



YCLSA

**THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE
OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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MEDIA STATEMENT

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2026 MTBPS: WHERE IS THE PLAN FOR WORKING-CLASS YOUTH?

The Young Communist League of South Africa (YCLSA) rejects the complacency of a Medium-Term Budget Policy Statement that finds room to celebrate fiscal progress in a country where five million young people aged 15–34 are unemployed. National Treasury has a trajectory for the debt, a target for the surplus and another request for patience from the unemployed. Where is the equally concrete plan for their lives? Minister Enoch Godongwana must explain how long a young person is expected to remain an economic spectator before this strategy counts their exclusion as a failure. A generation cannot be kept in the waiting room of an economy it is old enough to build.

Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey for the second quarter of 2026 places the official unemployment rate among young people aged 15–34 at 47.4%. Another 264,000 young people joined the ranks of the unemployed in a single quarter. Behind those figures are households paying for qualifications that have produced no income, young parents unable to provide for their children and workers accepting whatever terms an employer offers because unemployment is the alternative. These conditions demand an emergency programme of investment and employment. Instead, the Minister offers continuity. Treasury's patience is financed by people who cannot afford another month without work.

This year marks fifty years since the 1976 uprising. The young people who confronted apartheid understood that education served a system of power: it prepared black youth for the subordinate position assigned to them in the economy. Their struggle helped open the doors of democratic possibility. Today, the working-class child can enter those doors and still find their progress obstructed by hunger, fees, debt and unemployment. Government cannot honour the courage of 1976 while becoming comfortable with the exclusion of 2026. The youth did not fight to replace an apartheid ceiling with a Treasury expenditure ceiling. The democratic state has a responsibility to use its power and resources to dismantle the material barriers to freedom.

TREASURY MUST ACCOUNT FOR ITS BROKEN PROMISE

For years, expenditure restraint has been sold as the difficult road to investment, growth and jobs. The Minister now reports that debt stabilised at 78.4% of GDP in 2025/26, yet projected growth for 2026 has been revised down from 1.6% to 1.2%. The primary budget surplus is expected to increase from 1.7% of GDP this year to 2.9% by 2030. Treasury is entitled to explain these fiscal developments. It is not entitled to present them as sufficient evidence that its economic strategy is succeeding. A policy cannot keep passing its own examination while failing the people it was supposed to serve.

Austerity has consequences that disappear from the account when government measures only its own spending. An understaffed clinic transfers costs to the patient who must travel elsewhere. Inadequate student support transfers costs to a household already borrowing to survive. The absence of public care transfers work to women who perform it without pay. An unemployed graduate transfers the cost of their survival to parents and grandparents. The social need remains, but responsibility for meeting it is pushed downwards. What Treasury calls a saving, a working-class household often experiences as a bill. Wealthy families can purchase alternatives; poor families must surrender income, time and opportunities.

The budget therefore expresses a distribution of power between classes. Those who control investment can withhold it, demand concessions or move their money elsewhere. Those who depend on wages cannot withdraw their need to eat. When government makes private investor confidence the organising principle of development, it gives disproportionate influence to people who already command economic resources. The country's future cannot depend on whether its owners are in the mood to invest. Public investment must respond to social need and build productive capacity even where private capital sees insufficient profit.

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE DONE THE HOMEWORK. WHERE ARE THE JOBS?

Young people have rewritten CVs, completed courses, attended workshops and accepted internships. Their families have paid for data, transport and certificates in the hope that one more requirement will unlock employment. Government returns with another speech about employability. Skills matter, but a qualification cannot create a funded nursing post or restore a lost industrial job. Entrepreneurship can support livelihoods, but a business needs customers with purchasing power. You cannot workshop five million young people into jobs that the economy is not creating. The supply of skills must be matched by an expansion of production, services and employment.

Mass unemployment also strengthens employers' power over those who find work. The queue outside the gate makes it easier to impose low wages, temporary contracts and conditions workers would otherwise resist. Young workers know the threat that somebody else will accept the job if they object. This is why YCLSA rejects the celebration of placements without scrutiny of pay, security and labour rights. An employment programme must do more than move a young person from the unemployment queue into somebody's cheap-labour supply chain. Public support must improve workers' bargaining position and create routes into secure employment.

We demand a funded national youth employment programme linked to industrialisation, infrastructure maintenance and the expansion of public services. There is socially necessary work in repairing water systems, maintaining schools, building housing, expanding transport and strengthening food production. State procurement must support local production, with enforceable employment and training obligations attached to public assistance. State-owned enterprises must expand apprenticeships linked to operational needs. Public employment programmes must provide decent remuneration, useful training and credible routes into sustained work. Every public subsidy to business must come with a public claim on the benefits. Government must publish budgets, recruitment commitments and timeframes against which implementation can be judged.

VACANCIES IN OUR SERVICES, UNEMPLOYMENT IN OUR HOMES

YCLSA stands with NEHAWU against the treatment of public servants primarily as a cost to contain. Communities wait for nurses, teachers, social workers and technical staff while qualified young people wait for employment. These two queues expose a failure of public planning. A vacant post in an overcrowded clinic is a budget decision with a human casualty. Government must account for the services left undone and the pressure transferred to remaining staff whenever it refuses to fund necessary appointments.

