



The Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) cordially invites you to a webinar on

Austerity, Poverty, and Inequality - Who Bears the Burden?

Date: 5 February 2026
Time: 11:00 – 13:00 (SAST)
Venue: Zoom
RSVP: [Click here](#) to register

Background

Governments tend to introduce austerity measures in response to economic crises. However, these measures have far-reaching effects, including economic depressions, increased inequality, strained social welfare, and potential impacts on specific marginalised demographic groups (e.g. women, the elderly and children) and those living in certain localities (e.g. the countryside).

It is in this context that ASSAf, through its Standing Committee on Science for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality (SCfRPI), is hosting a webinar in a series on “Social Protection and Employment Creation” to examine the impact of austerity on the livelihoods and social welfare of vulnerable populations, with a view to strategising and collectively prioritising wellbeing over austerity.

Objectives

- Examine the influence of austerity measures on wellbeing and access to public services such as education, healthcare, and social protection.
- Explore links between austerity, unemployment, and income disparities.
- Explore actionable recommendations to balance fiscal stability with social equity.

Programme

Moderator: Professor Vusi Gumede (Standing Committee on Science for the Reduction of Poverty and Inequality (SCfRPI) Chairperson)		
11:00-11:10	Opening and setting the scene	Prof Vusi Gumede
11:10-11:40	The influence of austerity policies on socio-economic inequality and access to public services	Ms Isobel Frye, Senior Policy Advisor, Oxfam South Africa
11:40-12:10	Poverty trends in South Africa	Mr Risenga Maluleke, Statistician General, StatsSA
12:10-12:50	Q and A	All
12:50-13:00	Key Takeaways and Closure	Prof Vusi Gumede

Speakers



Prof Vusi Gumede is a distinguished South African economist, academic leader and public intellectual with extensive experience in political economy, development and public policy. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and has held senior roles in government and higher education, including serving as Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences at the University of Mpumalanga and as Director of the Thabo Mbeki African Leadership Institute at UNISA. Prof Gumede has advised government at the highest levels, including serving on the Presidential Economic Advisory Council, and is a prolific author, with numerous books, journal articles and policy papers focusing on socio-economic transformation, governance and African development. He now serves as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning at Durban University of Technology.



Ms Isobel Frye is a prominent South African advocate for the reduction in economic inequality and poverty eradication and broader social justice. With a background in law and over two decades of experience in research, policy, and advocacy, she has championed transformative policies such as Universal Basic Income, the National Minimum Wage and the national Poverty Lines. She has held influential roles across civil society and labour sectors, including leading the Advocacy Unit at the Black Sash Trust and serving as Senior Researcher at NALEDI, the research arm of COSATU. In 2006, she founded the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII), where she served as Executive Director for many years. Currently, Ms Frye is the Senior Policy Advisor for the G20 at Oxfam South Africa and Special Advisor to the DPME for the G20 Development Working Group, working to influence national and global policy on inequality and social protection. She is a frequent commentator on platforms such as Daily Maverick and Mail & Guardian, and broadcast media.



Mr Risenga Maluleke is a South African statistician general and public servant at Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). He is responsible for producing official data on the country's population, economy, and society. He has worked at Stats SA for more than two decades, joining in 1997 as a manager in the Limpopo provincial office and later serving as Deputy Director-General for Statistical Collections and Outreach before his appointment as Statistician-General in November 2017. Maluleke holds a BSc in Mathematical Statistics from the University of Limpopo and an MPhil in Urban and Regional Science from Stellenbosch University and has also completed senior executive programmes at the University of the Witwatersrand and Harvard Business School. He has played a significant role in both national and international statistical development, representing South Africa at forums such as the United Nations Statistical Commission and contributing to initiatives on census operations, big data, and sustainable development indicators.

