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What Works for Youth Employment In South Africa.

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Abstract

According to the 2022 Census, South Africa has a population of 62 million in 2022 and grew at a rate of 1.8% per year between 2011 and 2022. The median age of that population increased to twenty-eight years in 2022 from twenty-five in 2011, suggesting that most of the population is young. The South African economy faces high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, and youth unemployment is alarmingly high, fluctuating between 45% and 65% in the last decade. The South African government has implemented numerous youth-employment programmes that focus on education, training, public employment, entrepreneurship, and job placement. The main objective of this study was to review and analyse youth-employment programmes in South Africa, using a blend of descriptive evidence from desk reviews; fieldwork; and soliciting the perceptions and opinions of experts, programme participants, and programme nonparticipants through focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews. The main finding of this research is that gap between planned outcomes and actual performance in youth-employment programmes remains significant.

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I. Introduction

According to the 2022 census, South Africa had a population of 62 million in 2022, with a growth rate of 1.8% per year between 2011 and 2022 (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Close to 64% of South Africa's population is under 35 years of age (median age: 28) meaning that South Africa's population can be considered predominantly young (Statistics South Africa, 2023). While a young population has the potential to produce a youth dividend, the reality is that youth unemployment in South Africa is alarmingly high, and the country faces a major challenge in providing adequate job opportunities to its large youth population.

Despite the strategic and development plans in place, the country has experienced slow economic growth, and the gross domestic product averaged growth of 1.1% from 2009 to 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The country's fiscal space has deteriorated significantly as a consequence of increased public debt, which rose from 47% of GDP in 2014 to 72.8% by 2022. Rising public debt, the energy crisis (in the form of widespread electricity load shedding), which has been heightened since 2015, and shocks resulting from other global crises such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global geopolitical instability in the form of ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza have led to further deterioration in the stability of the country's macroeconomic landscape, further aggravating challenges related to high levels of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, particularly among young (Government of South Africa, 2020). The expanded definition of youth unemployment stands at almost 63%, while the official definition indicates a rate of 44.7% (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Around 50% of young people who enter the labour market are not engaged in employment, education or training, a situation the government has declared a national crisis.

Youth in South Africa face a number of challenges when they transition to the labour market. Broadly, they can be categorised as supply-side, demand-side, and misalignment issues. Supply-side challenges arise from deficiencies in education, skills levels, and social factors that hinder young people's ability to secure and maintain employment, including inadequate education at all levels, limited entrepreneurial education, insufficient focus on non-cognitive skills, and unfavourable social conditions leading to issues like teenage pregnancy,

HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, and involvement in crime. Demand-side factors include low economic growth, a structurally imbalanced economy with limited opportunities for youth with low education and skills, low rates of youth entrepreneurial activity and business formation, and an entrepreneurial sector driven more by necessity than opportunity. Misalignment challenges result from market failures caused by a mismatch between the available youth labour pool and existing job opportunities. Lack of job information and weak employment services, social biases and socioeconomic disparities, spatial disparities due to historical planning, high costs of seeking a job, negative perceptions of young people by employers, young people's unrealistic expectations about work, and issues regarding their work readiness are all implicated (Cassim, 2020; De Lannoy et al., 2018).

We set out to review and analyse the implementation of youth-employment programmes in South Africa through a blend of research methods, including comprehensive desk review, focus-group discussions, and key-informant interviews of participants in youth-employment programmes that attempt to improve labour-market outcomes for youth by fostering labour supply and demand.

South Africa presents an intriguing case study for several reasons. First, despite being classified as an upper-middle-income economy and boasting the most industrialised, technologically advanced, and diversified economy in Africa, the country still struggles with among the highest youth-unemployment rates in the world: between 45% and 65% over the last decade. Second, unemployment rates continue to soar despite the country's robust youth-employment strategy (Levinsohn, 2008; Rodrik, 2008). Third, the government has allocated significant resources to youth employment, making it crucial to assess the effectiveness of resource allocation across government sectors and to explore the potential for scaling up public-employment initiatives. Fourth, gaps remain even as the number of studies on youth programmes in South Africa grows (see, for example, Allie-Edries & Mupela, 2019; Habiyaremye et al., 2022; Jacobs et al., 2018; Kobedi et al., 2022; Langa, 2022; Mathende, 2015; Moeti, 2014; Mubangizi 2013; Mudau, 2021; Mullagee & Bruce, 2015; Philip, 2013a, b; Ryk, 2020; Stanwix & Van der Westhuizen, 2012; and Zwane, 2020).

Rigorous impact-evaluation studies of youth-employment programmes remain few because most explore either youth wage subsidies alone or other youth-employment policies (e.g., Bhorat, Kanbur & Stanwix, 2014; Bhorat, Magadla & Steenkamp, 2015a; Bhorat et al., 2019; Ebrahim et al., 2017; Odendaal, 2016; Bhorat et al., 2020; Ranchhod & Finn, 2016; Budlender & Ebrahim, 2021; Muller, 2021; Piek & Fintel, 2020; Strauss et al., 2017; Bhorat, et al., 2021; Abel et al., 2018; Bertrand & Crépon, 2020; von Broekhuizen, 2016; and Levinsohn et al., 2014). Finally, effectiveness and coordination of youth-employment programmes, as well as the distribution and use of their benefits, remain understudied.

