get hon Dr Scheurkogel on the platform.

Dr I SCHEURKOGEL: Thank you, Chairperson Modise, and good afternoon, Minister. I based this follow-up question on a physical oversight and interaction that I had with this

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specific TVET college that I'm going to mention. So, the original question is very noble. So how can we try to assist graduates to start their own businesses when a TVET college like Motheo Artisan College in Bloemfontein has failed to place hundreds of students at workplaces to gain their required practical hours, or their products used on clients have expired?

So, Minister, to go back to basics, how will you hold the executive accountable, like the principal of that school, to stop misusing funds from the Seta to ensure students are trained, qualified and experienced to start their own business? Because as of now, we're sitting in August, and this is the school of hairdressing, haven't done their trade test. They have graduated, but they haven't done the trade test. So how can we enable them and hold this specific principle accountable to ensure that we can grow businesses and not kill the futures of our young people?

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Chairperson, I was saying, thank you for that question. I have seen that question, and I think we've responded to it. I just don't remember the details thereof. But what I can assure the hon member is that we will

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find out what's happening and ensure that, if it's attended to, if it has not been attended to since his question was asked, that seems to be the case. So, we'll have to get on the line with the principal of Motheo TVET College to get to understand why there are those issues. But this underscores my point. One, the availability of workspaces is a function of the economy. They are not just a function of the education sector. Secondly, if the economy is not growing, if the economy is not creating jobs, you will see a rise in graduate unemployment. This is the highest it's ever been since 1994.

We have been struggling around 6% for years, and now we are at 12%. So that's the second thing. The third thing is that if we don't get factories to open their doors to give young people experience who are paid for, by the way, stipends from the skills fund and from the Setas, we're not going to succeed. And so, our call really, I know a couple of brands and I hope the hon member also knows a couple of brands that do hairstyles and hair chemicals, let's go talk to them. Let them open their doors and offer workplaces. But also, if it's salons, there in Bloemfontein in the Free State, those who own salons, please work ... It is a skill that will benefit your businesses at the end of the day. So that's our call, and I

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hope the hon members will also join us in that call as they face these challenges, not only direct them to us, but talk to their neighbours who may be in business to open up their doors to place learners for this experiential learning. Thank you, Chair.

Ms A MATSHOBENI: Hon Chair, greetings to you. Greetings to the hon Minister and hon members. Minister, thank you for your explanation. It shows that the support that you've given them as a department is perfect. But, Minister, many TVET colleges are currently teaching metalworks and carpentry, and using outdated machinery from the 1990s, etc. What steps have you been taking to ensure that all TVET colleges have modernised workshops to ensure that these learners are industry-ready? Thank you very much, hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: Chairperson, well, I think we should check which college that is. And yes, there are challenges. I mean, some of our colleges, well, I'm not sure about 1996; it may be taking it a bit far back, so we'll have to check what programme they're studying and what kind of support they need. What we have done, you know, over the last few years, I mean, we've spent billions of rand, I'm not sure

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of the specific figure now, investing in equipment in our TVET colleges, investing in machinery, investing in infrastructure, and the kind of workshops. It obviously may not cover all our 350 campuses spread throughout the provinces. But there is work that has been done to ensure that we modernise our infrastructure. By the way, our TVET system is second to none, and compared to some of the systems also in the world, I believe that we should be able to punch completely above our weight. We, of course, need to do a lot more. There are a lot of reforms that are still necessary: governance, infrastructure, training, facilitators and so on and so forth. But I think that we are on the correct trajectory as we celebrate TVET Month this month, in building a world-class TVET system.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, Minister. And I assure you it was not on purpose that the last two speakers on the list are both from the home of legends, the Eastern Cape. We take the last question for the day from hon Feni, the People's Advocate.

The MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION: He is back! [Laughter.]

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Mr M FENI: Hon Chair, from the home of Mapanyapanya, you are welcome. I think mine is just to commend the Minister. I do not have a question. I think the Minister has also, in his responses, given us some tasks to embark on, not only to ask questions. I think he said it's not only his responsibility, but a collective responsibility to ensure that we are working hand in hand. So that's what I wanted, just to say that I'm covered in terms of the responses. That is why I do not have a question, Chair, just to adhere to the call of the Minister. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Mr M G Modise): Thank you, hon Feni. Minister, there was no question. I am sure you are happy now. And I'm sure the assignment you have given to members, they will do it. And member Kennedy will also supply you with a list that you requested, as I hand over to my capable colleague, hon Ryder, for the last session of the day. Thank you.

CLUSTER 1C -

PEACE AND SECURITY

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Question 149:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon House Chairperson, and indeed, all the hon members, good afternoon. As always, it is a great pleasure to be here with you today in the National Council of Provinces. Let me also greet Deputy Minister Nzuza and all other colleagues on the platform.

In terms of the question, I can report that there is no backlog currently at the first level of adjudication within the department, with more than 90% of applications receiving their first level adjudication within 30 days. The Refugee Appeals Authority is also making steady progress in finalising the existing backlog of asylum appeals.

In the previous three years, the biggest challenge we had was the fact that the Appeals Authority was capacitated with only 10 members nationally to work on an appeals caseload that had been developing over many years. That is why in 2025, the department partnered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on a new project intended to scale up the performance of the initial backlog project, which we call the Surge Initiative Project.

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The Surge Initiative Project is focused on capacitating the authority in its various regions by recruiting additional adjudicators, the development of different adjudication strategies, capacity development from first instance adjudication by the Refugee Status Determination Officer in the department, all the way up to the level of appeal and review. Technology enhancement of the adjudication process as well as data compilation across all the departmental systems is also underway.

Last year, I appointed an additional 40 part-time members who were recruited from different societies of advocates in Pretoria to assist with the backlog. The additional members commenced with the work between January and February of this year. I can also report to this House that recruitment in the Cape Town region is also currently underway with an estimated number of 35 additional members to adjudicate on the Cape Town caseload.

The same process will then be rolled out over the other three regions where the Refugee Appeals Authority of South Africa, Raasa operates. However, It’s important to point out that the project does remain underfunded and this does pose a risk to

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the smooth processing and finalisation of the appeals. I think it is important to emphasise that, where there was previously only 10 people working on this, we've now got that additional 40 and another 35 on the way, which is indeed, a very encouraging progress.

In terms of the second part of the question, the department has prioritised the filling of critical frontline and operational posts through a centrally co-ordinated staffing committee chaired by the Director-General. Priority focus areas include immigration services and inspectorate functions, where 71 operational posts have been prioritised for funding and filling to strengthen immigration enforcement and inspectorate capacity.

I think members will also have seen the 301 additional posts that we have recently advertised. So, that covers both aspects of the initial question. Thank you.

Ms J S MANANISO: House Chairperson, greetings to the Minister, Deputy Minister and members on the platform. The hon Minister may be aware of other critical pushback factors that undermine the fast-tracking of the processing of asylum applications and

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speedy deportation of those found to be illegal in the country.

This includes but not limited to protracted litigation by asylum seekers and undue delays in the finalisation of the White Paper on immigration. Against this background, can the hon Minister take this House in confidence about the challenges of the department in the fast-tracking and translation of the White Paper on immigration?

