

Employment Law

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Namibia

- The Venus Project: A labour law and employment perspective



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The Venus Project: A labour law and employment perspective

Namibia's emerging oil and gas industry has captured national attention, and at the centre of this development is the Venus Project a large-scale offshore petroleum initiative expected to transform the country's economic landscape. While much of the public discourse focuses on economic growth and government revenues, the project also raises important questions about employment, labour rights and the long-term benefits for Namibian workers.

From a labour law perspective, the Venus Project represents both a significant opportunity and a potential challenge. The project promises new jobs, skills development and growth in supporting industries. At the same time, concerns remain about who will access these opportunities, the quality of the jobs created and how employment will be managed throughout the project's lifecycle.

This article explores the project through a labour law lens, examining its implications for employment creation, localisation, skills development and long-term workforce sustainability in Namibia.

Understanding the Venus Project

The Venus Project is a major offshore oil and gas development located in Namibian waters. It is being developed through a joint venture that includes the National Petroleum Corporation of Namibia. The project forms part of Namibia's broader effort to transition from exploration to full petroleum production.

The primary objectives of the project include the commercial development of offshore petroleum resources, contributing to national economic growth and fiscal revenues, strengthening local supply chains and service industries, and creating employment opportunities during construction, production and ancillary operations.

Due to its scale and long-term nature, the project is expected to influence labour markets beyond the offshore facilities themselves. Its impact will likely extend to logistics, engineering, marine services and several onshore support industries.

Legal and constitutional framework

The Namibian Constitution places a clear obligation on the state to promote employment and fair labour practices. Article 95 of the Constitution requires the state to adopt policies aimed at the creation of employment opportunities, fair and reasonable labour practices, and economic empowerment for Namibians.

Large-scale extractive projects such as the Venus Project must therefore be evaluated not only on economic output but also on their contribution to decent work, sustainable employment, and equitable participation in economic opportunities.

The Labour Act 11 of 2007 (Act) provides the main statutory framework regulating employment relationships in Namibia. The Act establishes rules relating to fair recruitment practices, non-discrimination in employment, minimum employment standards and procedures governing termination and retrenchment. The Venus Project will engage these legal requirements throughout its lifecycle, from construction to production and eventual decommissioning.

Environmental and social impact assessment

Under the Environmental Management Act 7 of 2007, major development projects must undergo an environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA). This process evaluates environmental, social and economic consequences before a project may proceed.

The ESIA for the Venus Project includes a socio-economic impact assessment that examines employment effects, labour-market dynamics, and potential pressures on local communities. From a labour law perspective, this process is important because it allows regulators and stakeholders to identify employment risks, anticipate labour-market disruptions and propose mitigation measures where necessary.

Employment creation and labour market impact

The construction phase of the project is expected to create several thousand jobs in areas such as drilling, installation, logistics and marine services. However, many of these jobs are temporary and may involve fixed-term or rotational contracts.

During the production phase, the project is expected to generate approximately 600 direct jobs related to offshore operations and support vessels, as well as a similar number of indirect jobs within supply chains and logistics. Additional induced employment may arise through broader economic activity linked to the project. While these figures suggest a positive employment impact, labour law considerations require attention to the quality of jobs created, access to employment for Namibians and fair recruitment practices.



Skills development and localisation

A recurring concern raised during stakeholder consultations is the possibility that specialised positions may be filled by foreign workers due to limited local expertise in offshore petroleum operations.

To address this risk, the project identifies opportunities for skills development in fields such as electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, process engineering and specialised marine technical trades. Investment in training and skills transfer is essential to ensure that Namibians benefit from the industry in the long term. Such initiatives also align with the broader objectives of labour legislation and national development policies aimed at strengthening the local workforce.

Decommissioning and labour transition

The final phase of the project decommissioning is expected to last approximately one and a half years and may involve the termination of most production-related employment. The labour law considerations at this stage include fair retrenchment procedures, consultation with employees and planning for labour transitions. Without proper planning, large-scale job losses could occur once production ends, potentially creating social and economic instability.

Proactive labour transition strategies, including skills portability and redeployment opportunities, are therefore critical to ensuring long-term workforce resilience.

Conclusion

The Venus Project represents both an opportunity and a challenge for Namibia's labour market. On the one hand, the project promises employment creation, skills development and economic growth. On the other hand, without strong labour safeguards, there is a risk that many opportunities may not fully benefit local workers.

Ensuring transparent recruitment practices, meaningful localisation strategies, and robust skills development programmes will be key to aligning the project with Namibia's constitutional commitment to fair labour practices and sustainable employment.

Ultimately, the success of the Venus Project should not be measured solely by economic output, but also by the extent to which it contributes to decent work and long-term employment opportunities for Namibians.

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Our BBBEE verification is one of several components of our transformation strategy and we continue to seek ways of improving it in a meaningful manner.

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