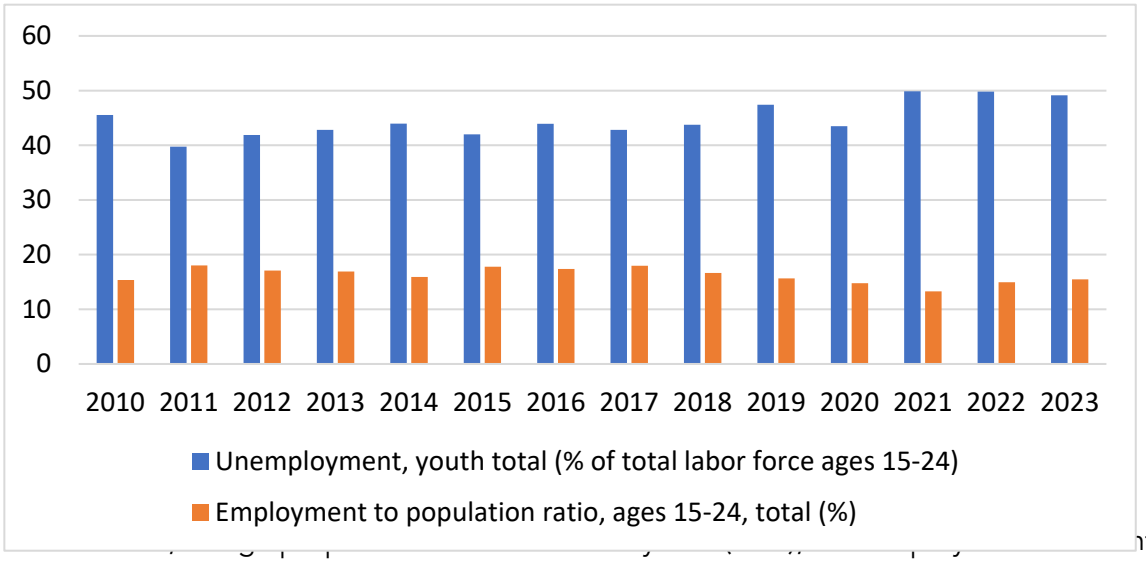
II. Overview of Youth Labour-Market Outcomes

South Africa's youth face significant labour-market challenges that can be refined into five major factors. First, employment opportunities are lacking. Unemployment has been a persistent issue since the 1980s, exacerbated by some apartheid-era structural features such as poor-quality education and restrictive legislation that ensured cheap labour for the mining sector. Additionally, low and imbalanced economic growth, coupled with limited entrepreneurial activity, has resulted in a mismatch between job opportunities and young people's skills. The private sector has not kept pace with the influx of young job seekers, and the job market offers fewer prospects for those with limited education and skills (Fedderke, 2014). Existing labour-market policies, characterised by inflexible regulations and low minimum wages, fail to address the difficulties young people face in the employment sphere, further discouraging formal sector hiring (Bhorat & Stanwix, 2018).

Second, South African youth face significantly higher unemployment rates than their older cohorts. Statistics South Africa (2024) reported that more than 43% of youth are unemployed compared to 32.9% for older cohorts. Since 2010, youth unemployment among those aged 15-24 has remained above 40%, with the corresponding employment rate

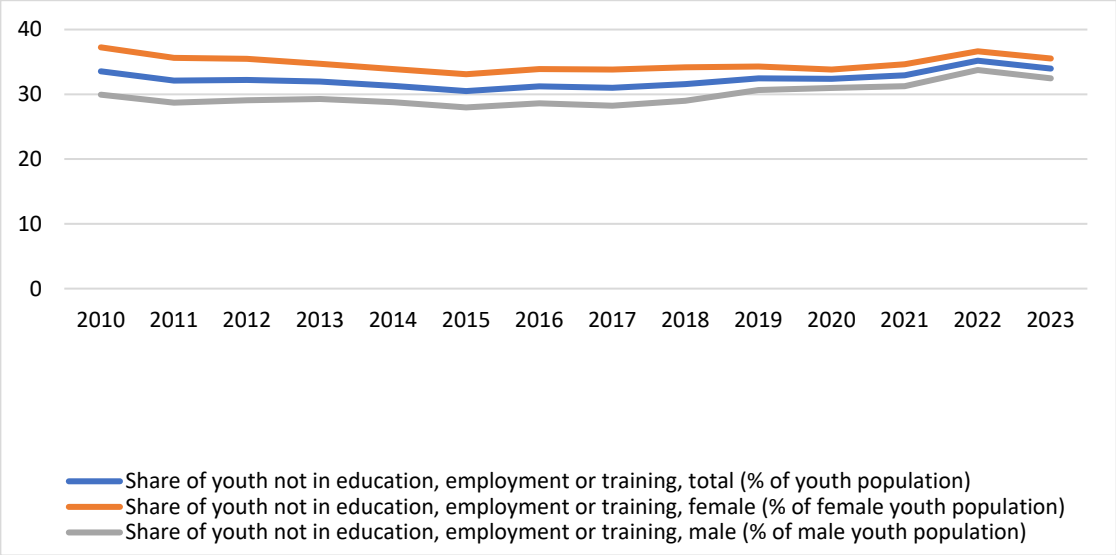
stagnating at around 15% (see Figure 1). Limited access to quality education results in a significant skills gap, And insufficient support systems, such as limited access to job information, counselling, career guidance, and employment services, further deter young people from entering the labour market. Meanwhile, employers' demand for years of work experience presents a significant barrier for young people seeking their first job (De Lannoy et al., 2020).

Figure 1: Youth Employment Unemployment Rates: 2010-2023 (%)



nformal sector, which typically lacks social-security benefits and protection (International Labor Organization, 2015) and is characterised by income precarity and risk exposure (Bhorat et al., 2015b). Fourth, young women and other vulnerable groups face harsher labour market conditions compared to men, as reflected in higher unemployment and the rates of those not engaged in employment, education, or training (see Figure 2). Fifth, unemployment in South Africa has a racial and spatial dimension, with Black African and coloured populations experiencing higher unemployment rates than the national average as a consequence of the legacy of apartheid.