Again, can the Minister just give us in detail in terms of when will this White Paper process and its translation be into legislation and when will it be finalised? I want the Minister to commit before the House. Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon member, a reminder that supplementary questions are limited to one question per opportunity. But Minister, if you can respond as best you can, please.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: House Chair, the Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection was approved by Cabinet earlier this year, following a very

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extensive work process from the department. The target that exists in relation to the hon member's question is, I believe, March of next year. So, at the beginning of the next financial year, we hope to table a Bill that flows from that work.

Members will also know that this is an item that the President addressed in his recent address to the nation on the comprehensive approach to managing migration. I can confirm that that work of developing the Bill is underway. Thank you very much, Chair.

Mr M BILLY: House Chair, greetings to your good self, the Minister, the Deputy Ministers, and to the hon members present. Let me put my follow-up question: Minister, is it not ironic that the ANC now asks about a refugee appeals backlog it allowed to accumulate for more than three decades? I think you have largely answered the initial question, but perhaps, Minister, you want to use this opportunity to further expand on the reform programmes that are already in place and how quickly some of these backlogs will be cleared in the next few years or months. Thank you.

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The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: House Chair, I think it's fair to say that these backlogs didn't fall from the sky, they were issues that have been accumulating over many years and something that indeed this administration inherited and where the work must be done and is underway to address them.

If you look at the results we've already seen from the Surge Initiative Project in terms of the asylum-seeker backlog, it's very encouraging to see that we've had, I think, around a 12% reduction in one category over the last financial year and an even higher reduction in a different category of these backlog cases since this project has been underway.

I think the investment in the relationship with partners, as always, is very important to us. We've invested in the relationship with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, as I've mentioned, as well as with the legal fraternity. There have been engagements with judicial officers to try and smooth and speed up the process around this. I do think that that is making an impact and will continue to make an impact as we move forward.

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I think hon Mananiso also mentioned court cases, but it's very important to mention the victory that Home Affairs achieved in the Constitutional Court recently in relation to exactly this issue, where asylum seekers whose claims had been rejected are no longer able to just continue to submit repeat applications. That is a direct result of the work that Home Affairs has been doing, even in the legal space, to put in place a more effective system that is not open to abuse and to the sort of dragging out of these cases.

So, as it relates specifically to the issue of asylum and refugee management, as I say, the first instance applications has no backlog. The backlog that existed over many years and grew is being systematically dealt with in the appeals space, and indeed that court case is going to assist. I think more broadly, of course, this challenge is one that we've confronted head-on as well in the immigration space as it relates to permitting and visa backlogs.

Of course, yesterday we saw the launch of the Electronic Travel Authorisation System, which is really the systematic reform and solution that is going to address all these issues. Where we want to end up is for all immigration processes, as

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well as your asylum and refugee processes, to run through that automated and modernised system, so that we not only eradicate the backlogs that we inherited and that exist, but most critically, that we prevent this kind of thing from recurring into the future. That is all part of the comprehensive response and reforms that are underway. Thank you, Chair and members.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much, Minister. Let's now turn to the hon Mampuru for a supplementary question. Hon Mampuru? Once again, hon Mampuru is not available. Is there another member from the EFF that would like to pose the supplementary question on his behalf? It appears not. We'll then move forward. Hon Van den Berg, the opportunity now falls to you.

Mr H J VAN DEN BERG: House Chair, from my side, just a simple question to the Minister. What effect has this ongoing asylum surge and pressure on illegal immigrant registration had on your inspectorate capacity? If you can answer this question on the situation with competition for jobs, housing, health, social services, and perhaps if you can narrow it down to the Northern Cape, I would really appreciate it. Thank you.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon Van den Berg, I think your comment about a simple question may have been a bit of a red herring, but Minister, over to you for reply.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: House Chair, and hon member, I think that the general answer is, of course, I think the question relates more to the repatriation process that has been underway recently. That was my impression. In that regard to indicate that Home Affairs has processed over 85 000 repatriations in recent weeks, which has really been an extraordinary undertaking, an unprecedented level of work that has accompanied this, where it's not a matter of just letting someone walk out of the country.

We have to, in terms of the law and our processes, we must do fingerprint capturing and verification to see if anyone may be wanted for a crime by the police. We must see where there are people who are illegally in the country, that they get V-listed so that they are not able to re-enter legally for five years. We also must work with the embassies of various countries, in many cases to get what are called group passports for these people who are being repatriated, because

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in many cases, they don't even possess passports from the country of origin.

So, it is a massive logistical undertaking. I think from Home Affairs side, we are very proud of the fact that we have risen to the occasion and I am very proud of the team for the way in which this difficult work has been done, without a single serious incident resulting from the work of Home Affairs in this environment and in this unprecedented space.

I think in terms of the Northern Cape specifically, I don't have numbers on hand, but what I can say is that we've obviously seen the most pressure coming from urban environments. I would imagine that perhaps in an area like Kimberley, there would have been quite a number of repatriations in the Northern Cape, but since it is quite a low population province and quite rural, I don't think it will be the lion's share of those 85 000 repatriations.

But what I can confirm to the hon member is that the temporary repatriation facility that we set up at Musina, along with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, is the central receiving point for anyone from across the country, including

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the Northern Cape, who then gets repatriated and processed from that point on. Thank you, Chair.

Question 157:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chairperson, I thank the hon member for this question. I note I have only five minutes, and this is my favourite topic, so I'm going to try and be disciplined, Chair.

Let me start by indicating, in relation to the White Paper, that Home Affairs, as well as the Border Management Authority, has made very significant progress in advancing the reform agenda contained in that revised White Paper, as well as more broadly in terms of our strategic plan for this administration. As a baseline, recent performance indicators during the Easter period demonstrate both strengthened enforcement and improved operational efficiencies. During that period, as a case study perhaps, traveller volumes increased by 21% to over 1,27 million people, reflecting the capability of this ecosystem to manage legitimate cross-border movements. At the same time, we also saw a marked improvement in enforcement outcomes, where we saw a 24% decline in attempted illegal crossings taking place, which we think is part of the

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deterrent effect that we are starting to see. We have also seen a focus on enforcement, where we have seen increases in the arrest of facilitators. This is a very important part of the picture. These are people who facilitate illegal crossings, and that includes a 192% increase in fines for immigration violations, reinforcing adherence to the rule of law.

These improvements, I think, are also underscored by the increase in deportations that we saw over the last two years. Even before the current repatriation exercise, there was a 46% increase in the number of deportations. All of this work is really supported and underpinned by our commitment to digital transformation, the use of modern technologies. I think specifically, again, in the context of yesterday's launch of the Electronic Travel Authorisation, ETA, the power of biometric technology for us to be able to detect and verify identities is critical.

The department, I think, in terms of the second part of the question, Chair, has made hugely significant progress on the roll-out of its digital reform agenda. Over 68,4 million records have been digitised from paper into a digital

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environment, whilst biometric-enabled integration that we have seen through our partnership with the banking sector has moved us closer towards our vision of what we call the Intelligent Population Register, where we have dynamic and modern systems able to verify identities.

I think, just in terms of that project specifically, hon members, we now have 444 bank branches that are live under that new system, just five months after the first one went live — apologies, 440 branches. Over half a million South Africans have already used that system, and it really encompasses or gives expression to our vision because, in that new system, there is no paperwork, there is no booking required, and there is also no scope for manipulation or human intervention. It is all biometrically managed through fingerprint and facial verification, which completely locks out the space for fraud.

