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Public hearings take closer look into the labour brokering system

By Ofentse Mokae - 25 August 2009

The Parliamentary portfolio committee on labour is hosting public hearings into the labour brokering system.

The hearings which starts today at parliament, will continue until tomorrow and will look into the challenges the country faces with regard to labour brokers not operating in accordance with the Labour Relations Act.

During the hearings, the committee will engage with various stakeholders from trade unions, workers, the business sector, researchers and academics as well as labour brokers.

In an interview committee chairperson, Ms Lumka Yengeni said the aim of the hearings is to get the public's input before parliament amends the labour relations act.

"The hearings are meant to get the public's views as well as other stakeholders on labour brokering so that when we amend the labour relations act we would have listened to their views and take them into account," said Yengeni.

She says the problem with labour brokering system is that workers' rights are not recognised and that they have no say in their day to day work.

She added that in most cases the brokers are faceless and are the unknown middle men between employers and the workers for financial benefits.

Earlier in the month labour minister Membathisi Mdladlana said the exploitation of workers by labour brokers may soon be a thing of the past as plans are taking place to review the laws that regulate labour brokers.

This followed a research commissioned by his department which indicated that employees engaged through brokers are, among others, paid significantly less than those that are directly hired by employers though they perform the same work.

The amendments to the Labour Relations Act after the public hearings could see labour brokers being banned.

Researchers at the University of Cape Town's Labour and Enterprise Policy Research Group found using labour brokers dispenses with the problem of unfair dismissal and retrenchment costs and procedures.

The findings say clients are not bound to keep workers for the stipulated periods, as labour brokers promise to replace a worker who the client is unhappy with.

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