The Minister says early retirement and voluntary exit measures will save an average of R4.4 billion annually and rejuvenate the public service. Rejuvenation requires funded recruitment, mentoring and the transfer of

institutional knowledge. Without these, an exit programme risks becoming another reduction in capacity dressed up as renewal. You cannot rejuvenate the public service by retiring its experience and freezing its future. YCLSA demands a comprehensive workforce plan connecting training to funded appointments in healthcare, education, social work, engineering and municipal technical services.

Recruitment must be transparent and protected from corruption, patronage and the sale of jobs. Public vacancies belong to the institutions and communities they serve; they are not private assets for officials or political gatekeepers to distribute. A young person must receive fair consideration without buying favour or declaring factional loyalty. Nobody should need a political connection to make their qualification count. Those who sell access to employment exploit desperation and weaken the state at the same time.

AN ACCEPTANCE LETTER CANNOT FEED A STUDENT

The class barriers to education follow working-class students onto campus. They determine who can afford transport, who has reliable data and who studies while hungry. Delayed allowances can mean missed classes, lost accommodation and an interrupted qualification. A university may record a student as enrolled while that student is being materially pushed out. An acceptance letter opens a door; adequate funding makes it possible to stay inside. Government must take responsibility for both.

YCLSA demands adequate and predictable funding for NSFAS, universities and TVET colleges, alongside a funded response to historical student debt. Support must cover food, accommodation, transport, learning materials and digital access. Corruption in bursaries, procurement and accommodation must be confronted because it steals resources intended to sustain students. Its perpetrators must face consequences rather than leaving students to absorb the damage through reduced support. The punishment for stolen student money must fall on the thief, not on the next poor applicant.

Education and economic development must also be planned together. Colleges need equipment, lecturers and paid workplace opportunities. Universities must be supported to develop knowledge and skills for public service and productive development. Government cannot encourage young people to enter socially necessary professions and then leave the institutions that could employ them without funded posts. The country cannot plead a skills shortage while its trained young people sit at home. Free, quality education must form part of an economic programme capable of using the abilities it develops.

HUNGER DOES NOT RESPECT THE BUDGET TIMETABLE

YCLSA welcomes the allocation of R1.6 billion over the medium term for pre-birth care and the first 1,000 days of life. It must reach families through nutritional support, sufficient personnel and functioning facilities. Government must also confront the hunger that follows children into classrooms, students onto campuses and unemployed youth through another day of searching for work. Its damage accumulates in health, learning and lost opportunities. A child cannot postpone development until the fiscal position improves.

We reiterate our demand for a universal Basic Income Grant alongside employment creation and stronger public services. Income support provides an immediate means to meet basic needs and can reduce the desperation on which exploitation feeds. The Social Relief of Distress grant must be adequate and accessible, with fair verification, effective appeals and assistance for people without reliable phones, data or transport. A system that demands proof of poverty must not demand the resources of the wealthy to navigate it. Preventing fraud and protecting eligible beneficiaries are responsibilities government must fulfil together.

Young women absorb a disproportionate share of the crisis through unpaid care work, interrupted education and economic dependence. Services against gender-based violence must produce staffed shelters, accessible healthcare, effective social work and sustained support for survivors. Employment, income support and sexual and reproductive healthcare must reinforce these measures. “Leave the abusive relationship” is an inadequate

instruction to a woman denied the means to leave. Government must fund the conditions that make safety and independence possible.

DEMOCRACY DOES NOT END AT TREASURY'S DOOR

The proposed fiscal anchor is described as a principles-based framework rather than a rigid numerical rule. YCLSA will judge its provisions and effects. We oppose any framework that entrenches expenditure restraint while government avoids equally rigorous accountability for unemployment, hunger and educational exclusion. If fiscal targets require explanations when they are missed, why does a generation's exclusion receive another promise? Decisions about public resources must remain open to democratic contestation, including a challenge to Treasury's preferred trajectory.

The accelerated use of municipal public-private partnerships requires scrutiny of ownership, tariffs, financial risk and accountability. Working-class households need to know what they will pay, who carries losses and how services will reach communities offering limited commercial returns. Municipalities need technical staff, maintenance budgets and effective oversight. Corruption and mismanagement must be confronted wherever they occur. The failure to maintain a public asset must not become somebody else's opportunity to buy control over a public necessity.

YCLSA calls for progressive taxation of wealth and high incomes, stronger action against corporate tax avoidance and illicit financial flows, and sufficient capacity for SARS. Revenue must support public investment, industrial development, decent employment and universal services, with firm consequences for theft and waste. Treasury cannot keep examining the poor for signs of dependency while treating concentrated wealth as beyond interrogation. Fiscal choices must confront who has the resources, how those resources were accumulated and what contribution their holders owe to society.

We call on young workers, students and unemployed youth to organise alongside trade unions and working-class communities. The unpaid allowance, the unfilled post, the poverty wage and the failing water system are connected by decisions about whose needs command resources. Those decisions can be changed through organised power. Our task is to build that power across campuses, workplaces and communities, and to demand a programme whose commitments can be measured in appointments, production, accessible services and improved lives.

Godongwana's dream has a brutal waking reality: five million unemployed young people, families stretching pensions across generations and graduates spending money they do not have chasing jobs that do not exist. Yet the Minister and Treasury expect applause for fiscal discipline. What extraordinary arrogance to demand patience from a generation whose adulthood is being spent waiting outside factory gates and refreshing unanswered job applications. Treasury's spreadsheet offers no column for the years stolen from young people while it waits for private capital to find employing them sufficiently profitable. Working-class youth have a claim on this country's wealth. We refuse to grow old in unemployment so that Treasury can congratulate itself on meeting its targets.

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