I think, importantly, the department has also gazetted draft regulations for amendments of the identification regulations in terms of the Identification Act, which is to give effect to the work that is under way to create a digital identity platform where South Africans will have digital versions of

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their identity credentials that will also be available through their smartphone. So, I think if I were to summarise the response to the hon Billy, it is that the three key pillars of our reform agenda encompass the digital partnership that we've rolled out to those 440 bank branches in the last five months. It also includes the digital identity system, where we want to bring digital versions of enabling documents right to people's smartphones, and the ETA we launched yesterday along with the President. I think when you pool all of those things together, it does point to very substantial progress in a short space of 25 months to deliver the vision for digital transformation that we call Home Affairs @ home. Thank you, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much indeed, Minister. Hon Billy, that was quite an extensive answer. Do you have anything to add in terms of a supplementary question?

Mr M BILLY: House Chair, I think the Minister has largely given a response to the question, but I do want to maybe give the Minister another opportunity by asking the following follow-up question. Given the introduction of forward-looking measures such as a merit-based immigration system, the ETA

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that you mentioned, and new visa categories for remote workers and startups, what timelines can South Africans expect for the full implementation of these reforms? I know that we've already launched, excitedly, the ETA, but how will your department ensure that South Africa becomes a very competitive destination for talent and investment under this new system? Thank you, Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, I think that exact question was a big focus of the address made by the President yesterday as well. Indeed, in terms of timelines, what I can indicate is that my approach to these kinds of technological reforms is always to say that the most difficult work is the work required to go from zero to one. Actually, going from one to 100 or scaling up from there is the most fun part. Often, it moves more quickly. Let me just explain what I mean by that.

If we look at the work that we've done with the digital partnership, it took us really 18 months of work behind the scenes to do all the system upgrades and enhancements required for us to get into our very first bank branch with this digitalised service. Since then, it has only been five months

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to go from that one first branch to the 440 and counting. Really, now, every week, we are adding more.

I think we are seeing the same with the ETA system. It took us probably about 18 months as well to get to the point where we were able to then really launch it for the pilot phase in October last year. Now we have really put in place the full foundation, which is what we launched yesterday. What remains now is quite similar, where we have to scale up the ETA to cover additional countries, to cover all of our ports of entry and to cover every visa category, so not only for short visits, as is currently the case for tourism, but also for more complex visa applications like study visas, work visas, etc.

I'm confident that the most difficult work of getting from zero to one has been done. That is what we are really, I think, able to say now, two years into this administration, and what remains for the rest of this term of office is to now expand and scale up these solutions.

So, specifically, as the hon Billy's question relates more to immigration, we have to scale up the ETA by adding those

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additional countries, visa categories, and ports of entry. That's what we are focused on in our commitment, certainly by the end of this administration, that the ETA will exist not only as a tourist visa, if I can call it that, but really as an end-to-end digital platform for managing all immigration-related matters in a new manner where we have technological advancements and where we have automated and digitalised systems that don't leave any scope for manipulation or fraud.

That is the commitment we can give and where I think the evidence is pointing quite clearly that we are delivering on that commitment. Thank you, Chair.

Adv Inkosi M NONKONYANA: Chair and hon members, good afternoon. The hon Minister will no doubt agree with us that illegal immigrants rent accommodation from South Africans, both in townships and urban areas. In light of the experience of 30 June this year and beyond, what is the plan of the department in forging partnerships with communities to identify illegal immigrants and refer them to relevant law enforcement agencies? Secondly, will the department consider legislative and policy reforms to criminalise people who

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knowingly rent out their residential properties to illegal immigrants? Thank you, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much, hon Nonkonyana. Minister, I'm not sure that this is a direct link to the original question, but would you like to respond?

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, yes, I don't have a problem. Thank you to the hon Nonkonyana for that. Perhaps, I should just indicate that the Immigration Act already does what the member says in its clauses in relation to aiding and abetting of illegal immigrants. So, that is already in the law.

I think the comment on partnership is very important to us, particularly in the context of the interministerial ... [Inaudible.] ... we do with other law enforcement. This reiterates the government's position against a situation where people take the law into their own hands. I don't think that's what the hon member was suggesting, but I think it's important to just make it clear that it should not be construed in a manner because, if we are concerned about restoring the rule of law in our country generally, but also in the immigration

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system, as we all agree, then we cannot undermine the law at the same time or in the process of doing so.

So, I think it's important perhaps just to use the opportunity, Chair, to say again that only government has the legal mandate to do these kinds of enforcement operations. Certainly, in partnership with each other and in partnership with communities, that is exactly the way.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much, Minister. Let's now turn to the hon Gericke for a supplementary question, please. Hon Gericke? I note the hon Gericke is on the platform. Hon Gericke, would you like to put your question to the Minister? Let's move on then to the hon Zulu, please. Hon Zulu, your turn.

Mr S A ZULU: Chair, I hope I'm handsome and audible. Thank you very much. Greetings to your good self. Greetings to the hon members, the Minister, the Deputy Minister, and everyone on the platform. Hon Minister, in February this year, the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, exposed a case where a foreign national who had already overstayed his visa, left South Africa and then re-entered the country without any movement

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record. Parliament subsequently reported that your Border Management Authority has only 2 600 of 11 200 approved posts filled and is operating at about 50% capacity.

Minister, what verified evidence can you give this House that the movement control system weakness exposed by the SIU has actually been closed across South Africa's ports of entry? If you cannot demonstrate that, hon Minister, on what basis is increased deportations being presented as proof of threatened border integrity rather than evidence of intensified enforcement within a system that still has serious gaps, hon Minister? Thank you very much, House Chairperson, for the opportunity given.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you, hon Zulu. It's a tenuous link, Minister, but your response, please.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, I'm afraid, in this case, it really, in my view, is not related at all to the main question. I don't know if, perhaps, it was intended to be a follow-up at a different spot, but the question does not relate to the movement control system. So, I just would not

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have the specifics on hand. I think, in this case, it would be difficult to answer, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Thank you very much indeed, hon Minister. Hon Zulu, I think there's an invitation there to submit your question in the form of a written question. That would probably be the best solution. Let's give the hon Gericke one last chance to pose his supplementary question to the Minister. I see he's not engaging, so we'll move on, Minister. We move on to Question 151.

Question 151:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chair, I just want to indicate that the department does rely on the reporting of cases, which then leads to investigation. Members may know that Home Affairs is one of the few sorts of line departments that has its own countercorruption and security services unit. It also does good work with limited resources to investigate these reports. Inspections by the Immigration Enforcement Unit also covers a number of sectors, and it does include the kind of internet shops that the main question is referring to, which means that regular inspections are conducted and actions are taken against those who transgresses.

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In the field of document verification and confiscation, that is also a regular part of the law enforcement operations that we do in partnership with other government departments, and the specifics on the successes and the exact metrics, are always reported against the annual performance plan, APP. So, we do monitor and assess that performance against specific targets that are set for the enforcement component within the annual performance plan, APP. Thank you, Chair.