Figure 2: Share of Youth Not Engaged in Education, Employment, or Training, 2010-2023



Youth unemployment in South Africa not only drives poverty and economic stagnation, but deepens social inequalities and unrest, disproportionately affecting disadvantaged youth (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). Severe adverse effects, including poor health, substance abuse, and social exclusion, are associated with youth unemployment (De Lannoy et al., 2018), and high levels of unemployment among youth pose significant risks of political instability.

III. Methodology

Our methodology can be broken down into three components. The first was a desk review of youth-employment programmes and related literature which, in our case, included government reports, legislation, research reports, and other relevant materials from national or global sources along with a review of the academic literature on youth-employment programmes in South Africa. Based on gaps we identified in the review, we conducted focus-

group discussions and key-informant interviews to obtain the first-hand experiences and the perceptions, and opinions of experts, programme participants, and partners across the country. The fieldwork was conducted between February and May 20, 2024, with the assistance of BlaPau Management Consulting.

Based on a questionnaire developed for this study, participants in focus-group discussions were asked to describe their employment status and their knowledge and experience of youth-employment programmes. For key-informant interviews and focus-group discussions, information on youth-employment programmes in South Africa and their political economy (implementation, utilisation, coordination, clientelism, etc.) was gathered. The standard questions were augmented with a few questions around preferred job sectors, quality of skills development and mentorship, barriers, and success stories. Given the sparse in-depth qualitative research on these questions, we included open-ended questions to help us better understand participants' experiences with youth-employment programmes and their implementation.

A total of fourteen focus-group discussions and seventy-one key-informant interviews were conducted in South Africa's nine provinces. To improve our understanding of the experiences of participants, used a purposive sample strategy. Tables 1A and 2B and Figure 1A in the Appendix provide a further breakdown of the samples, segmented by age, race, location/region, and beneficiary status. Data from focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews were transcribed and captured into an Excel database. The data sets were imported into the MAXQDA trial version and NVIVO for exploratory analysis. The authors leveraged the power of large language models, particularly ChatGPT, which rely on the use of artificial intelligence to uncover meaningful patterns, gain deeper insights, and enhance the overall quality and validity of their qualitative research. Themes were then extracted from responses.

IV. Review of Youth-Employment Programmes

According to Mabugu et al. (2024), South Africa has about thirty-one youth- youth-employment programmes which fall under four umbrella initiatives: the Employment Tax Incentive; the Jobs Fund; the Expanded Public Works and Community Works Programme; and the National Youth Development Agency Sector Education and Training Authority. The youth-employment programmes and associated initiatives are aimed at promoting youth employment directly or indirectly by targeting the supply side of youth employability and the demand side of youth job creation. Direct employment-promotion initiatives can be categorised as funding and technical support initiatives (the Expanded Public Works Programme, the Jobs Fund, Public Employment Services, the National Rural Youth Service Corps, and the National Youth Services programme of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention; job-placement initiatives such as the Presidential Youth Employment Interventions, the National Pathway Management Network, and Youth-employment services; skills training initiatives such as the Youth Enterprise Development Strategy, the South Africa Digital Skills the and Information and Communications Technology initiatives; Social Entrepreneurship and Community Development programmes; and technical, vocational, and occupational programmes. On the other hand, South Africa has also established programmes that indirectly contribute to job creation, such as those aimed at building agencies or improving the work readiness of young people (the Monyetla Work Readiness Programme, the Second Chance Programmes, the Second Chance Matric Programme, agency-building initiatives, school-based initiatives, and social services).). A salient characteristic of South Africa is that most of the resources targeted at youth- employment programmes go toward increasing short-term jobs on the demand side (mainly the Extended Public Works Programme and the Youth Employment Tax Incentive).

South Africa's efforts to address youth unemployment have led to the creation of many jobs and job opportunities for young people. For example, while the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention National Pathway Management Network aimed to have 250,000 programme participants between 2023 and 2027, as of 2024, 4.2 million young people were

registered on SA Youth, with over 1.6 million having already secured opportunities through the platform (Mabugu et al., 2024). The single largest contributor to such opportunities has come from the Basic Education Employment Initiative. On the other hand, the Expanded Public Works Programme shows modest success, having provided 4.5 million work opportunities against a target of six million for Phase 3 (2014-2019). Programmes that have worked very well include the YES4Youth Programme, the Department of Basic Education program with the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, all the skills-development programmes, and the National Youth Development Agency. The programs established under the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, which is now in Phase 4, has been a groundbreaking addition. The partnership with Harambee, a public-private partnership, and the work of the National Youth Development Agency as an implementor has strengthened the initiative and the potential outcomes. The Youth Challenge implemented by the Jobs Fund has also been successful. All of this is brought together under the National Pathway Management Network which leverages digital technology to drive scale and transparency and eliminate corruption. The key factors in what has worked have been a stronger relationship with the private sector, a new targeted approach to skills development, a more comprehensive approach, and digital platforms.

