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Annual increase to the National Minimum Wage



It has been seven years since the official implementation of South Africa's National Minimum Wage in 2019.

This demonstrates the government's unwavering commitment to tackling income inequality, establishing a baseline of income security to mitigate and reduce poverty and enhance the bargaining power of low-wage workers.

This article highlights the amended National Minimum Wage rates and Learnership Allowances for 2026.

What is the main purpose of the National Minimum Wage Act (NMWA)?

Section 2 of the Act states that the purpose is to advance economic development and social justice by--

- improving the wages of lowest paid workers;
- protecting workers from unreasonably low wages;
- preserving the value of the national minimum wage;
- promoting collective bargaining; and
- supporting economic policy.

Which employees will benefit from the National Minimum Wage Act?

The Act applies to all workers and their employers except members of the South African National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency, and the South African Secret Service.

What is the new National Minimum Wage (NMW) rates and effective date?

The latest NMW is set out below and will be effective from 1 March 2026.

Schedule 1 of the National Minimum Wage:

1. Subject to item 2, the national minimum wage is R30,23 for each ordinary hour worked.
 2. Notwithstanding item 1--
- farm workers are entitled to a minimum wage of R30,23 per hour;
 - domestic workers are entitled to a minimum wage of R30,23 per hour;
 - workers employed on an expanded public works programme are entitled to a minimum wage of R16,62 per hour;
 - workers who have concluded learnership agreements contemplated in section 17 of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No. 97 of 1998) are entitled to the allowance referred to in Schedule 2.

Schedule 2: Learnership Allowances (Section 6(5)):

NQF LEVEL	CREDITS EARNED BY LEARNER	MINIMUM ALLOWANCE PER WEEK
LEVEL 1-2	0-120	R455
	121-240	R909,94
LEVEL 3	0-120	R455
	121-240	R856,94
	241-360	R1 402,87
LEVEL 4	0-120	R455
	121-240	R910,04
	241-360	R1 402,87
	361-480	R2 047,41
LEVEL 5-8	0-120	R455
	121-240	R985,76
	241-360	R1 474,90
	361-480	R2 077,79
	481-600	R2 654,04

Sectoral Determination 1: Contract Cleaning Sector

The Contract Cleaning Sector's minimum hourly rates for contract cleaning employees have been amended as follows subject to their geographical location of work:

- Area A – The rate per hour is R33,27;
- Area B – The rate per hour is in accordance with the BCCCI rates;
- Area C – The rate per hour is R30,00.

Sectoral Determination 9: Wholesale and Retail Sector

The Wholesale and Retail Sector's minimum wages have been adjusted and were published in *Government Gazette* No. 554075 dated 3 February 2026, which confirms the rate for a specific job category in a region.

How to calculate an employee's hourly rate?

The wage payable in terms of the Act is the amount calculated in money for ordinary hours of work. This amount excludes any payment to enable an employee to work, such as transport costs, equipment, tools, food or accommodation allowance, any payment in kind and gratuities such as bonuses, tips or gifts. This is applied unless otherwise specified in law.

Is an exemption from the National Minimum Wage Act possible?

Employers, or employer organisations registered in terms of section 96 of the Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No. 66 of 1995) or any other law, acting on behalf of the employer, may apply for exemption from paying the national minimum wage. They must comply with the prescribed form and manner as indicated in section 15(1) of the NMWA and the exemption will only be temporary, conditional and closely regulated.

Enforcement of the amendment

Following the conclusion of an inspection, a labour department inspector may, in terms of section 68(1) of the Basic Conditions of Employment (Act No. 75 of 1997) (BCEA) issue a Compliance Order in terms of section 69(1) of the BCEA to enforce adherence to the statutory requirements.

What are the consequences of non-compliance with the National Minimum Wage Act?

Non-compliance with the provisions of the amended NMWA carries significant legal and financial repercussions for employers. Employers may be compelled to retrospectively reimburse employees for any period during which the prescribed minimum wage was not paid. In addition, unilateral alteration by the employer of the working hours or other conditions of employment relating to the implementation of the NMW, constitutes an unfair labour practice under South African labour law.

SERR Synergy assists employers in understanding all elements of new employment-related legislation, including the National Minimum Wage Act. Our professional labour teams across South Africa will provide employers with guidance regarding the adjusted national minimum wage specific to their business and industry to ensure that they are compliant with the latest adjustments. *We assist employers with registration with the Unemployment Insurance Fund* and Workmen's Compensation Fund.

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Sources acknowledged:

Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 (Act No. 75 of 1997). Labour Relations Act, 1995 (Act No. 66 of 1995). *National Minimum Wage Act*, 2018 (Act No. 9 of 2018).

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