



THE PRESIDENCY
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



PRESIDENTIAL
YOUTH
EMPLOYMENT
INTERVENTION

LEARNING BRIEF

Closing the gender gap in Youth Employment:

Exploring gendered labour market outcomes amongst young people in South Africa.



The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), hosted a Women's Month learning event entitled **Closing the gender gap in Youth Employment: Exploring gendered labour market outcomes amongst young people in South Africa**. Participants convened to explore gender disparities facing young women in South Africa's labour market. The event featured multiple panels and discussions involving key stakeholders from government, civil society, and the private sector.

Participants unpacked the barriers faced by young women in the labour market and identified actionable strategies for improving the economic participation of young women. This brief synthesises key learnings that emerged from the event to inform both implementers and policymakers.





Systemic barriers facing women in the labour market

Despite the implementation of numerous interventions to foster women’s economic empowerment, significant gender disparities remain in the participation of young people in the labour market. According to the Quarter 2 (Q2) 2024 Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), the labour force participation rate for women stood at 55.8% compared with 65,6% for men.

The overall rate of women’s labour force participation has increased over the last 10 years from 50,9% in Q2 2014 to 55,8% in Q2 2024. However, women continue to remain less likely to participate in the labour force and experience higher rates of unemployment in comparison to men. The systemic barriers that contribute to these disparities are outlined below:

WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN UNPAID CARE WORK

Empirical evidence shows that women engage in disproportionately more unpaid care work than men. According to the 2010 Time Use Survey, young women engage in significantly more unpaid care work such as

cooking, cleaning and caring for dependents, than young men. This limits young women’s ability to become economically active and increases the opportunity cost of their participation in the labour market.



Back at home, where a girl child is expected to be [the] clean[er.] In the house, a girl child is expected to be cooking while the male child is playing. So in the streets, you [can] expect to do a lot of things, and it takes even your growing years. I mean, when you are older and stronger, you still feel like ‘I need to be that anchor in the house’ while the male child is doing...oh, absolutely nothing, I can say that.

– **Young People’s Perspectives: Alina Maseko**



In addition, young women are more likely to be married and when in partnered living arrangements, they are more likely to live with more household members and dependents. Due to young women taking on disproportionately more unpaid care work, being married and caring for more household members further constrains the time available to participate in the labour market.

Conversely, young men are less likely to live in a household with dependents, less likely to be married and when married, spend more time engaging in paid labour activities¹. This indicates that the unpaid labour of young women often supports the participation of other household members in the labour market.



¹ Presentation of analysis conducted by Dr. Odile Mackett



Systemic barriers facing women in the labour market

LACK OF ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

Lack of access to affordable childcare services, particularly Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, remains a major hurdle for women caregivers seeking employment. Many women are unable to afford to substitute childcare responsibilities by paying for ECD services.

This lack of ability to substitute the time spent on childcare with participation in the labour market means women are less likely to participate in the labour market.

GENDER PAY GAP

Despite having on average higher education outcomes than young men, young women consistently earn less than young men across all sectors. According to research conducted by Harambee, on average, young women within Harambee's database earn at least 6%² less than young men. These gendered pay disparities contribute to young women having significantly lower lifetime earnings than men and thus having less buying power and less disposable income to direct to savings and investments.

Key interventions needed to enable women's labour market participation:

Despite the systemic barriers that inhibit young women's labour market participation and overall economic agency, a number of key catalytic interventions were identified to foster gender equality in the South African labour market. These interventions focus on tackling gender disparities in the labour market both at the policy level and the individual programme level. Some of these interventions include:

REDUCING REGULATORY BARRIERS IN THE ECD SECTOR

The ECD sector plays a key role in supporting women's economic and labour market participation. The ECD sector has the potential to create earning opportunities in the form of jobs and enterprise opportunities for young women. In addition, most community-based early learning centres in South Africa are run by women and employ women.

By addressing the complex regulatory requirements for registering ECD centres, more community-based early learning centres will be able to access the government subsidies required to support the expansion and professionalisation of their operations.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in partnership with the Presidency's Red Tape Reduction Unit has implemented an ECD registration drive and several other interventions to reduce the regulatory barriers faced by community-based early learning centres.

By reducing the red tape that community-based early learning centres face in registering their operations, the DBE and the Presidency are working to ensure more community-based early learning centres can access government subsidies and provide affordable ECD services to women in their communities.

² Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (2024) Internal SA Youth Network data / Breaking Barriers Publication August 2024 / Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (2024) / Breaking Barriers Publications August 2022 & August 2023



Key interventions needed to enable women's labour market participation:

UNIVERSALISING ACCESS TO ECD FOR ALL WOMEN CAREGIVERS

Access to ECD services remains prohibitively expensive for many women caregivers in South Africa. Regulatory barriers to registering community-based early learning centres and the subsequent lack of access to government subsidies prohibit women from setting up early learning centres in communities.