Budget analysis shows that the funding framework for youth-employment programmes consists of conditional grants and equitable share. Using secondary data from the National Treasury and other official sources of statistics, and mindful of the difficulty created by the fact that many youth-employment programmes are initiatives rather than budgeted programmes, our analysis shows that the government allocated 24.8 billion rands (about $1.35 billion USD) in 2022/23 and 25.3 billion (about $1.38 billion) in 2023/24 to youth-employment programmes. Taking these caveats into account, our estimate is that public expenditure on youth-employment programmes represents approximately 1.2% of total government spending over 2022-2024 or 0.4% of GDP in 2023. Of these amounts, the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (a multisector action plan/programme that addresses the challenge of chronic youth unemployment) is the largest, accounting for approximately 36% of the total. That program was allocated R9 billion (about USD $492 million) in 2022/23 and 9.4 billion rands (about USD $514 million) for 2023/24 with a target of 515,905 short-term jobs over the years.

This implies a national expenditure of R17,867.37 (about USD $976.36) per short-term job. The national average of youth who benefited from work and training was 32.72%; women represented 79.9% (Mabugu et al., 2024).

4.1 The Political Economy of Youth-Employment Policies

Drawing on responses from focus-group discussions and key-informant interviews, we identified factors that hindered the effectiveness of youth-employment programmes and drew implications from them regarding the (in)adequacy and endogenising of youth-employment policies.

4.2 The (In)adequacy of Youth-Employment Policies

4.2.1 Employment-Market Situation for Young People

Government programmes and assistance: Participants had mixed views of the efficacy of government programmes aimed at reducing unemployment and improving employment. Some recognised the positive effects of initiatives such as learning opportunities, skills-development programmes, and internships. These programmes were seen as valuable avenues for experience that could improve employability. Programmes such as those offered by the National Youth Development Agency and Services SETA are appreciated for supporting aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses by providing funding and resources for start-ups. However, accessibility remains a significant concern. Participants noted that these opportunities often do not reach the broader population.

4.2.2 Governance Challenges and Nepotism/Clientelism

A prevalent sentiment was that governance challenges, clientelism, and favouritism undermined efforts to combat unemployment. Job opportunities are often allocated based on

personal connections rather than merit, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and exclusion. The participants highlighted instances in which candidates were required to pay upfront fees for government jobs, raising suspicions about the transparency and integrity of the hiring process. One participant noted, "There was a vacancy that came up under the government, after those people applied, the selected candidates were required to pay a fee up front before they could get the job, which was very disturbing." Another commented, "Now we are paying R2.50 a week so that our CVs can be pushed at the mine. We have been paying since 2023, and we are still paying to the forum." Participants highlighted instances in which job postings seemed to be controlled by a select few, leading to feelings of exclusion among those without the right connections. Some even suggested that political affiliations played a significant role in determining who is hired. One participant mentioned, "We know they are going to take ANC volunteers; we know they are the ones that are going."

4.2.3 Access to Resources and Opportunities:

Access to resources such as community libraries, internet facilities, and career-guidance services is crucial to facilitate job searches and skill development. Participants emphasised the need for more community libraries and proactive government assistance. One participant suggested: "What I think the government should do to help us in looking for jobs is to create more community libraries so that we can make copies and print out as we compile job applications and also have an opportunity to apply online." Evident disparities in access exist, and some communities lack adequate infrastructure and support systems. Limited access to transportation and financial restrictions further compound the challenges faced by unemployed individuals.

4.2.4 Critique of Government Efficacy:

Despite some positive aspects, there was widespread disillusionment with the overall effectiveness of government efforts to address unemployment. Participants expressed frustration with the disconnect between policy implementation and tangible outcomes. Criticism extended to broader issues such as inadequate job creation, lack of support for entrepreneurship, and the failure to align education and training with market demands. Participants called for more transparent, inclusive, and meaningful interventions to alleviate unemployment and empower marginalised communities.

4.2.5 Communication and Accessibility of Programmes

Awareness of Employment Programmes: Awareness of government programmes aimed at addressing youth unemployment and social issues appears to be limited. Participants mentioned programmes such as the Youth-employment service, the National Youth Service Programme, the Expanded Public Works Programme, and the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, indicating some familiarity with these initiatives, but the consensus was that information about these programmes is not adequately disseminated, especially to marginalised communities. Lack of awareness contributes to the perception that opportunities are only available to those with political connections or proximity to government officials. Participants suggested that better communication channels, increased community outreach, and streamlined application processes could improve accessibility.

Application Experiences: Many participants had applied for various programmes, including the National Youth Service Programme, Year Beyond, the Youth-employment service, and the Expanded Public Works Programme, but expressed significant frustration over the lack of responses and outcomes. Some shared experiences of applying to multiple initiatives only to receive no response or feedback. This indicates a disconnect between the

applicants and the organisations responsible for managing these programmes, leading to feelings of disillusionment and hopelessness.

Challenges in the Application Process: Navigating the application process posed significant challenges for many participants. Barriers included difficulties in accessing information about available opportunities and systemic issues within the employment landscape, such as clientelism, lack of transparency, and unequal access to opportunities based on personal connections or political associations. One participant noted, "Yes, we did, but it is really not that easy. We get so many promises that always turn out not to be true. It sounds stupid, but we still keep applying." In general, while participants applied to programmes aimed at youth employment and development, their experiences underscored the need to address issues of nepotism/clientelism, improve communication and feedback mechanisms, and ensure that opportunities are accessible to all, regardless of personal connections or political affiliations.

4.2.6 Youth Integration Initiatives

Participation Requirements: Requirements for participation in various youth-employment programmes typically include a matric certificate, a South African ID, meeting age requirements (typically 18-35 years old), a CV, and sometimes a driver's licence. Some programmes may also require participation certificates from other initiatives. Participants expressed frustration with the lack of transparency and fairness in the application process, again highlighting the ways in which personal connections played a significant role in securing opportunities, leaving those without such connections at a disadvantage.

Application Process and Systemic Issues: Despite meeting participation requirements, many applicants felt their applications were dismissed without proper evaluation. One participant expressed their frustration, "All this time, when I was applying for jobs, my CVs were thrown like this in the bin and I was thinking, oh man, how could she do that?" Participants additionally emphasised the financial burden of paying for CV preparation, transportation, and

application submissions, to no apparent avail. This systemic problem within the recruitment process undermines the efforts of many young people as they seek employment opportunities.

Programme Implementation Effectiveness: Lack of effectiveness was a major concern among key informants who pointed out that the implementation of youth-employment programmes was distant from the original plans. During the discussion, performance, consultation, execution, regional disparities, and policy adaptation gaps were cited. Potential levers to promote effective implementation include strengthening policy frameworks, aligning education with market demands, fostering entrepreneurship, and addressing the needs of marginalised groups, thereby promoting inclusivity, leveraging technology, and fostering entrepreneurship.

4.2.7 Endogenising Youth-Employment Policies

Programme Accessibility and Selection Criteria: Participants were asked to share their knowledge of the structures involved in the selection of participants in youth- employment programmes. All decision makers and more than three quarters (75%) of the influencers who responded explained that the selection of programme participants involved various factors, including implementing partners, local authorities, internal selection committees, client organisations, and political structures. The criteria for selecting participants are thus diverse and tailored to meet specific needs, ensuring the inclusion of vulnerable and marginalised groups. The process often involves community participation, recommendations from local authorities, and the adherence to criteria set by donors. The participation of vulnerable groups is a priority, with a focus on addressing the barriers to employment faced by women, people with disabilities, and orphans.

Coordination and Harmonisation of Interventions: A divided landscape emerges in perceptions of coordination of youth-employment policies in South Africa, with half of decision makers indicating a lack of mechanisms for effective coordination. Fragmentation and duplication of efforts lead to wasted resources and reduced impact. As such, "the issue was much more around coordination and eliminating duplication in order to make sure that we coordinate these programmes much better to make sure that we can have a much better impact," said one key informant. There is a call for consolidating public employment programmes under a single department for better monitoring and implementation. Some efforts, such as the National Pathway Management Network, aim to move beyond coordination to actual impact. Alignment with public sector policies and the creation of communities of practice can enhance synergy and reduce fragmentation. Continuous improvement in planning, coordination, and implementation is necessary to achieve better results.

4.2.8 Gender Dynamics of Programmes

Gender Equality in Employment Programmes: The discussion surrounding gender equality in youth-employment programs presented nuanced perspectives. Some participants believed that women should be prioritised in employment opportunities due to systemic inequalities, particularly in light of gender-based violence cases. Programmes such as the Charlotte Maxeke Foundation, which supports women entrepreneurs, were seen as crucial. Others acknowledge progress in women's participation in fields traditionally dominated by men such as mining and civil engineering, though they noted that there was still room for improvement, especially in political representation.

Perceived Barriers for Women: On the contrary, some participants argued that women still face barriers, particularly in industries such as construction, where physical demands are perceived as favouring men. Participants shared sentiments such as "No. Mostly in constructions, they prefer males to females because they say the work is hard for females."

Practical Implications of Gender Dynamics: Some participants argued that women were indeed prioritised, though others suggested that gender biases persisted, with men feeling marginalised or reluctant to apply for certain opportunities. The need for more inclusive policies and transparency in the selection processes was emphasised to ensure fair access to employment opportunities for all genders. One participant emphasised: "When there are trade opportunities, they have to be specific, saying, we are looking for 10 men and we are looking for 10 women. Because right now, even though they don't communicate, we already know that they prefer women over men." Another participant highlighted the systemic nature of these issues, stating: "In most programmes they prefer more women than men. They have higher chances than their male counterparts since most programmes involve women, such as HIV prevention." The conversation reflected a complex interplay of factors, including historical inequalities, evolving societal norms, and government policies. Although progress has been made in advancing gender equality, challenges remain in achieving true parity in youth-employment programmes, necessitating ongoing dialogue and concerted efforts to address systemic barriers and biases. To quote a participant, "The path to true parity in youth-employment programmes is paved with ongoing dialogue and collective efforts to overcome systemic barriers and biases." These words resonate with the need for continued collaboration and proactive measures to foster inclusive opportunities for all genders.

4.2.9 Budget Adequacy and Access to Funding

Perspectives on budget commitments for youth-employment programmes in South Africa varied among respondents. Although significant funds are allocated, concern remained about their effective use and impact. For example, one participant said, "We have spent too much money on things that have shown us no return. Our problem in South Africa is not the lack of money. The amount of money that South Africa has spent on youth employment projects, if this money was spent by any other country in the world, that country would be

number one. So, the problem is not the amount of money that we are spending. The problem is the amount of money we leak through the system." Major concerns were raised about the fragmented nature of funding among multiple departments and initiatives that complicated the assessment of overall spending. Despite substantial investments, the impact on reducing youth unemployment remains limited by poor coordination, duplication of efforts, and inefficiencies. Allocation and investment in youth-employment programmes are not proportional to the magnitude of the challenge. "The number of unemployed is increasing every day with company closures and some still suffer from after COVID effects," stated one key informant. In general, inefficient use and misuse of funds, along with lack of proper targeting and coordination and a failure to address such underlying issues as poverty and education, hinder programme effectiveness. Innovative funding mechanisms, such as integrated platforms for skills training, public-private partnerships, performance-based funding models, and philanthropic investments could improve the effectiveness and sustainability of youth-employment programmes.

