THE JOBS FUND

SOUTH AFRICA·SIYASEBENZA

August 2026

Siyasebenza

Introduction by Najwah Allie-Edries, Head of the Jobs Fund

The nature of work is evolving. As technology, entrepreneurship and new business models reshape labour markets, young people are increasingly finding opportunities beyond traditional employment.

This edition of *Siyasebenza*, under the theme **Youth at Work: Unlocking Opportunities in the Freelance and Creative Economy**, explores how innovation, skills development and enterprise support are expanding pathways into meaningful economic participation.

The stories in this edition demonstrate that creating sustainable livelihoods requires more than technical training. It requires connecting young people to markets, professional networks and practical opportunities that enable them to build careers and businesses in emerging sectors of the economy. From digital storytelling and community engagement to the creative industries and the growing gig economy, these examples illustrate how targeted partnerships are equipping young people with the skills, confidence and support needed to thrive in a changing world of work.

As the Jobs Fund continues to invest in innovative employment models, these stories reaffirm that expanding economic participation goes beyond creating jobs to creating opportunities for young people to realise their potential, build sustainable livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to South Africa's economic growth.

Najwah

Najwah Allie-Edries
Head of the Jobs Fund

About the Jobs Fund

The National Treasury established the Jobs Fund in June 2011 to support innovative initiatives and approaches to job creation. The R9 billion fund operates on challenge-fund principles, and all funding allocations are made on a competitive basis through pre-defined criteria in a transparent and open manner.

Once-off grants are awarded to projects that demonstrate sustainable job-creation potential and project partners are required to match the grant allocation at a ratio of 1:0.5 or higher.

The Jobs Fund is not a mass employment programme, nor is it intended to tackle long-term structural causes of low growth and unemployment. Instead, it provides a targeted programme of support for effective labour market interventions that create sustainable employment.

About Siyasebenza

Siyasebenza is the Jobs Fund's quarterly newsletter. *Siyasebenza* is an isiZulu word meaning "we are working".

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PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

Creating Opportunity Through Storytelling and Digital Entrepreneurship

When Morena Mofokeng reflects on his life before joining Sunshine Cinema's Spark Impact Programme, he remembers feeling uncertain about his future. Growing up in Orange Farm, he watched youth unemployment, gender-based violence, and social injustice shape the lives of people around him. Quiet and introverted, he struggled to find his identity and saw the film and media industry as simply out of reach.

"I was looking for a way in, but there was no clear path," he recalls.

Today, Morena is a confident Impact Facilitator, filmmaker and entrepreneur who has worked on SABC1's Daily Thetha, partnered with global organisations such as the National Geographic Society and Disney, and leads community dialogues on mental health, gender-based violence, climate justice and the empowerment of young men. His journey illustrates what becomes possible when young people are equipped not only with skills but also with opportunities to apply them.

His story is one of many emerging from Sunshine Cinema's Spark Impact Programme. Founded on the belief that storytelling can drive both social and economic change, Sunshine Cinema created the programme to address a challenge that extends beyond unemployment. Many young people possess talent and ambition but remain excluded from meaningful economic participation because they lack professional networks, practical experience and access to markets.

Picture: Morena Mofokeng, Sunshine Cinema, Spark Facilitator, with a group of children.

Rather than focusing solely on technical film production, the programme develops media entrepreneurs who use storytelling to facilitate dialogue, mobilise communities and create digital content for organisations working across conservation, education, health and community development. Through intensive training and continued mentorship, participants build skills in impact facilitation, digital storytelling, media production, communications, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, event management and digital marketing.

These skills are immediately applied through real-world assignments, enabling participants to build portfolios, gain professional experience and generate income.

Since its inception in 2021, Sunshine Cinema has trained and supported 120 young people through its innovative model. Together, they have delivered more than 1,128 community screenings, engaged 44,795 audience members, and generated R2.78 million in participant income. Graduates have gone on to establish freelance careers, launch businesses and secure work with respected organisations across South Africa's creative and development sectors.

What sets the programme apart is that the learning does not end once the training is complete.

Through Sunshine Cinema's Impact Facilitator Network, graduates remain connected to mentorship, paid gig opportunities, professional networks and enterprise support. The model recognises that while training creates potential, sustainable livelihoods depend on continued access to markets and clients.

Recognising the potential of this innovative model, the Jobs Fund partnered with Sunshine Cinema following the organisation's successful application to the 11th Call for Proposals in 2023. Implementation began in 2024, enabling the programme to expand its reach and strengthen its long-term sustainability.