Ms O D MEDUPE: Greetings to yourself, hon Minister and Deputy Minister. Hon Minister, allow me to express our appreciation of the breakthrough by the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, in uncovering the systemic corruption in the Department of Home Affairs. As we could recall, this investigation is the culmination of the process that date as far as the Sixth Administration.

My follow-up questions are whether there is a plan by the department to institutionalise lifestyle audit for officials, mandatory and regular, and does the department have a plan to strengthen the anti-corruption unit of the department? Thank you very much, hon Chair.

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The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chair, thank you and hon Medupe for the question. The work of the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, in this environment has gone even well beyond your traditional lifestyle audit. Obviously, it is a work that is still in progress. The release earlier this year was of an interim report, and we continue to work with the SIU towards the finalisation of all of this work. But as you will know, the SIU's powers extend into the most serious kind of lifestyle audit you can imagine, including, as we've already seen, some of the matters where people owned homes that were well beyond the means of their salaries, for example.

So, certainly, we do not only support that approach, but we are also actively implementing it. We have had 65 dismissals since July 2024 from the Department of Home Affairs alone. We've had, I think, nine successful convictions and a number of arrests as well over that period. I also think that they demonstrate the impact that exactly this work is having. The member is correct to identify the counter-corruption and security services branch.

We do still continue to face resource constraints in this environment, but I think the important thing to say is that

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all of the digital reforms that we are rolling out are geared and have a component which links directly to enhancing our enforcement capacity. So, whether it is the Electronic Travel Authority, ETA, which is then systematically recording biometrics and other information for all foreigners entering the country, or indeed some of the reforms that we are rolling out to do away with the Green ID book.

By way of example, which is very fraud prone and often used in cases of identity theft by illegal immigrants, that all of these things actually come together to support the counter-corruption work. So, we agree with the SIU's assessment in its interim report about the systemic causes of corruption. You will see that almost all of them relate to the manual processes which gives discretionary powers and the ability to manipulate outcomes and decisions into the hand of certain crooked officials, and that is exactly what we are eradicating through the shift to more advanced technological platforms. Thank you, Chair.

Mr O J MOKAE: Hon House Chair, hon Ryder, and good afternoon to the hon Minister, Dr Leon Schreiber, and welcome again to the NCOP Chamber on the virtual platform. Minister, my follow-

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up question is as follows. The Special Investigating Unit, SIU, report and the experiences of our people, all confirm that the ANC's paper-based and corruption-prone systems enabled documents syndicates to flourish, and I think we have touched a bit on how the digitalisation process is assisting to shut down these syndicates permanently.

But I would like the Minister to expatiate on how the digitalisation process is helping transformation programme which is geared in addressing all these corruption and paper-based prone activities? Thank you very much, hon House Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon Minister, I think the signal broke up a little in the middle, but I'm sure you got the gist of the question.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Yes, I did. Thank you, Chair. Just to really emphasise that this particular perspective, I think, is really important for understanding our approach to dealing with these issues, and the perspective is that, while it is critically important for us to have accountability for individuals involved in corruption or fraud, that alone, individual accountability, will not actually be enough to

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prevent a recurrence of these kinds of activities. The only way to prevent a recurrence of these activities is to diagnose the root causes.

What are the loopholes and specific opportunities that people can manipulate and abuse in order to have a corrupt outcome; whether it is with a visa document or whether it's with a civic service application? That is really why we are so focused on modernising these systems, because that is the only way where you can close down the discretion and the access that any particular individual, official or person could have to manipulate an outcome.

Earlier, I mentioned the case study of the work we are doing with the banking sector, which is not only about the expansion of access, but also obviously critical. It is also about how that is transforming the application process itself. If you were to go into one of these modernised systems in the bank branches, you will find that it is all directly linked to your fingerprint and your face, and that becomes the key that unlocks the transaction.

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It is a message that we were also conveying yesterday in the case of the ETA, where we are even making the point that we would like to work with someone like ABSA and we are engaging with them because they've got e-gates at the airports. That is a good example of where we could eliminate the reliance completely, even on a physical passport or a physical visa document, or even on a passport stamp itself.

It is the facial verification that becomes the key, and it is that which becomes the record of a movement into or out of the country. So, I think you see this kind of focus on automation and closing of loopholes, both in the civics environment with the new application processes we've rolled out for smart IDs, and where we will shortly add passports, first-time applications into that process.

But you also see it now with the ETA in the immigration space, where you move away from reliance on any kind of paper, document or expression which can be manipulated. You close down the space for officials or anyone to interfere with an application, and you use the same technology as your ally to do so.

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The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon, Minister, thank you very much. I wonder if that technology will be able to differentiate between coffee face and my after-coffee face in the morning. Hon delegates, the next opportunity for a supplementary question was granted to hon Makesini. I've checked the platform, and I noted that hon Makesini is not online. Is there another member of the EFF that would like to take up the slot? I see none of the EFF members are unmuting or raising their hand. So, I am going to then continue ... [Interjections.] Yes, hon Mampuru.

Mr M M MAMPURU: I will take this question on behalf of hon Makesini. She has network problems like everyone else in the audience. Minister, it is concerning to note how the Department of Home Affairs operates as a compromised, syndicate-driven entity where highly organised criminal networks continue to manufacture and sell South African passports, identity documents, visas and permits to high bidders. Why do you continue to only investigate syndicates after fraudulent documents have already been printed out, circulated and also used? Thank you

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The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: I think the reply is that we don't only do that. As I've said in the previous response, the entire focus of this administration is on proactively moving away from reliance on only these kinds of physical documents to prove status. When you speak about permits and visas specifically, let me rephrase it. The question we have to answer is, how do we verify whether a foreign national has legal status in South Africa? That is the question we have to answer.

For the longest time, the answer to that question has been through reliance on a piece of paper, which is a visa document, for example. What we are saying now is, that visa document; that piece of paper is not actually the thing that grants you the status; it is an expression of the record of your status. We want to move the verification away from something like a piece of paper, which can be manipulated, into the biometric space, which cannot.

If you look at something like online banking, that is the kind of example we have in mind. I would wager that every single member on this meeting has a banking application on their smartphone, and every single day, they rely on their facial

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verification to access their banking. They trust that system, they trust the security of that system, quite literally, with their life savings.

We are saying that exactly in the same way, we are going to move away from trusting a piece of paper, which can be manipulated or forged, as the hon member has outlined, to relying on exactly the same thing that South Africans are using in their millions already for something like online banking. That is really the perspective, and that is the proactive work that is going on, which is certainly not only about reacting; it is about rebuilding the entire foundation of the system itself. Thank you, Chair.

Mr P NOE: Hon Chair, I think you can see me. Can I close my video?

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Yes, we have seen you in your very nice jacket. Thank you, hon Noe.

Mr P NOE: Okay, very briefly, Minister, we see the success of Madlanga Commission in breaking gradually the neck of the organised crime. Can you just maybe update us if you have

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anyone in your department who might have been fingered, and possibly referred, who might have links in the criminal justice ecosystem? Thank you, Chair.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr D R Ryder): Hon Noe, thank you very much. Hon Minister, as I vacate the chair in front, I pass my thanks to you and ask you to reply to hon Noe's question, please.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chair, I am not aware of a specific name in that regard, but obviously it is work in progress. Should such a thing emerge, of course, we will deal with it. But I think it is important to say that the responsibility to deal with corruption is not only confined to that particular process. In every single government department, we have the responsibility to proactively and on an ongoing basis deal with it.

