

About the Institution

The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) is mandated to ensure a safe, secure and humane environment for incarcerated individuals in South Africa. It reports to the Minister for Correctional Services, and its accounting officer is the National Commissioner. The DCS is a national department that operates through a regional structure; a regional commissioner oversees each of the six regions. Its expenditure for 2024/25 was R28.4bn.¹

The DCS was implicated in historical cases of state capture during the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption and Fraud in the Public Sector, including Organs of State (the Zondo Commission).²

Flag Status

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
								
Improper appointments	Co-opting key functions	Climate of fear or favour	Corrupt awards	Financial malpractice	Obstructing accountability	Manipulating perceptions	Private gain	Shadow network

ISS Analysis

- The ACTis has raised one flag for DCS and placed two under monitoring.
 - Prolonged acting positions and contested appointments suggest instability and irregularity in leadership and senior management appointment processes. The position of Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is particularly concerning, given the responsibility it carries and the vulnerability to undue influence created by temporary appointments. The link between a senior executive and potential abuse of resources is a further concern.
- Repeated procurement irregularities could indicate an environment susceptible to corruption. Given the DCS’s history of state capture, this could be a legacy issue.
 - Although there are clear signs of governance weakness, improvements have been seen in procurement, audit outcomes, irregular expenditure and consequence management. This suggests fragmented risks across the Department rather than a coordinated pattern of influence that typifies attempts at state capture.



Findings

Flag #1

Improper Appointments



The flag is raised due to concerns regarding senior appointment processes and prolonged acting appointments in key positions.

- Chief Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Management, Joseph Katenga, was implicated in a 2021 Public Protector report regarding the irregular appointment of Sihle Zikalala as Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental Relations in June 2018. The report found that the interview panel chaired by Katenga had acted irregularly by recommending the appointment of Zikalala despite him not meeting all the requirements for the post as advertised. The Public Protector found that this constituted maladministration in the appointment process and recommended that the National Commissioner consider disciplinary action against members of the interview panel in terms of the Public Service Act.³ In May 2023, the National Commissioner reported to Parliament that it had instituted consequence management against the officials involved in the recruitment and interview process, but did not disclose further details.⁴
- Lebogang Marumule appears to have served as acting CFO for more than four years. A parliamentary meeting in November 2022 referred to him as acting CFO,⁵ and he was still referred to in that capacity during a parliamentary meeting in February 2026.⁶
- Lucky Mthethwa, Eastern Cape Correctional Services Commissioner, reportedly cost the DCS more than R1.45m by being accommodated at the ICC Premier Hotel in East London between 2021 and 2024, while acting in the position.⁷ This arrangement was made despite a state house allegedly having been renovated at a cost of R1m and being available for use. Mthethwa was appointed permanent Commissioner for the Eastern Cape in April 2024, after which he moved out of the hotel.⁸
- In 2019, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Regional Commissioner Mnikelwa Nxele was suspended after being implicated in testimony at the Zondo Commission. He allegedly accepted R57 000 a month in bribes from Bosasa to pressure the National Commissioner to work with the company.⁹ The Department also accused Nxele of manipulating bid outcomes as Chairperson of the Special Bid Adjudication Committee in KZN.¹⁰ He was reinstated in 2022 after an arbitrator overturned then-National Commissioner Arthur Fraser's suspension of Nxele. In late 2025, a Labour Court granted DCS permission to reinstate charges.¹¹ Nxele was arrested in June 2026 on charges of fraud and money laundering for crimes allegedly committed between 2004 and 2023.¹²



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards



The flag is being monitored to assess whether procurement irregularities reflect a wider pattern of favourable treatment in contract awards.

- In a May 2026 presentation to Parliament, the Department reported finding significant price inflation for food items under contract HO4/2023, which was concluded with 115 suppliers. The contract period runs from April 2025 to March 2030. The inflated prices included R726 for 1 L of cooking oil, R781 for 10 kg of pawpaw, and R3 735 for gravy powder. The Department renegotiated to significantly lower prices, and internal investigations are ongoing.¹³
- In an October 2025 briefing to Parliament, the Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) reported that DCS failed to address material findings on non-compliance with supply chain management regulations. These included awarding contracts using altered evaluation criteria, awarding contracts to suppliers that were not tax-compliant, and making payments that exceeded the approved quotation values.¹⁴
- In the 2024/25 audit, the AGSA found that a contract was awarded to bidders based on evaluation criteria that differed from those stipulated in the original bid invitation. The contract was for a panel of service providers to supply perishable and non-perishable food items to the Department.¹⁵
- According to a parliamentary reply tabled on 22 November 2024, DCS purchased walk-through metal detectors for the Ncome Management Area in Vryheid, KZN, and the Waterval Management Area near Pietermaritzburg, KZN, for R7.5m each. Similar walk-through metal detectors in the correctional system typically cost between R18 500 and R107 652 per unit.¹⁶
- In 2025, DCS announced a move towards centralising procurement to reduce fragmentation and procurement process abuses across regions. The Department reported that this would allow for greater oversight and accountability.¹⁷

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

Factors indicating resilience were detected under this flag.

