

## **Restaurant Worker Struggles to Make Ends Meet**

### **By Emeldah Khumalo**

Thobakgale\* (not her real name) is a waitress at the BenBom Coffee Shop in L'Corro close to Cresta in Johannesburg. "We work a lot of hours here and at the end of the day we don't receive much. Because we are trying to fight poverty and provide for our families back home; that is why I endure the pain and the treatment I get here," said Thobakgale.

"Today a gangster crew came into our restaurant. They wanted to rob us after we had heard that they had already stolen someone's phone and wallet. While they [the robbers] were in the shop, the person who had been robbed hid and called the police. Fortunately the criminals left and they were later arrested around the L'Corro Shopping Centre", she added.

In the first month of the lockdown many places of business were closed and people working in restaurants were at home with no pay. This was made worse by the fact that the government did not distribute the relief funds equitably for people in financial distress. When workers returned to work during Level 3; they were welcomed back with a rise in taxi fares and salary cuts.

Workers like Thobakgale are forced to work under very hard and unpleasant conditions and because of survival they cannot just leave their jobs. Thobakgale represents the majority of South Africans that the government has neglected. Only a small portion of the population are able to live luxuriously in suburbs, with adequate electricity and water and access to private education. Even though the government claims South African citizens are "are in the same boat"; but in reality this is not true. COVID-19 has exposed the levels of inequality that exists in South Africa and the recent retrenchments has deepened these inequalities.

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