That is why I think the work that Home Affairs is doing with the SIU, the work that we are doing through the Border Management and Immigration Anti-Corruption Forum, where we partnered not only with the SIU, but with the Hawks, with the National Prosecuting Authority, NPA, with SA Police Service,

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SAPS, our own counter-corruption colleagues, that work remains fundamental. That is where the bulk of the accountability measures that I referred to earlier, is actually originating from.

So, I think the point is that taking full ownership and responsibility for speeding up disciplinary processes for investigating corruption and dealing with it on an ongoing basis, is something that should not be dependent only on one particular process, but something that should be embraced fully, and on that ongoing basis within departments like ours. Thank you, Chair.

Question 144:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, this question relates to challenges facing the office in Idutywa in the Eastern Cape. I can confirm that on 19 January 2026, a significant power outage affected parts of the Mbhashe area, including the area serviced by this Idutywa office. When electricity supply was restored approximately a week later, unfortunately, a power surge then caused extensive damage to critical ICT infrastructure, including computer equipment, routers,

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switches, the network cabinet and Long-Term Evolution, LTE equipment.

In consideration of the anticipated time frame, it would take to replace all this extensive damaged equipment and fully restore normal operations. The office deployed a mobile unit as a business continuity measure to ensure uninterrupted service delivery to the community. That mobile unit remains operational, although intermittent disruptions have been experienced due to capacity limitations and indeed the ongoing electricity supply challenges in the area, which I think is an important point to reflect on where we see local municipal or local government failures actually having a direct impact on our ability to deliver even Home Affairs services. However, as an interim arrangement, that office is also utilising the nearest clinic facility to provide selected civic services, including the registration of birth and the issuing of death certificates.

The office management there continues to engage with relevant stakeholders to expedite the restoration of the office to full operational capacity following these series of setbacks outside of our control. In addition, the department is in the

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process of securing alternative office accommodation at the Edutywa Mall, with occupation anticipated by March 2027.

I think finally, to indicate that I know that this particular area of Edutywa is one of those that have also received one of the very first bank branch rollouts in the country. So, that should also help to alleviate the pressure in the interim while all this work is underway. Thank you, Chair.

Ms A MATSHOBENI: Hon Chair, greetings to hon Minister and hon members. Minister, given that the community of Edutywa in the Eastern Cape has been subjected to continuous service challenges of electrical disruptions. As we speak now, Minister, the office is unable to connect the new computers because the electrical supply is causing equipment to burn out. The IT specialist cannot be properly connected to printers and computers because of the ongoing electrical problem. As a result, the office is unable to print important documents like death certificates, birth certificates and other essential documents.

Minister, what measures have you put in place to ensure that residents of Edutywa, particularly vulnerable persons and

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those requiring urgent identity documents, are not further disadvantaged concerning this crisis that is happening there? Thank you very much, hon Chair.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Thank you, hon Chair and to the hon member for the follow up. I think firstly to just reiterate, the solution here has to be the movement of the office to a facility where we have the reliable electricity supply. I have also just quickly checked on our new online platform, which is at my https://myhomeaffairsonline.dha.go.za to confirm that there is a bank branch operational in the local mall already in Edutywa, where the specific issue of identity documents can be addressed, where people can switch if they have lost their ID or they need a Smart ID Card, and I think it is important to say, members, really, even from the hon members follow up question, I said earlier that we have to move towards diagnosing the root causes of these problems. From the follow up question and the challenges that the member is relaying from the community, it is clear that the root cause is the failure to provide reliable electricity supply. That is not something that Home Affairs controls.

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We will mitigate it in the ways that I have described. But the reality is that we have a local government elections coming up in less than three months, and it is time for us to have local authorities which can provide reliable electricity supply because we can raise the issues in different line departments, but I can assure you, you have the same problem that will affect not only Home Affairs, but every national government department, if you have a local municipality that is incompetent or unable to deliver electricity. That is the root cause that we will also have to address. So, the mitigation measures, I think, have been outlined, and we have the interim solution in place in the form of the mobile unit, as well as the bank branches that we are rolling out at pace. Then the longer-term solution in terms of shifting the office to a more conducive environment. But I think we must also not lose the opportunity here to say the root cause of so many of our problems is collapsing local governments. That is the root cause that we must address. The people of South Africa have the opportunity to actually do that in the upcoming local government elections. It will also assist us and all of us as South Africans who rely on something as basic as electricity provision but are clearly not receiving it in the community of Idutywa. Thank you, Chair.

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Mr P A PHALA: Chair of the session, I hope you can see me. Can I switch off my camera?

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: No, you are very clear, hon Phala.

Mr P A PHALA: Yes, thanks a lot, hon Minister. Minister, I watched you yesterday, launching the Electronic Travel Authorisation, ETA. Wonderful, Minister. Minister, this is the indication of the transformation project we started in 1994 throughout all the past administrations to eradicate the legacy of the racist regime. It is gradually picking up, and we really congratulate you for that. Minister, in the follow up question, I would say, Minister, the Home Affairs mobile units, which is critically important, especially for the people living in the far-flung rural areas. My follow up question is that how mandatory and regular are these services to the rural communities across the country, and whether the department considers a partnership with traditional leaders, district, local municipalities, and other sector departments like sports, arts and culture to use their infrastructure as service points for Home Affairs as part of making Home Affairs

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services accessible to the rural communities? Thank you, Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Thank you, Chair, and to the hon Phala for the follow up. That work is an ongoing project. There are about 210 mobile units that are used across the country, and we really rely on, exactly as you have said, local councillors, local municipalities, local traditional leadership, civic organisations, every day, we work with them to identify communities in need, and as you have said, particularly underserved communities, people with disabilities, old age homes, people in rural areas, this is really the bread and butter of the work that is done by the mobile units. So indeed, the member is correct to identify that role of partnership. The embrace of expanding access is really something very close to our hearts, and the mobile units assist us with that, but we have also now seen recently that one of our partners in this digital partnership with the banking sector, they have actually now rolled out mobile units from the bank side, which is going out and also assisting with access to Smart ID Cards.

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So, I think we are seeing those 440 bank branches, the 210 mobile units, and now even private sector innovation that is also becoming more mobile, all working together towards this shared goal that we all have as South Africans, which is to make sure that all people are actually included in having access to something like an identity document.

So, I can confirm to the hon member that the role of partnership, the engagement with stakeholders, it is absolutely right to point that out, and it is something that we take very seriously and we will continue to pursue. Thank you, Chair.

Ms H S BOSHOFF: Thank you very much, Chair, and good afternoon to you and to the Minister. Minister, you have answered my follow up question. However, allow me to commend you and your department for not being derailed by the ANC municipality's failure to provide the necessary services and that you stepped in to ensure that operations could continue. It is equally encouraging that you are also looking at relocating to more secure premises to ensure greater stability and continuity going forward. Thank you, Chair.

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The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Thank you, Chair. I think more of a comment there, and I really appreciate it, but just to emphasise that I was recently in Centurion, where people have had a very bad experiences with the previous office, and in that case, it was more where it was located and some of the issues outside of the office, and we were able to transition it into the better environment that exists in the Centurion Mall.