I joined the ECD centre for a month, I was with a home-based care centre where I met with child-headed households. It's not nice. It's bad to the point where some of these children sleep on hungry stomachs, and some of these children sleep on the floor with no blankets. And you think to yourself, how did I make it? How can I make a difference?

– **Young People's Perspectives: Nokuphiwa Vilakazi**



This in turn means that many women in poorer communities do not live in proximity to affordable quality ECD services. This in addition to quality ECD services being prohibitively costly for poorer women means that they cannot afford to enrol their dependents in ECD services. Thus, more funding is required in the national budget to not only increase the percentage of centres accessing government subsidies but also to increase the value of the subsidies to community-based early

learning centres so that they can provide affordable ECD services to women in poorer communities. By enabling women to substitute their time use on childcare for participation in the labour market, further investment in the ECD sector has the potential to catalyse young women's labour market participation across all sectors of the economy.





Key interventions needed to enable women's labour market participation:

GENDER-SENSITIVE DESIGN OF PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Many young women face structural challenges to participating in the labour market which include: time poverty, gender-based violence, and gender biases in hiring processes. Thus it is critical to design programmatic interventions that are gender-sensitive to mitigate these structural challenges.

Gender-sensitive programmatic elements include subsidising childcare support, providing safe transport options, offering flexible working conditions and other measures that reduce the opportunity cost for young women to participate in their programmes.



Young women care for children more than we realise. So in the programme itself, we have to help them figure out what their childcare solution is. How are we going to ask a young woman, once we give her a skill and she doesn't have any child care solution, to go and work, you know?

– **Divya Vasant, Chief Executive Officer of AMAZI SHEtribe, Jobs Boost Implementing Partner**



Through designing and implementing gender-sensitive programmes, implementers can foster women's labour market participation and increase the likelihood of success of programmes targeted at women.

LEGISLATIVE INTERVENTIONS TO ENSURE GENDER PAY EQUITY

Legislative interventions to enforce pay equity across sectors are essential for addressing gender disparities in the labour market. This includes mandatory pay transparency policies, requiring companies to disclose pay scales and gender-based wage disparities. Additionally, legislation should impose penalties for non-compliance and provide mechanisms for women to challenge unequal pay practices.

Furthermore, incorporating gender pay equity audits into existing labour laws can ensure that both private and public sector employers actively work toward closing the gender wage gap, thus creating a more inclusive and fair labour market for young women.





Conclusion

The Women's Month learning event underscored the need for collective action to address gender disparities facing young women in the South African labour market. Implementers, policymakers, and civil society organisations must collaborate to create a more inclusive economy that values women's contributions. By expanding childcare access, promoting gender equality in wages, and supporting women in high-demand sectors, South Africa can unlock the potential of millions of young women, driving economic growth and social progress.



The Presidential Youth Employment Intervention is funded from the fiscus and is implemented by participating departments. Strategic oversight is provided by the Project Management Office in the Presidency. Development partners provide technical and research support to the PYEI.



The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH supports the monitoring and evaluation of the PYEI as well as the dissemination of results.



Acknowledgements

Speakers	
Minister Sindiswe Chikunga	Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
Dr. Odile Mackett	Associate Professor of Economics, University of South Africa
Boitumelo Motsoatsoe	Head of Communications and Public Relations, Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator
Waseem Carrim	CEO of the National Youth Development Agency
Benedikt Hartmann	Economic Cooperation Division of the German Embassy
Bianca Peters	Implementation Manager, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Panels Discussions

Young People's Panel	
Facilitator: Kristal Duncan Williams - Project Lead at Youth Capital	
Cayla Pillay	Nokuphiwa Vilakazi
Chriszelda Scheepers	Alina Maseko
Lungile Dlongolo	Khanyisile Mlanzana
Ofentse Pitso	

PYEI Implementers Panel	
Facilitator: Kristal Duncan Williams - Project Lead at Youth Capital	
Beverley Andrews	CEO, Charisma Foundation
Ike Makae	Chief Servant, Youth Life
Divya Vasant	Founder and CEO, AMAZI SHEtribe
Rebotile Matoane	ECD Team Lead at Seriti
Sandy Dlamini Zhanda	Programme Lead at Seriti

ECD Panel	
Facilitator: Tshego Walker - Director of the PYEI	
Dr. Janeli Kotzé	Acting Director, ECD, Department of Basic Education
Zaheera Mohamed	CEO, Ilifa Labantwana
Rebotile Matoane	ECD Team Lead at Seriti