

MEMORANDUM

PEPs 4 Youth: Re Squeeze(eng) In!

There is work. Pay us in it.

#PEPs4Youth #PayUsInWork #1MillionJobs

TO:

The President of the Republic of South Africa
The Cabinet of the Republic of South Africa
National Treasury
The Minister of Finance
The Minister of Employment and Labour
Chairs of the Appropriations and Finance Committees
Members of Parliament

A Call to Protect, Fund, and Scale Public Employment Programmes for Young People

Introduction

South Africa is facing a deep and persistent youth unemployment crisis. Millions of young people are actively seeking work, yet the economy continues to exclude them. This is not due to a lack of willingness to work. It is the result of a structural shortage of opportunities.

Public Employment Programmes (PEPs) have proven to be one of the most direct and effective ways to connect young people to work, income, and pathways into the economy. However, recent budget decisions threaten to undermine these programmes at a time when they are needed most.

Through the PEPs 4 Youth campaign, we are calling on the government to act with urgency and intention.

The Crisis

Youth unemployment remains extremely high, with millions of young people excluded from employment, education, or training.

The number of young people entering the labour market continues to grow, while opportunities remain limited.

Many young people spend months – even years – searching for work without success.

The cost of looking for work – including transport, food, and data – continues to rise, making participation in the labour market itself increasingly difficult.

This is not a temporary challenge. It is a structural crisis.

The Opportunity

South Africa does not have a shortage of work to be done.

Schools require support staff and teaching assistants

Communities require care workers and social support

Public infrastructure requires maintenance and development

Environmental and community services require labour

The arts and creative sector requires practitioners

Public Employment Programmes were designed to meet some and more of these needs – connecting unemployed people to socially valuable work while providing income and experience. These programmes are not theoretical; they exist, and they provide socio-economic value.

The Proof

Programmes under the Presidential Employment Stimulus – including:

The Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI)

The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP)

The Community Work Programme (CWP)

The Social Employment Fund (SEF)

have created work opportunities at scale and delivered tangible benefits across communities. They have:

Provided income to young people

Supported schools, communities, and social services

Created pathways into further employment and skills development

**Where opportunities are made available, young people respond in large numbers.
The constraint is not demand – it is supply.**

The Threat

Despite clear evidence of impact, funding for Public Employment Programmes is being reduced or remains uncertain.

The Basic Education Employment Initiative has seen a significant reduction in funding, effectively removing large-scale work opportunities.

Parts of the creative sector have been defunded.

Other programmes continue to operate under short-term, uncertain funding cycles.

This has immediate consequences:

Loss of income for young people

Disruption to schools and communities

Reduced capacity across social and public systems

A permanent crisis is being met with temporary and uncertain funding.

Our Demand

We call on the government to take urgent and decisive action to protect and scale Public Employment Programmes.

We demand:

A ring-fenced Public Employment Programmes budget:

Funding must be protected and allocated specifically to PEPs, ensuring it is not reduced or reallocated.

A multi-year funding framework:

Public employment programmes must be funded over multiple years to ensure stability, continuity, effective planning, and sustained impact.

At least 1 million funded opportunities annually for young people:

This target must be clearly defined, measurable, and aligned to the scale of the crisis.

Clear accountability mechanisms:

The government must publish targets, timelines, and progress reports on youth employment outcomes.

Why This Matters

Public Employment Programmes are not charity, and they are not temporary relief. They are:

A bridge into the economy

A source of dignity and income

A tool for delivering essential public and community services

A driver of local economic activity

**Failure to fund and scale these programmes is not a neutral decision.
It is a decision to limit access to opportunities for young people.**

Conclusion

South Africa stands at a critical moment.

Some of the solutions to youth unemployment are known. The programmes exist. The demand is undeniable.

What is required now is political will and fiscal commitment.

We call on the government to re-squeeze young people into the economy – not through promises, but through funded, scalable, and sustained opportunities.

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