

The KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Department of Social Development (DSD) delivers social welfare and development services to vulnerable communities in KZN. The Department operates in accordance with the policies set by the national Department of Social Development. The KZN DSD reports to the KZN Member of the Executive Council (MEC) for Social Development. The Head of Department (HoD) is the accounting officer. In 2024/25, its expenditure was R3.4bn.¹

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

- ACTis has raised one flag for the KZN DSD and placed two under monitoring.
- Despite a history of corruption, the Department is taking steps to improve financial governance and accountability under MEC Mbali Shinga's leadership.
- Institutional turnarounds are fragile in their early stages and require leaders with integrity to drive reform and good practices. However, political factionalism and infighting surrounding MEC Shinga's party membership are destabilising the MEC position. Concerns also remain about the last two HoD appointments.
- Despite improvements, the Department still needs to address its failure to impose consequence management for alleged wrongdoing. Impunity is a known enabler of corruption and investigations by the Public Protector and the Department's internal processes need to result in clear consequences.



Findings

Flag #1

Improper Appointments



The flag is raised because of concerns about the appropriateness of the Department's governing body and administrative head.

- Onkemetse Edwin Kabasia was appointed as the KZN DSD's HoD in October 2025, despite having been implicated in irregularities while working in various senior management positions within the Gauteng DSD between 2016 and 2018.² The allegations included Kabasia failing to prevent over R600m in irregular expenditure and failing to ensure compliance with internal controls. Forensic investigations found that Kabasia failed to maintain oversight of the Gauteng DSD and allowed widespread bypassing of procurement processes.³ The KZN DSD said that it had not been notified of any formal findings against Kabasia.⁴
- The Public Protector is investigating the appointment of the previous HoD, Neliswe Vilakazi, who was appointed in 2020 despite irregularities. A complaint alleged that proper procedures were not followed in her appointment. This meant that the previous incumbent, who had reapplied for the position, might have been unfairly overlooked. She was also reportedly subject to a disciplinary process over an alleged case of nepotism while HoD.⁵
- In December 2025, MEC Shinga was suspended from the National Freedom Party (NFP) for failing to vote along party lines in the legislature.⁶ MEC Shinga had been credited with driving the Department's improved financial management, resulting in a clean audit outcome in 2024/25.⁷ On 13 April 2026, the NFP announced that it had found her guilty following an internal disciplinary process. In June 2026, MEC Shinga was expelled from the NFP, but was reinstated two days later following an order by the Pietermaritzburg High Court and therefore remained a Member of the Provincial Legislature (MPL) and the MEC.⁸ In July 2026, the NFP approached the Pietermaritzburg High Court to have her removed from the NFP and as an MPL.⁹ If Shinga is finally expelled from the NFP, she will no longer be an MPL and can no longer be the MEC.

Flag #3

Climate of Fear or Favour



The flag is being monitored to determine whether a wider pattern exists of protecting selected officials from accountability.

- The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA) reported in 2024/25 that consequence management for fruitless and wasteful expenditure remains inadequate, despite ongoing investigations, and that no officials have been held accountable.¹⁰



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Flag #4

Corrupt Awards



The flag is being monitored because, although numerous contract awards have been flagged for irregularities, many are being addressed and no detectable pattern connects them.

- In February 2025, the Special Investigating Unit's (SIU) Special Tribunal ordered 16 service providers to pay back profits from irregularly awarded personal protective equipment contracts linked to the KZN DSD. An SIU investigation and forensic work commissioned by the Provincial Treasury found that these contracts, worth about R21m in total, were inflated and unlawful. The Tribunal set aside the contracts and recommended disciplinary action against implicated officials.¹¹
- The AGSA reported that 13 forensic investigations had been conducted from 2009 to 2022 into procurement irregularities, fraud and maladministration at the Department. However, only two investigations had been finalised by July 2025.¹²

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice



Only factors indicating resilience have been detected under the flag.

- The Department has significantly reduced irregular expenditure, from approximately R71m in 2022/23 to around R9.8m in 2024/25. The Department reportedly established an Unauthorised, Irregular, Fruitless and Wasteful Expenditure Committee and implemented an audit turnaround strategy in 2024/25.¹³
- The Department received an unqualified audit opinion in 2024/25.¹⁴



Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring

Recommended Actions

	DUTY BEARER	ACTION(S)	ASSOCIATED FLAGS
1.	Public Protector	Investigate the appointment of HoD Kabasia.	Flag #1: Improper Appointments



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 #4

Corrupt Awards

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

Flag #7

Manipulating Perceptions

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

Flag #2

Co-opting Key Functions

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

Flag #5

Financial Malpractice

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

Flag #8

Private Gain

Illicit gains may be distributed to benefit the same actors.

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 #6

Obstructing Accountability

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

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

References

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Flag raised



Flag lowered



Under monitoring