So, this is an ongoing project. It is really working across the country, and that is exactly the same way that we will solve it in this particular community. But indeed, it is something that we are working on mitigating. But I really must emphasise, that if we had working local government there and many other places where there was electricity, then this whole issue would not arise in such a manner. Thank you.

Mr P NOE: Chair of the session, I am sure you can see me. I can switch off.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D MEDUPE): You are very clear and handsome, honourable.

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Mr P NOE: As always. Minister, I just want to warn you against the praise singers who are always having something to say in relation with the ANC when we deal with government work. Just do your government work without being influenced by praise singers. We see what you are doing, and as a collective South Africans, we are all expected to do our bit.

In this instance, you have already answered my question because I was going to emphasise the issue of electricity. But you have covered it very well. But as a patriotic citizen too, and as a Minister entrusted with resources, I was going to put you on the spot.

So, in order to avoid people being retained when they have already come for services, as we understand the rural areas' conditions or situation where electricity might go off, do you have perhaps already working on something for backup other than the mobile units so that when systems are already running, they do not have to break down because of the power outages? Because that will be then focusing on your continuous effort to make sure that South Africans get these services without whether you are wearing a cap of DA or ANC. That is

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immaterial. I say again, do not be derailed by praising us. Thank you very much, Chair.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, perhaps on a lighter note, it is important to not be derailed by praising us or critics. So, I think we take the point. If I could just really respond by also indicating that we have made significant investments in what hon Noe is referring to as backup solutions. It is really unfortunate, but even when it comes to the electricity stability of where some of our headquarters are located, we have done a lot of work to get your Uninterruptable Power Supply, UPS, and your inverters and power supplies stabilised in many of our big systems.

I think that has really contributed to the 61% decrease that we have seen in hours lost to system offline issues. So, to just give the member the comfort that this is something wherever we can, we do try to find that backup solution. In many cases, we have generators as well that operate with the mobile units. That also assists. But I think, probably this question, in my mind, really concludes with something that we probably all agree on, which is that we end up spending money on backup solutions like generators and UPS and batteries and

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power supplies, which we could have invested elsewhere, if we had the basics working. I think that that is the message that we can all probably say we have to get right in South Africa and that that lies with local government.

In the interim from Home Affairs, we continue to do whatever we can to mitigate, given our own capacity constraints. Thank you, Chair.

Question 147:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chairperson, I think this question from the hon member is very well timed in the context of the launch yesterday. So, I think the launch we did of the Electronic Travel Authorisation, ETA, as well as well as the Enhanced Movement Control System 2.0, EMCS 2.0, those are exactly the member is asking about and obviously this was submitted a while ago already. However, I think I will use the opportunity to just give a run down of what we launched yesterday.

So, effectively hon Chairperson and hon members, what we have in place now through the ETA is for the very first time end-to-end digital application and adjudication process which is

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based on biometric verification and machine learning technology.

So, the four countries that we regionally onboarded in October last year, have already produced 216 000 applications through the ETA as well as over 6 100 rejections based on this new capability that we now have working into end.

So, effectively travellers from those four countries can go on the ETA platform - eta.dha.gov.za. They register profile there. We verify the cell phone number and the email address through the OTP system that we of ... [Inaudible.] ... us. The traveller then uploads scan of their passport and upload a selfie. We use biometrics to match the photos and the selfie together so that we know that the passport belongs to that traveller and then we have risk assessment tools in the background that can verify that the passport is authentic. It can check certain international databases and run risk analytics on that traveller. Within 24 hours they will get the visa outcome which they can store in their digital phone wallet if they qualify and of course if they do not then we are able to reject them. That is where that 6 100 already came from.

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I would say that the capability to detect fraudulent passports for example is one that never existed before under the manual system and that is what the ETA system has already brought to the table.

So, in terms of where we are now, the ETA nine corporates payment portal, we are just finalising the public comments that we have received on the fee that will be associated with the use of the ETA. We have now also built the extension module payment module where legitimate traveller can apply for an extension in terms of the Immigration Act. We have deployed the departure module which is very important because that is now when you leave the country, we again verify your face and that gives us the capability to know whether you have overstayed your visa. We now have the ability to contact you directly if we see that you are approaching the expiry date of your visa. For the first time foreigners in South Africa will know that home affairs know. We are watching and we know you are at risk of overstaying, and we can then take enforcement action based on these new capabilities we have.

The Electronic Movement Control System 2.0, has now been rolled out to the four international airports. Really over the

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next phase and over the coming weeks we will be adding many more countries to the ETA for tourist visas. Then we will begin the process of adding other visa categories in. So, your study visa, your work visa, your more complex visas for all run through this new modern platform and we will extend over the next few months the EMCS 2.0, facial verification technology to all of our ports of entry which is really going to be a gamechanger for us.

I think in terms of the remaining two questions, hon Chairperson, we continue to engage through the SA Police Service, SAPS, on the functions issue with the Border Management Authority, BMA. The last discussion we had was to say that SAPS must help support the BMA's case for additional funding so that we can employ more border guards for the BMA. That is something we have managed to agree on.

I think finally in terms of the statistics I can indicate the BMA since its inception in 2023 until 31st of March this year, has intercepted and arrested 542 684 undocumented, undesirable ... [Inaudible.].

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I think that particular statistic of over half a million does demonstrate the impact that the BMA has.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Hon Minister, we are losing you.

Hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Apologies.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Yes. Towards the end of your response, we are losing you.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Alright.

Perhaps just to reiterate that the figure that the hon member was asking for is 542 684 undocumented, undesirable and inadmissible migrants that the BMA has deterred since it was established. Thank you.

Mr H J VAN DEN BERG: Hon Minister, you are probably aware that the FFPlus has constantly and consistently has been calling for extra funding for the BMA.

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Now I would like to know when will the BMA finally exercise exclusive operational command over border law-enforcement as contemplated in the Act and what specific additional funding has the National Treasury committed for the Northern Cape and other high risk provinces to make this a real solution for all the provinces and all the land entrances and exit points? Thank you.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chairperson, in the most recent budget there was a baseline increase of about R330 million to the BMA and of course we appreciate that but that is still not enough. That would be for the work done in all provinces to the hon member's question. The BMA currently has about 600 border guards in its employ that is in addition to all of the immigration officials, the port health, port agriculture, etc, which is clearly not enough and that is where we will continue to make the case. We do appreciate everyone who joins us in making this case for additional funding.

I will always point out hon members that it is ultimately Parliament that approves the budget. So, as much as it is an issue that Members of Parliament raise, there is also a

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responsibility for Parliament and for members in the budget making process to raise critical issues such as this one and it is really a shared responsibility. However, I can certainly commit to once again to the continued work that we are doing to get across the urgent need for this investment in the BMA but also that is a good investment for South Africa because of the economic benefits that will flow directly from dealing with things like illicit trade and in the process increasing tax revenues, etc.

So, I think that is really the key issue. I think it is important to point out to the hon member, hon Chairperson that the BMA has integrated a huge number of functions successfully already. I mentioned, health and agriculture. So, a lot of that work has been done. However, I think for as long as we are sitting with under-resourcing and a lack of boots on the ground, we will continue to face the issue where we have to work together with other agencies to actually physically manning the borderline.

I think perhaps just to conclude by saying that the Interministerial Committee, IMC, on migration is also seized with this issue. Now particularly as it relates to the

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borderline and Defence and the infrastructure and that is work that the Department of Defence is now leading in a formal capacity where we certainly also support the collaborative effort to invest in border security. Thank you, Chairperson.

Adv iNkosi M NONKONYANA: Madam Chairperson, congratulations. Hon Minister, allow me first to congratulate the Border Management Authority and law-enforcement agencies for the recent successful breakthrough in pushing back against the illegal entry and drug trafficking at our various ports of entry with limited resources. As a relatively new institution, the BMA continue to inspire hope about the better future in relation to our border management.

My two inter-related follow up questions are firstly: What are the key milestones that the department has set for itself to position it into a worldclass Border Management Authority?

Secondly, what is the current deficits in terms of the financial technological and human resources capabilities?

Thirdly, the plan of the department in addressing these challenges?

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Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Hon members, it seems as though we have lost the Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chairperson, I heard the first part of the question. I have just switched off the video.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Alright.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Alright.

Hon Chairperson, I think in relation to the milestones that the hon member is asking about I think an obvious one would be to complete the scale of the ETA. That would be the major milestone for the BMA's capability and creating that world class institution that the hon member refers to. The capacity shortfall is about 75% if I have to put a figure on it.

The response to that is twofold. It is of course to continue to make the case why that the investment in the BMA is a good

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investment for South Africa. As I said in the budget making process Parliament has an important role to play.

However, I think secondly also very important that we are not saying that we do not have resources so there is nothing we can do. We are pushing ourselves to the limit in terms of delivering within the constraints that we face. I think again that is where technology is such a critical enabler for us to actually makeup for resource shortfalls by doing things differently and by doing things more efficiently. So, I would say those are some of the key interventions to address the shortfall. Thank you, hon Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Hon Minister, your camera was still off. However, I noticed that you might be in a situation where the network is a little bit poor, hence I did not want to disturb you.

I will then invite the hon Billy from the DA to present your supplementary question. Hon member, over to you.

Mr M BILLY: Hon Chairperson, maybe let me join my good colleague the hon Nonkonyana and congratulate the Minister and

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his department for the exceptional work that they are doing. I am glad that there is finally concession that what is happening in the department is extremely extraordinary and it is something that needs to be welcomed by all of us.

Hon Minister, after years of fragmented and largely manual border control under the ANC-led government I the past, what measurable difference are drones, biometrics and the ETA making to enforcement and when will all ports of entry be fully electronically integrated? Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Hon Billy, on a lighter note, I thought you would also congratulate me for chairing this session. I can see you have your personal vendetta against me. That was on a lighter note. Hon Minister, you are invited to respond.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chairperson, let me give the camera another shot. In order to protect myself, allow me to congratulate you as well formerly.

Hon Chairperson, to indicate in response that the end state that we are looking for is of course that at the end of this

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administration to do what the hon member suggest that we have that fully end-to-end digitalised platform for all kinds of immigration in South Africa.

So, we have now started let us say with simpler applications like the tourist's visa. However, we will be working up that chain of complexity to make sure that we actually deliver that end-to-end solution. Of course, the hon member mentions the role of drones and body cameras and other technology. The more we can invest in those the better. However, obviously as I have said earlier, we are determined to acknowledge the resource constraints that we face but to then maximise what we can do within the context of those constraints.

So, I almost want to say that sometimes your perspective can be very empowering and you can say that having constraints can be an enabler if you have the right mindset because it forces you to actually do more. That is the approach we have taken rather than viewing it as something that disables us or makes us despondent. So, we believe that the end state we are looking for by the end of this administration is indeed achievable and the fact that we got yesterday as I said we got from zero to one on the ETA. I think it is really encouraging.

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You know the event there with the President and myself, the Deputy Minister and other colleagues, I think has really inspired all of us to push even harder and make sure we reach that target. Thank you, Chairperson.

Mr V GERICKE: Hon Chairperson and Minister border security is a very important issue at the moment because in some instances there is no borderlines, no fencing and no thing and people are entering the country as in when they like to. It fuelled and has fuelled and still fuelling civil unrests in our country. However, you are respectfully wasting time on digital visas for your corporate clients and elites instead of enforcing border security.

Now, the Border Management Authority has done an exceptional work in clamping down on illicit goods and illegal drug paddling and this agency is much needed for border control. There are, however, consistent complains that the BMA is too limited in terms of human resources capacity, logistics and financial resources.

What are your plans to expand the BMA and employ more personnel to secure our borders and border control and what

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are the timelines to expand the BMA and what percentage of manpower do you still needed or how many people do you still need to cover all our borders since our borders are porous, I repeat again no borderlines people are walking in and out of this country and we are sitting with the problem? Thank you, hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Hon Chairperson, I am afraid part of the problem comes when we have irresponsible political leaders like the leader of the EFF who once invited people to come into South Africa illegally and that is something that we must reject outright. Where we have issues, we must address them including the borderlines ...

Mr V GERICKE: Chairperson, on a point of order.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: ... that being exploited.

Mr V GERICKE: Chairperson, point of order!

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Hon Minister, hon Minister, just a second.

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Hon Gericke, what is your point of order?

Mr V GERICKE: Chairperson, I rise on a point of order. My point of order is: The Minister is misleading this House. The leader of the EFF has never said that people must come into this country illegally. We are actually advocating for people to be documented before they enter the country. So, the Minister must not mislead this House. Thank you, Chairperson.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Alright. Thank you very much, hon member.

Hon Minister.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Can I proceed, Chairperson?

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms O D Medupe): Yes, you may proceed.

However, hon Minister, can we please not cast aspersions on other members, please.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Alright. Chairperson, let me indicate that as I said earlier the shortfall is about 75%.

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So, we still have a very long way to go to be able to adequately resource this critical institution. As I also mention earlier the issue of borderline controls is something where the IMC has delegated Defence to really zoom in on this and we were all recently there from the IMC. I have made multiple trips and that is really such a big challenge.

I think the work that we are doing in the redevelopment of our busiest land ports of entry, the introduction of the ETA and this incredibly powerful and transformational new technology can be so much enhanced if we have the investment that we do so desperately need in the borderline infrastructure and the fencing, etc. I am in full support of that work. It is the matter that Defence is really seized with through the work of the IMC. Thank you, Chairperson.

Question 152:

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chairperson, I think this question is really about weekend services. Just to indicate, over the recent second registration weekend, we did exactly that. We had extended office hours over that weekend, and we also did that for the first registration weekend. So, wherever

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we are able to, we do attempt to extend the hours that people can use these services.

I think what is important to also add is that the department has of course implemented this multi-channel delivery strategy to expand access to services with a specific focus on underserved and rural communities.

I think the digital partnership with the banking sector is exemplary in this regard, because you will often find that these branches are open on weekends. And in that manner, we've actually indirectly extended the hours during which people can obtain the Smart identity document, ID, replacement service at these 440 locations across the country. And I perhaps also just to indicate again to members that we will be adding first time Smart ID applications, passport applications, as well as the option for home delivery to this system before the end of the year, which is really quiet an extraordinary transformation.

Additionally, it's worth emphasising where many of these locations are, that are benefiting from these extended hours and enhanced footprint. The first one we launched was in

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Orange Farm, the second one, was at the Maponya Mall, and since then we've had as I say, now 440 locations and they're growing every week, including areas like Eldorado Park, Lanasia, Bochabelo, Tembisa, Mlondo, Everton, we've got Mamelodi, Soshanguve, Khayelitsha, KwaMashu, we've got Jabulani and so many, many other areas that have now received access, including over weekends to these services. This is also in addition to state-of-the-art offices, that have been opened in places like Lusikisiki.

The department, however, having said all of this, the main offices do not generally operate on weekends, but we do have those outreach services as and when required, such as we recently saw with the registration weekend.

So, in a nutshell, from the department side, wherever we are able to, we do try and extend services. But this is again one of the great benefits of these 440 new locations, because almost all of them are open, at least partly on weekends as well.

Thank you.

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Mr P NOE: Chair, it should be like we are dealing ...I mean... labour in this issue. Whilst we acknowledge the positive impact of Home Affairs on digital platforms for bookings, for application of IDs and other relevant documents, and the partnerships with the commercial banks to roll out Home Affairs services to the people. The truth is that this continues to exclude many people in far-flung rural areas, now, my follow-up question is twofold. First, whether the department has considered introducing the shift system in consultation with the organised labour, so that the staff will be allowed to work weekend shift in the rural areas to provide Home Affairs services, especially on Saturday?

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP (Ms O D Medupe): Hon Noe, we are missing you. Can you get a better position, hon Noe? I'm not sure if the first question, hon Minister... sorry, hon Noe. We did not capture your question. Yeah, we were unable to capture your question actually.

Mr P NOE: Okay, excuse my sound outside, I'm at the airport now. Minister, I was just saying we are not labour in this issue. My question is still in relation with the digital platforms for bookings for application of IDs and other

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relevant documents and the partnership with the commercial banks to roll out Home Affairs services to our people. The truth is that this continues to exclude many people in far-flung rural areas. So, my follow-up question is in twofold. Firstly, whether the department has considered introducing the shift system in consultation with the organised labour, so that the staff is allowed to work weekend shift in the rural areas to provide Home Affairs services, especially on Saturdays?

Secondly, if this is to be done, what will be the financial implications to the department in terms of the current budget?

Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP (Ms O D Medupe): Thank you very much, hon Noe. I hope, hon Minister, you managed to capture the question, because on my side I was struggling to hear what hon Noe is saying. However, I've noted that his question is on introduction of shift system to cover the rural areas, whether there has been any consultation with organised labour. And also, the financial implication of the extra hours that the

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department might experience while your staff is servicing the rural areas.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, really, I think, in short, the hon member answers his own question to some extent, because we mustn't forget the extent of underfunding that also affects the Department of Home Affairs itself. It's not the Border Management Authority, BMA, only. And I would be hesitant to make a promise that we can't keep at this point. So, I think in order for something to be viable really at scale, where we are able to extend these hours in the manner that the member proposes, it would really be unfunded as we currently have the budget before us.

So, I think it is something we will continue to endeavour to do as often as possible. We try to do it over certain peak periods for school learners, for example, in addition to key registration weekends and other such events. But it does become a resource challenge. And what I think we would not want to do, is to actually end up stretching ourselves so thin that we're not able to properly service members of the community just because we don't have enough staff to actually do this on a sustainable basis.

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So, it’s something that I will certainly keep in mind. I think the principle is sound and we will continue to do it in any affordable manner that we can. But I would not want to go into an environment where we’re not actually able to deliver it, until we have that adequate funding, it would obviously require.

Thank you, Chair.

Ms N S DU PLESSIS: Hon Minister, thank you very much for the unit in Lanesia and surrounds, people from Lehae and Protea South and Lanesia have thanked me quite a bit for making it easier for them to do this. My question has been answered to a great extent, as well as the comment links into the answer. However, it deserves additional mention and information. After 30 years in which the ANC left rural residents travelling long distances and queuing at too few offices, how are weekend outreach services, mobile units and the new digital banking partnership now reversing this historic exclusion?

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: Chair, I think what we’ve done in the last five months has actually expanded access to Home Affairs services, particularly to the Smart ID replacement

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service. I think probably now by over 300%, which is an extraordinary thing if you think about it. There were 214 permanent Home Affairs offices where South Africans could obtain a replacement Smart ID. And we've now added 440 locations to that, which takes it close to 700 in total. And that is in a matter of five months since we launched the first one. Our intention is to enhance access to the service by five times by the end of this year, because we are targeting 750 bank branches alongside the existing offices.

I think it gives you a sense of the really exciting scale at which an urgent ... we are able to add those additionally and even your home delivery option in services and that's before we even get to the introduction of digital credentials which in many cases will eliminate the need for the user to actually go to any physical location because it can exist digitally as well.

Thank you very much Chair.

Ms A MATSHOBENI: Chair, let me acknowledge your response, hon Minister. I'm partly covered by hon Noe, concerning services

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to be offered and the budget and the staffing implications. I thank you, hon Minister.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP (Ms O D Medupe): Thank you very much, hon Minister. Hon Matshobeni does not have a question. She is covered.

Mr S A ZULU: Greetings once again Minister for Home Affairs. Minister with weekend outreach services and the bank partnerships expanding access, what additional internal control and anti-corruption measures has the department put in place to prevent the fraud, document the selling and bribery at this satellite and offside points? Minister, because without safeguards, we risk taking corruption from the office to the community.

Thank you very much hon Minister and hon Chairperson of the session.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP (Ms O D Medupe): Thank you very much, hon Zulu. Hon Minister, over to you. However, the question has been responded to earlier on, but it is at the liberty to the Minister to respond to the question again.

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Thank you very much.

The MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS: To the hon member, I think, just to briefly, I suppose, emphasise that the security measures, the closing of loopholes for corruption and fraud is the foundation of this project. And the key measure is that there is no space whatsoever for any official or for any person to manipulate the outcome or the application itself. That has now all been moved into the biometric environment, which entirely depends on the person who is putting their fingerprint and who is using their face to verify their identity. So that is the single most, I think, important security and anti-corruption measure you can actually imagine in this space, because as the Special Investigating Unit, SIU, report has shown us. This is really the manual system, the paperwork, the manipulation that we have seen over many years, really creating the kind of problems that the hon member describes.

So indeed, this work is not complete. It is a principle that we must expand to passports. It is a principle that we must expand to all of our Home Affairs products, that we remove the capability for any individual to have a say in a particular outcome because ultimately it is the record we have on the

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population register that determines whether the outcome is approved or not. And I think that is really the gold standard for security and anti-corruption in this environment.

Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON OF THE NCOP (Ms O D Medupe): Thank you very much, hon Minister. As we concluded the last question, that was the last question. I just want to take this opportunity, hon members, our delegates. I would like to thank the Minister, permanent delegates, Members of the Executive Council, MECs, Deputy Minister, and all special delegates and South African Local Government Association, Salga, representative for availing yourself for this sitting. I will also want to conclude the business of the day and the House stand adjourned. Thank you very much on our members.

The Council adjourned at 17:17.

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