The Jobs Fund's partnership with Sunshine Cinema to date*

R8.4 million
Jobs Fund funding

R5.5 million
Matched funding

137
Jobs, Placements and Internships

(*Q4 FY25/26 figures)

Beyond funding, the partnership has enabled Sunshine Cinema to strengthen its operating systems, expand training opportunities, improve monitoring and evaluation, and generate evidence demonstrating that storytelling and community engagement can become viable pathways to entrepreneurship and employment.

As Sydelle Willow Smith, Co-Founder of Sunshine Cinema, reflected, "The Jobs Fund believed in this model before many others did. Its investment helped us prove that storytelling can create livelihoods and laid the foundation for a new generation of youth-owned creative enterprises."

The programme also demonstrates an important lesson for South Africa's evolving labour market. While traditional employment opportunities remain constrained, the creative economy continues to generate demand for facilitators, digital storytellers, communicators and community engagement specialists. By equipping young people with practical, market-relevant skills and connecting them to real clients, Sunshine Cinema is helping build a generation of entrepreneurs capable of creating their own opportunities.

Building South Africa's Creative Economy

South Africa's creative economy has long been recognised for its extraordinary talent. From theatre productions and live music to festivals and technical production, the sector showcases the country's creativity while enriching communities and preserving cultural expression. Yet for many artists, technicians and creative entrepreneurs, turning talent into a sustainable livelihood has remained one of the sector's greatest challenges.

Work is often seasonal, contracts are short-term, and opportunities are concentrated in a handful of cities. For young people entering the industry, breaking into professional networks and securing consistent work can be difficult.

The Festival Enterprise Catalyst (FEC) was established to address this. Led by the National Arts Festival, the initiative is creating a more connected and resilient creative economy. Rather than viewing festivals as standalone events, the Festival Enterprise Catalyst links South Africa's major arts festivals into a national circuit that enables productions, artists and technical professionals to travel across provinces, extending the life of creative work while creating longer periods of employment.

The approach addresses one of the biggest barriers facing the sector: consistency.

A performer who may previously have worked for only one festival each year can now participate in multiple festivals across the country. Likewise, theatre productions that may once have ended after a single run are given opportunities to tour, reach new audiences and generate sustained income for everyone involved, from performers and directors to lighting technicians, sound engineers and production managers. Once-off music gigs have become tours, supported by Concerts SA's administered music mobility grants, enabling musicians to access new markets locally and across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

The result is a stronger creative ecosystem that supports both artistic excellence and enterprise development.

Recognising the potential of this collaborative model, the Jobs Fund partnered with the Festival Enterprise Catalyst following the consortium's successful application to the Fund's 11th Call for Proposals in 2023, with implementation beginning in 2024. This provided the resources needed to scale the initiative while demonstrating that the creative economy can be a credible driver of enterprise development and employment.

Over the past two years, the Festival Enterprise Catalyst has supported the development of

17 new theatre productions,

which have collectively toured

39 times

across South Africa.

Through its music mobility fund,

112 musical acts

have been supported in staging

345 performances while

86 jam sessions

have provided musicians with opportunities to perform, collaborate, and build professional networks. The programme has also delivered informal training to

342 participants,

equipping emerging creatives with practical skills in production management, arts administration, crowdfunding, technical theatre, marketing and business development.

These investments also recognise that creative careers require business skills, professional networks and access to markets that enable individuals to build sustainable freelance careers and creative enterprises.

The programme's collaborative model has also transformed how the sector operates. Instead of each festival commissioning productions independently and absorbing the financial risk, festival partners now share resources, infrastructure, and

The Jobs Fund's partnership with FEC to date*

R9.7 million
Jobs Fund funding

R9.7 million
Matched funding

1 108
Jobs, Placements and Internships

(*Q4 FY25/26 figures)

expertise. This reduces duplication, lowers production costs and creates a more sustainable environment in which productions can thrive beyond a single event.

The Festival Enterprise Catalyst is also helping young South Africans prepare for careers that extend beyond the festival stage. Participants receive practical, industry-aligned training in production management, technical theatre, arts journalism, music touring, fundraising and entrepreneurship. More importantly, they gain consecutive work opportunities that allow them to build professional portfolios, establish businesses, access finance and compete in an increasingly dynamic creative economy.

Looking ahead, the Festival Enterprise Catalyst believes the model can grow even further. Its ambition is to expand the national touring circuit, deepen enterprise development and create even more opportunities for young artists, technicians and creative entrepreneurs to participate in South Africa's cultural economy.

The partnership with the Jobs Fund has demonstrated that, beyond memorable performances, strategic investment in the creative sector creates businesses, strengthens local economies, supports tourism and provides young people with practical pathways into sustainable employment and inclusive growth.

Navigating the Legal Landscape of Youth Participation in the Gig Economy

Understanding your rights in the world of freelance and gig work

The gig economy is changing the way many young South Africans earn a living. From ride-hailing and food delivery to graphic design, filmmaking, software development and content creation, more people are choosing flexible, project-based work instead of traditional full-time employment.

For many young people, the gig economy offers an opportunity to earn an income, build experience and even start a business. However, it also comes with legal responsibilities and risks that every freelancer or gig worker should understand.

WHAT IS THE GIG ECONOMY?

The gig economy consists of short-term or project-based work, in which people are paid for completing specific tasks rather than receiving a monthly salary from a single employer.

There are two broad types of gig work:

- **Platform-based work**, where digital platforms connect workers directly with customers. Examples include ride-hailing, food delivery, and home maintenance services.
- **Creative and professional freelance work**, where individuals such as photographers, filmmakers, graphic designers, writers, software developers and consultants provide services to different clients on a project basis.

While this type of work offers flexibility and independence, it also means workers are often responsible for managing their own finances, taxes and business affairs.

EMPLOYEE OR INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR?

One of the most important legal questions in the gig economy is whether someone is an **employee** or an **independent contractor**.

Employees are protected by South Africa's labour laws, including rights relating to minimum employment standards, leave and protection against unfair dismissal.

Independent contractors, on the other hand, generally operate their own businesses. They are responsible for managing their own work, paying taxes and providing their own equipment. In most cases, they do not enjoy the same legal protections as employees.

Although many digital platforms classify workers as independent contractors, South African courts have ruled that labels alone are not enough. What matters is the actual working relationship.

Recent court decisions involving Uber drivers and other contract workers have confirmed that courts will consider factors such as who controls the work, how payments are made and how independent the worker truly is. This means that every working arrangement should be assessed on its own facts rather than relying only on the wording of a contract.

COMMON LEGAL RISKS FOR YOUNG GIG WORKERS

As the gig economy continues to grow, young people should be aware of several important legal considerations.

LIMITED LABOUR PROTECTION

Many gig workers are not covered by the same labour protections as employees. This may mean they are not entitled to paid leave, unemployment benefits or protection against unfair dismissal. Understanding your employment status is therefore essential.

CONTRACTS MATTER

Many freelancers begin work based on informal agreements or verbal discussions. This can lead to disputes over payment, deadlines or ownership of work.

Before accepting a project, ensure there is a written agreement that clearly sets out:

- the work to be completed;
- payment terms and deadlines;
- ownership of the final product;
- how either party may end the agreement; and
- how disputes will be resolved.

A clear contract protects both the client and the freelancer.

MANAGING YOUR FINANCES AND TAX

Gig work often provides irregular income. While this offers flexibility, it also requires careful financial planning. Freelancers remain responsible for meeting their tax obligations under South African law. Keeping accurate financial records, saving for tax payments and seeking professional advice when necessary can help avoid future penalties.

PROTECTING YOUR CREATIVE WORK

For many freelancers, their ideas and creative work are their greatest assets. Whether you produce films, photographs, designs, music or written content, it is important to agree upfront who will own the intellectual property once the work is completed. Without clear contractual terms, ownership may belong to the client rather than the creator.

CREATING SAFER PATHWAYS INTO THE GIG ECONOMY

While the gig economy presents legal challenges, structured support can help young people participate with greater confidence. Programmes such as Sunshine Cinema's Spark Impact Programme and the Festival Enterprise Catalyst combine practical work opportunities with mentorship, enterprise development and financial literacy, helping participants better understand both the opportunities and responsibilities that come with self-employment. Such initiatives equip participants to build careers that are both creative and commercially sustainable.

Jobs Fund Performance Update: 30 June 2026

FUNDING

OVERVIEW

R23.7 billion
total portfolio size

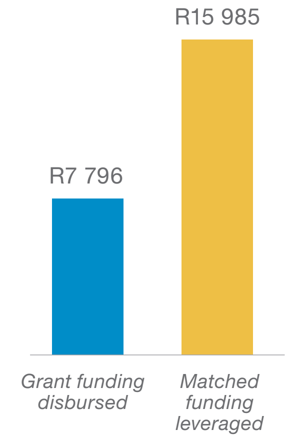
R7.8 billion
grant funding disbursed

R16.0 billion
matched funding leveraged from partners

1 : 2,05
matched funding ratio

R39 million
average grant disbursed per project

Total funding for job creation (R millions)

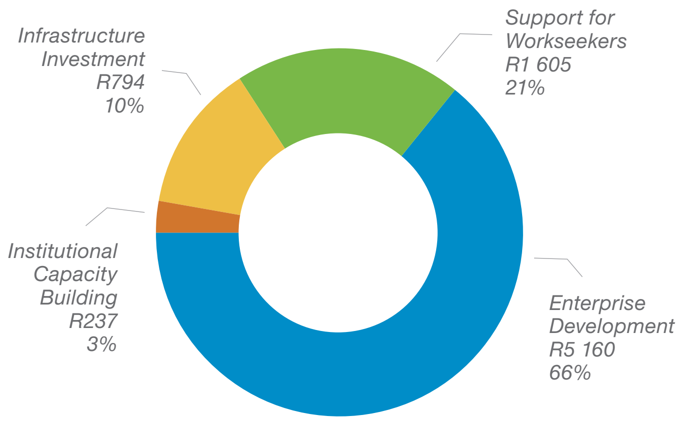


COST PER JOB

R23 755
grant cost per job
(includes the grant disbursed +
Jobs Fund operating costs – training costs)

R25 471
grant cost per job
(includes the grant disbursed +
Jobs Fund operating costs + training costs)

Grant disbursed by funding window (R million)

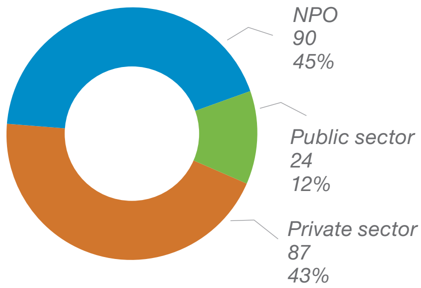


JOBS FUND PARTNERS

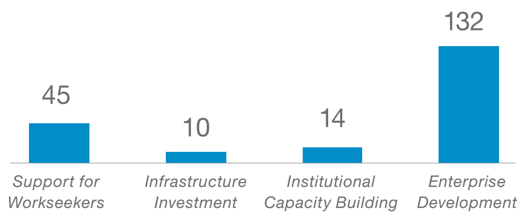
OVERVIEW

201
contracted projects

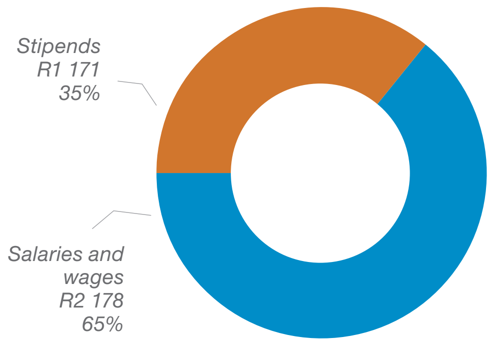
Projects by implementer type



Projects by funding window

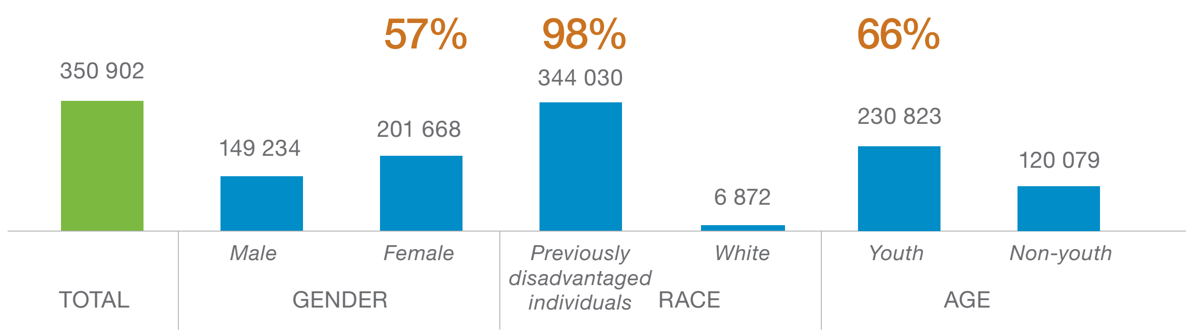


Salaries & Wages, and Stipends (R million)



JOB CREATION

All Jobs, including Permanent, Seasonal, Fixed-Term and Internships



Note: The Fund, through its interventions, also supported SMMEs (63 527) and emerging farmers (16 816), and 610 168 participants were supported with job-related training.
Source: Jobs Fund database (showing actual figures reported by projects as at 30 June 2026)