4.2.10 Political Cycle and Interference

Political manipulation, interference, and favouritism toward supporters are significant challenges in youth-employment programmes in South Africa. This manipulation extends to local government levels, where councillors, political affiliates, and special-interest groups control recruitment lists for programmes such as the Expanded Public Works Programme. One participant had this to say regarding governance challenges: "Despite all of these though, we still have limited resources, skills deficits, bureaucratic barriers, and communications gaps, and of course corruption and wasteful and fruitless expenditure and fiscal leakages." Strategies to mitigate political influence include a strict adherence to political neutrality, the involvement of traditional and community leaders, and transparency and integrity in programme implementation. Election cycles influence youth-employment policies and -programmes, and politicians often prioritise short-term, high-visibility initiatives to garner political support,

leading to programmes that not only lack depth and sustainability but are compromised in their long-term impact and continuity. Meaningful progress would involve moving beyond political cycles and focusing on sustainable, integrated approaches that address underlying issues in the labour market.

4.2.11 Monitoring and Evaluation of Interventions

Monitoring and evaluation of youth-employment programmes is essential for accountability, effectiveness, and continuous improvement. While internal and external evaluations are conducted by various entities, the process should be multifaceted and involve feedback from programme participants, community members, and funders. They provide evidence-based data to improve programme outcomes and guide policy development.

Although respondents showed an awareness of the importance and process of monitoring and evaluation of youth- employment programmes in general, they had criticisms regarding various aspects of implementation. For example, one participant had this to say: "We do not have a proper evaluation. It is challenging to identify gaps and improve policies to have a meaningful impact on youth employment."

Concerns were raised about the manual nature of administrative records, including manual data handling, and conflicts related to the independence and coordination of programme components. Clearly, digitalised and coordinated systems are preferable. Regular updating and ensuring that administrative records are available for research can improve programme design, drive innovation, and enhance overall impact.

4.2.12 Innovation and Dealing with Disruptors

In response to questions about South Africa's coping mechanisms with real and potential disruptors of youth-employment programmes, such as digitisation and automation of planning, respondents informed us that South Africa is addressing challenges through skills

development, public-private partnerships, infrastructure development, and inclusive policies. Efforts include developing digital skills, improving internet access, and fostering innovation and research in emerging technologies. The significant evolution in youth-employment programmes includes an extended programme duration, a shift from income support to training, and an increased focus on accredited training. Implementation changes emphasise robust monitoring and evaluation, community-focused projects, and sector-specific innovations. Continuous efforts to bridge the digital divide, reskill workers, and ensure cohesive implementation of policies are crucial for leveraging the potential for technological advancement and addressing. disruptions effectively.

4.2.13 Sustainability of Youth Programmes

The sustainability of youth-employment programmes in South Africa is crucial to their long-term success and impact. Aspects vital for policy and programme design include institutional sustainability to ensure the capacity of service providers and strategic partners to maintain their work beyond initial funding periods. Comprehensive support for small and medium enterprises, including financial assistance, technical support, and mentoring, is essential. Long-term funding and support that are adapted to the evolving needs of participants and partners, as well as capacity building at the community level. Aligning programmes with government fiscal policies ensures stability amid political changes. Graduation and transition strategies help participants move from temporary programmes to permanent employment or entrepreneurial ventures. Training and employment programmes must align with market needs to improve employability and workforce sustainability. Balance of funding between donors and the government makes programmes resilient to financial fluctuations, ensuring continuous support.

Factors that ensure sustainable youth-employment programmes include addressing unemployment rates, consulting youth during policy development, and ensuring effective execution and follow-up. Better coordination among government departments and

stakeholders could avoid fragmentation and duplication of efforts. Regular policy reviews and updates are necessary to address new challenges and incorporate feedback from implementation experiences. The programmes should aim to reduce crime rates, provide economic empowerment, facilitate skill development, improve social cohesion, and support mental health and well-being. Ensuring reliable income, reputable work, respect in the workplace, and a sense of purpose are critical markers of dignified and fulfilling work. The programmes should be inclusive of marginalised groups, providing young women, people with disabilities, internally displaced people, and refugees with opportunities for economic independence and social inclusion.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Our main objective was to review and analyse the implementation of youth-employment programmes in South Africa. We used descriptive evidence from a variety of methods to explore implementation, and the views and perspectives of our respondents were instrumental in identifying the political and institutional factors that hindered the effectiveness of the youth-employment programme.

The desk review pointed to three significant characteristics of the South African youth labour market. The first is the large number of youth-employment programmes (thirty-one in total) and the large number of resources devoted to youth-employment programmes (1.22% of government expenditure). Second, most of the resources targeted at youth-employment programmes go toward increasing short-term jobs on the demand side. Third, the number of studies on youth programmes in South Africa is growing, some of which have used rigorous impact-evaluation techniques, the available studies say very little about the "governance" and "political economy" of youth-employment programmes.

The evidence from fieldwork is that the effectiveness of youth-employment programmes is hampered by factors beyond funding. Persistent challenges included political interference, insufficient coordination among state agencies, ineffective monitoring and

evaluation, and capacity challenges. As an example, labour inspections, crucial for enforcing labour standards and health and safety regulations, face capacity issues, with only a fraction of inspectors dedicated to these tasks. The effectiveness of youth-employment policies is also hampered by such constraints as economic barriers, skills mismatch, and sociocultural challenges. To enhance programme impact, strategies such as stimulating economic growth and small-business formation, aligning education with market demands, fostering entrepreneurial spirit, ensuring holistic support, developing effective reporting systems, involving the community, establishing public-private partnerships, and increasing skills-development programmes are all essential.

Our findings suggest an urgent focus on better coordinated policy frameworks and interventions that support youth employment with credible implementation plans, monitoring and evaluation, and overall accountability. In this regard, the Project Management Office of the Presidency; the Department of Employment and Labour; the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (together with the National Youth Development Agency); and the Department of Higher Education and Training should coordinate all youth-labour markets and skills programmes to foster a more integrated and effective approach in which funding follows function to provide a path for young people into the labour market. To this end, we recommend the following measures:

- Strengthen youth labour-market demand-side support by targeting higher economic growth and placing more emphasis on systemic enablers for informal and small businesses run by young people (connectivity, public infrastructure, and market access in addition to direct enterprise support and financing, e.g.)
- Enhance the inclusion of youth and other stakeholders in the planning and implementation stages to ensure programmes are responsive to actual needs.
- Implement rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks to identify and address shortcomings promptly.

- Improve balance across regions and sectors by ensuring an equitable distribution of resources and support with a focus on both formal and informal employment.
- Enhance coordination among government departments (ensuring funding follows function) and the private sector to streamline implementation and eliminate redundancy.
- Adapt policies on a regular basis to stay current and fluid, addressing new challenges and incorporating feedback for continuous improvement.
- Address economic and social barriers by providing comprehensive support measures such as transportation subsidies and childcare services to enhance programme accessibility.
- Align training with market needs by ensuring that training programmes are closely aligned with market demands to reduce skills mismatches;
- Implement stronger accountability measures to combat corruption and ensure efficient use of resources; and
- Improve framework conditions in youth labour markets through innovation and learning by channelling funds to efforts to address critical gaps in the implementation of youth-employment programmes, quantifying their magnitude and impact.

By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended measures, South Africa can enhance the effectiveness of its youth-employment programmes and significantly reduce youth unemployment, contributing to economic growth and social stability.

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VI. Appendix:

Data Description

Table 1A provides a breakdown of the focus-group-discussions sample, segmented by age, race, location/region and youth-employment-programme-beneficiary status. Most individuals (107 or 57%) fell within the age range of 25-35 years. The next largest group was those aged 15-24 years, which included seventy-six individuals (41%). The smallest age group was individuals older than 35, made up of only three individuals (2%).

In terms of racial composition, the data indicate a Black population: 166 participants in the focus-group discussions identified as Black (89%), the coloured were nineteen individuals (10%), and a single individual (1%) represented the Indian demographic. Most participants who self-identified as Black were from Gauteng Province, but other provinces were represented as well: the eastern Cape, Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northwest, Northern Cape, and Western Cape. Participants of colour were from five provinces: Eastern Cape (8), Gauteng (6), Northwest (3), KwaZulu-Natal (1), and Northern Cape (1). The sole participant of Indian descent was from the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

Table 1A also provides information on the geographical distribution of participants, who were almost equally balanced between rural and urban areas: ninety-two people (49%) were from rural regions, and ninety-four (51%) were from urban areas.

Lastly, Table 1A also details the youth-employment programme beneficiary status of the individuals. The majority of 111 individuals (60%) were not participants in a youth-employment programme, whereas seventy-five individuals (40%) were. This indicates that a significant portion of the population had not benefited from the youth-employment programme initiatives, highlighting a potential area for increased programme outreach or support.

Table 1A: Demographic Profile of Youth Participants

	Eastern Cape		Free State		Gauteng		KwaZulu-Natal		Limpopo		Mpumalanga		Western Cape		Nothern Cape		North West		Grand Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Overall	%
AGE CATEGORY																				
15-24	5	2	1	1	18	16	2	1	2	2	6	2	7	3	4	1	1	2	76	41%
25-35	1	1	2	1	19	10	6	2	13	4	12	5	6	3	6	4	8	3	107	58%
>35					1	1								1					3	2%
Total	**6**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**38**	**27**	**8**	**3**	**15**	**6**	**19**	**7**	**13**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**186**	**100%**
RACE																				
Black		1	3	2	35	24	6	3	15	6	19	7	13	7	10	4	7	4	166	89%
Coloured	6	2			3	3	1									1	2	1	19	10%
Indian							1												1	1%
Total	**6**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**38**	**27**	**8**	**3**	**15**	**6**	**19**	**7**	**13**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**186**	100%
LOCATION/REGION																				
Rural			3	2			8	3	15	6	19	7			10	5	9	5	92	49%
Urban	6	3			38	27							13	7					94	51%
Total	**6**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**38**	**27**	**8**	**3**	**15**	**6**	**19**	**7**	**13**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**186**	**100%**
YEP BENEFICIARY																				
No	2		2	1	23	19	5	1	13	5	9	1	11	7	5	2	4	1	111	60%
Yes	4	3	1	1	15	8	3	2	2	1	10	6	2		5	3	5	4	75	40%
Total	**6**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**38**	**27**	**8**	**3**	**15**	**6**	**19**	**7**	**13**	**7**	**10**	**5**	**9**	**5**	**186**	**100%**

'Source: Authors' compilations.

We interviewed seventy-one key informants from sixty-two organisations from across the nine provinces of South Africa. Table 2A provides a detailed breakdown of respondents by roles, race, and the types of organisations they represented. Of the seventy-one participants, the majority, representing 32%, were from Gauteng, while Mpumalanga was the second, accounting for 15% of the respondents. Among the provinces with the lowest representation were Eastern Cape, Limpopo, and North West, with only two interviewees (or 3%). Table 3 shows that the majority of respondents self-classified as Black, accounting for 79% of the total, followed by White respondents (13%). Indian respondents made up 7% of the total while coloured respondents accounted for the smallest proportion (1%).

Furthermore, Table 2A shows the distribution of key informants across the categories of Advisors/Influencers/Representatives of Participants, Decision Makers, and Labour Inspectorates, as well as their gender. Advisors/Influencers/Representatives of Partners constitute the majority with fifty-one respondents, making up 72% of the total, followed by Decision Makers, which account for 25%; Labour Inspectorates were 3% of the total.

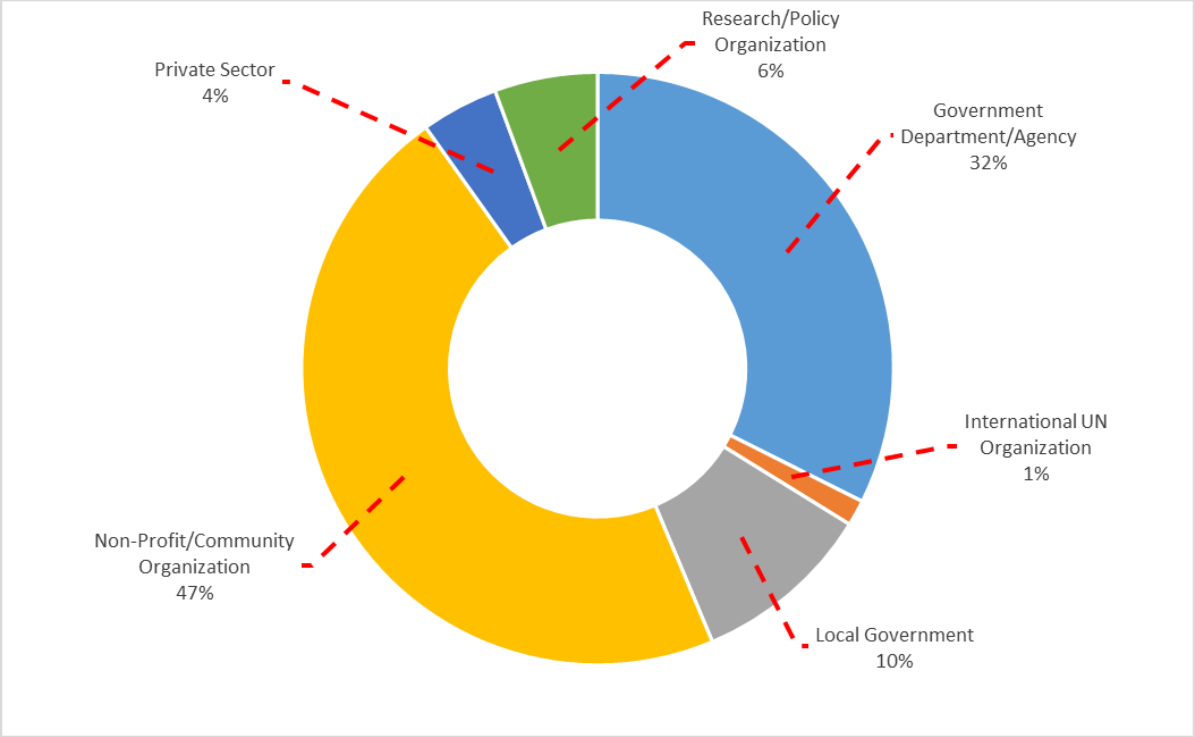
Table 2A Structure of the Key-Informant Interviews Sample

	Eastern Cape			Free State			Gauteng			KwaZulu-Natal			Limpopo			Mpumalanga			Western Cape			Nothern Cape			North West			Grand Total	
	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	F	M	PNTS	Overall	%
Respondent Category																													
Advisors/Influencer/Representatives of Beneficiaries	2			3	3	1	7	8		1	1		2			3	7		3	4		1	2	1	1	1		51	72%
Decision Makers							3	4		4	5											1	1					18	25%
Labour Inspectorate								1								1												2	3%
Total	**2**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**3**	**1**	**10**	**13**	**0**	**5**	**6**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**7**	**0**	**3**	**4**	**0**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	71	**100%**
RACE																													
Black				2	3	1	7	9		2	6		2			4	7		2	4		2	2	1	1	1		56	79%
Coloured							1																1					2	3%
Indian				1			1	2																				4	6%
White	2						1	2		3									1									9	13%
Total	**2**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**3**	**1**	**10**	**13**	**0**	**5**	**6**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**7**	**0**	**3**	**4**	**0**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	71	100%
TYPE OF ORGANISATION																													
Government Department/Agency				1	1		3	3		3	2		2			1	1		1			2	1	1		1		23	32%
International UN Organization								1																				1	1%
Local Government											1						1			3			2					7	10%
Non-Profit/Community Organization				2	2	1	6	7		2	3					3	3		2	1					1			33	46%
Private Sector	1							1									1											3	4%
Research/Policy Organization	1						1	1									1											4	6%
Total	**2**	**0**	**0**	**3**	**3**	**1**	**10**	**13**	**0**	**5**	**6**	**0**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**4**	**7**	**0**	**3**	**4**	**0**	**2**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**0**	71	100%

Source: Authors' compilations.

Figure 1A shows that the largest group of respondents came from non-profit/community organisations (33 individuals or 46% of the sample. Government Departments/Agencies were the next largest group with twenty-three respondents (32%). The local government was represented by seven respondents (10%), Research/Policy Organisations by four respondents (6%), and the Private Sector by three respondents (4%). International organisations represented in South Africa made up 1% of respondents.

Figure 1A: Institutions Represented by Key Informants



Source: Authors' compilations.