

The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention – Five Priority Actions to Accelerate Youth Pathways into the Economy Over the Next Five Years

Rudi Dicks

Head: Project Management Office, Presidency

Introduction

The most recent statistics from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey show that the rate of unemployment is 38.5% on the broad definition, its highest level in over a decade. More concerningly, the rate of unemployment for those aged between 15 and 24 years is now at 58.2%.

Youth unemployment is a national crisis that demands urgent, innovative and coordinated solutions. The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention is a direct response to the challenge that too many young people are not transitioning from learning to earning. Of the 1.2 million young people entering the labour market each year, more than 65% remain outside of employment, education and training. Those young people who do manage to access opportunities tend to zigzag on often broken pathways, falling in and out of education and short-term work so that they are unable to realise their potential and get a foothold in the economy.

Many young people who were previously disillusioned have resumed their search for work this year, causing the unemployment rate to increase as they become active in the labour market. While this suggests a renewed hope of finding work, the scale of youth unemployment requires **bold and urgent action** to provide young people with meaningful opportunities to progress.

President Ramaphosa has made addressing this crisis one of his foremost priorities. **A growing youth population should not be a threat to South Africa (SA)**, but rather its greatest source of potential. Young people hold the key to transforming our economy, boosting growth and fostering creativity and innovation. They are essential to increasing productivity and improving the livelihoods of all South Africans.

The Presidency has therefore established a Project Management Office (PMO) to coordinate and drive an integrated plan to create two million new jobs for young people during the next decade, over and above average job growth. The aim of this plan is to expand the range of opportunities available to young people - whether in further education and training, skills development, employment, work experience, entrepreneurship, or youth service - so that we can work towards a South Africa in which **every young person has a place to go**.

The depth and persistence of youth unemployment, as well as its structural nature, are such that minor projects and isolated initiatives will not make a meaningful difference. Effective solutions must therefore support and give prominence to what is working in the system, encourage innovation, and catalyse changes in the system that benefit millions - not hundreds or thousands - of young people over the next decade.

“The fact that the unemployment rate among young South Africans is more than 50% is a national crisis that demands urgent, innovative and coordinated solutions...”

*It is therefore essential that we proceed without delay **to implement a comprehensive plan – driven and coordinated from the Presidency – to create no fewer than two million new jobs for young people** within the next decade. This plan will work across government departments and all three tiers of government, in partnership with the private sector.”*

- President Ramaphosa

Five key interventions over five years

The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention is government's plan to address this challenge. It is designed to effectively transition young people into the labour market, aiming to significantly reduce the high rate of youth unemployment. It is intended to coordinate, enhance, and scale up existing programmes across government and through close partnerships with the private sector. Bringing together a wide range of partners within and beyond government, it is the largest and most comprehensive plan to address youth employment in South Africa's democratic history.

To pursue this objective and to unlock the energy and potential of young people, we will implement five priority actions over five years to catalyse long-term change:

- 1. Building a national Pathway Management Network** for young work-seekers to view and access available learning and work opportunities, and receive a range of support services and work readiness training to help them navigate into employment and other economic opportunities. Young people will receive a basic package of support in person, online and over the phone, complete online assessments and training and be matched to a wide range of opportunities.
- 2. Implementing agile, demand-led workforce development programmes** that allow young people to develop the capabilities required to take up

new opportunities in growth sectors such as global business services, digital and technology, tourism, agriculture, and social services over five years, and support those sectors to expand. This will be achieved through short learning interventions matched to real demand in the economy, in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the National Skills Fund (NSF), private sector bodies such as the Public-Private Growth Initiative and the relevant Sector Education Training Authority.

- 3. Supporting the township and rural economy** by creating inclusive markets in opportunity areas such as the food economy, the green economy, health, and education. To enable self-employment and enterprise, focus will be placed on systemic enablers such as connectivity, public infrastructure and market access in addition to the direct enterprise support and financing provided by the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) and its agencies.

- 4. Providing opportunities for workplace experience** through the Youth Employment Service, and ensuring that every student enrolled in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges can access work-integrated learning to complete their qualifications and enter the workplace.

- 5. Revitalising the National Youth Service** to create opportunities for young people to meaningfully contribute to their communities, develop critical skills required to participate effectively in the economy, build confidence and expand their networks and social capital. A Presidential Youth Service programme will channel young people's energy into advancing social cohesion, nation building and development.



Focus on implementation

The plan will be supported by the Project Management Office (PMO) in the Presidency, which will manage delivery and performance, working closely with implementing departments and agencies. This will allow for a clear line of sight and reporting to the President on the implementation of key priorities coordinated by the Presidency. A working group has been established drawing in leading experts from across government departments, the private sector, social partners and young people themselves, which has developed work streams for each pillar of the plan.

What makes this intervention different from past government programmes? The implementation of this plan is guided by **five core principles**, which ensure that it will improve outcomes and achieve greater scale:

1. The intervention *builds on existing policies, plans, and agreements* and focuses on addressing gaps in the policy landscape;
2. It is *driven from the Presidency*, and coordinated by the Project Management Office to ensure effective accountability for implementation;
3. It brings together a wide range of partners, and *breaks down silos* between government departments, between the levels of government, and between government and the private sector;
4. It is *designed around young people*, and is responsive to their needs and concerns; and
5. It addresses constraints to job creation on *both the supply and demand side* by maximizing the allocation of resources.

The overriding focus will be on **rapid and effective implementation**, and the coordinating and convening power of the PMO - with the authority to act quickly to unblock bottlenecks and facilitate necessary interventions - will ensure that the objectives of the plan are met.

Targeted outcomes

During the first **five years** of the programme, the following key outcomes will be achieved:

- Three million young work-seekers between the ages of 15 and 35 will have engaged in a National Pathway Management Network and accessed services to help them grow their employability and identify and pursue work opportunities;
- 1.5 million temporary, paid work opportunities will have been created (including one million work-based placements, 250 000 work-integrated learning opportunities and 250 000 service opportunities); and
- 500 000 young people will be engaged in sustainable work opportunities through workforce development programmes.