- The AGSA commended DCS for submitting high-quality financial statements and for reducing irregular expenditure from R9.2m in 2023/24 to R7.7m in 2024/25. The AGSA also reported that the internal audit unit and the newly appointed audit committee were functioning effectively.¹⁸ The Department's cumulative irregular expenditure balance decreased from R5.2bn to R2.8bn in 2024/25.¹⁹



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Flag #8

Private Gain



The flag is being monitored to assess whether public resources are being used to provide undue benefits to individuals.

- Eastern Cape Commissioner Mthethwa is alleged to have cost the department R1.45m in luxury hotel accommodation in East London over three years (see Flag #1: Improper Appointments). The Department later confirmed that it had also paid for hotel accommodation for three additional officials since 2020 – Solly Netshivhazwaulu, acting Head of St Albans Maximum Prison in Gqeberha, and his two secretaries, whom he insisted on bringing with him from Limpopo to the Eastern Cape. The money spent on hotels totalled R6m over this period.
- Mthethwa also reportedly spent R100 000 to take 40 staff members from the Eastern Cape to the Free State's Mangaung Prison to learn from how notorious prisoner Thabo Bester escaped. The Police, Prisons and Civil Rights Union described this as wasteful expenditure. Anonymous sources within the Department reportedly alleged that since Mthethwa became acting Commissioner, travel claims have increased tenfold. Mthethwa allegedly claims R30 000 to R40 000 a month in travel expenses, in addition to his salary.²⁰



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Recommended Actions

	DUTY BEARER	ACTION(S)	ASSOCIATED FLAGS
1.	National Commissioner	- Prioritise filling the CFO position with a permanent candidate. - Implement the AGSA's recommendations on strengthening supply chain management controls and improving contract management and oversight.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards Flag #1: Improper Appointments Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
2.	Special Investigating Unit	Advocate for a proclamation to investigate food and metal detector contracts at DCS.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
3.	Auditor-General of South Africa	Audit spending on travel and accommodation in the Eastern Cape regional division of DCS.	Flag #1: Improper Appointments
4.	Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services	- Interrogate whether there is a valid reason for the continued acting CFO appointment. - Interrogate the excessive expenditure mentioned in this report.	Flag #4: Corrupt Awards Flag #5: Financial Malpractice
5.	Public Protector	Investigate allegations that the Eastern Cape Commissioner has abused the Department's resources for travel and accommodation.	Flag #8: Private Gain



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

The 9 Flags

Flag #1

Improper Appointments

Improper appointments, dismissals or failure to remove individuals in senior positions may be used to drive a corrupt agenda.

Flag #2

Co-opting Key Functions

Informal control may be established over critical functions within the institution to abuse them.

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour

The working culture favours loyalty over duty; alignment with a corrupt agenda is rewarded, and resistance is punished.

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards

Contracts, licences, partnerships, loans and/or investments may be awarded irregularly and repeatedly benefit the same actors.

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

The institution's financial management practices may be abused to advance a corrupt agenda.

Flag #6

Obstructing Accountability

The institution's internal operations might be deliberately obscured to hide potential misconduct.

Flag #7

Manipulating Perceptions

A public narrative that frames misconduct as innocence may be promoted.

Flag #8

Private Gain

Illicit gains may be distributed to benefit the same actors.

Flag #9

Shadow Network

The same public and private actors may collude to gain control over an institution's assets and functions, benefiting repeatedly.

About ACTis

What is ACTis?

The Anti-Corruption Tracker Information System is an initiative of the Anti-Corruption and Accountability Project at the Institute for Security Studies. It provides analysis on corruption and state capture in South Africa, to inform early intervention and enforcement. It utilises a system of indicators and an AI-driven data-collection and analysis tool, validated by human experts. It identifies risks within individual government institutions and produces actionable recommendations to address them, with a view to disrupting patterns of state capture and corruption.

Findings are shared directly with government and other duty-bearers, civil society organisations, the media and the public, empowering authorities to intervene, strengthening accountability, and enabling citizens activism.

Links to ACTis Information:

Further project information may be found at the following links:

[Terms and Definitions](#)

[Project Methodology and Analytical Framework](#)

[About the Anti-Corruption and Accountability project](#)

[About the Institute for Security Studies](#)

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Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

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Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring