



South Africa Siyasebenza



Reflections from the
Head of the 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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Siyasebenza

Building sustainable futures through learning, well-being, and inclusion


Economic inclusion, social resilience, and human dignity are often approached as separate development priorities. In practice, the most meaningful and lasting impact emerges when these elements are intentionally advanced together.

This edition of Siyasebenza explores how that convergence is taking shape across the Jobs Fund's portfolio, where learning, healing, and opportunity are being integrated to unlock more inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

Under the theme Growing Impact: Learning, Healing, and Human Dignity, the Q4 newsletter reflects on the depth and complexity of development in contexts shaped by inequality, vulnerability, and structural constraints. It brings together stories and insights that demonstrate how economic participation is strengthened when individuals are supported not only with skills and jobs, but also with the social and emotional foundations required to sustain progress over time. From early childhood development that shapes lifelong trajectories, to mental health support that enables learners to remain engaged in education, to agricultural interventions that restore both livelihoods and dignity, this edition highlights a more holistic approach to impact.

As the Jobs Fund continues to operate in an evolving, often uncertain environment, these reflections offer practical insight into what it

takes to build interventions that are responsive, resilient, and grounded in the realities of the people they serve. The experiences captured in this edition reinforce that sustainable outcomes are enabled by strong partnerships, adaptive implementation models, and a commitment to lasting impact.

This edition invites readers to engage with lessons that are both practical and forward-looking. It affirms that growing impact requires intention, continuous learning, and a recognition that dignity, well-being, and economic opportunity are deeply interconnected. While job creation remains central to the Jobs Fund's mandate, the stories in this edition remind us that true progress is reflected in restored confidence, strengthened communities, and individuals' ability to participate meaningfully in shaping their own futures. 

Najwah

Najwah Allie-Edries
Head of the Jobs Fund

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

How The Unlimited Child is giving South Africa's youngest citizens the start they deserve

South Africa is regarded as the most unequal country in the world.¹ For children growing up and spending their foundational years in low-income areas, under-resourced and inadequately supported care environments, the consequences they endure compound across their lifetime.

The Unlimited Child was established with a clear conviction: unlocking a world of possibilities for children and communities by laying a strong foundation. They have built one of the most extensive and evidence-backed early childhood development (ECD) support networks in the country.

Through the Jobs Fund-supported Early Learning Social Impact project, there is now more supporting research, evidence, and learnings about what is possible when investment in people is matched with a willingness to go where the need is greatest.

Advancing ECD through partnership and innovation

South Africa's commitment to early childhood development is enshrined in the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) ECD mandate. Central to this commitment is the Bana Pele ECD Registration Drive, a national programme to register every ECD centre to ensure that every child has access to quality learning, a safe and nurturing environment, and good nutrition.

The Unlimited Child aligns with these priorities and is actively advancing them on the ground. It also occupies a rare position: it shapes national policy and translates it into action across all nine provinces. From supporting centre managers to understanding registration requirements, to facilitating registration clinics within community clusters, to strengthening the documentation, health and safety, and practitioner quality standards that registration assessors evaluate, The Unlimited Child is doing the work that turns government commitment into lived reality for children and communities.

¹ International Center for Transitional Justice, South Africa Most Unequal Country in the World: Report, <https://www.ictj.org/node/35024> (accessed 30 April 2026)



The Unlimited Child and Jobs Fund staff

**THE UNLIMITED
Child**

Impact of Jobs Fund's partnership with The Unlimited Child



R6.1 million

Jobs Fund funding



R7.6 million

Matched funding



120

Impact Coaches recruited, trained and deployed



Lessons from the field

A new kind of ECD professional

At the heart of the Early Learning Social Impact project is a workforce model that challenges long-standing assumptions about who can become an ECD professional and what that role can look like.

The 120 Impact Coaches developed through this project were recruited not primarily for their formal credentials, but for their connection with the community, commitment to child development, and growth potential. The majority are women from the communities they serve, and it is their first meaningful entry into professional employment.

Each Impact Coach received a structured, multi-module training programme covering ECD practice, play-based curriculum methodology, practitioner mentoring, environment assessment, and ECD financial management. They were equipped with tablets and data connectivity, assessed quarterly against structured mentoring tools, and supported

continuously. What emerged was a group of skilled individuals capable of improving the quality of early childhood provision at scale.

Noluthando's journey reflects the broader intent of the Jobs Fund's investment. She transitioned from volunteer to professional, and ultimately to entrepreneur. Through the organisation's Micro-Enterprise Development Programme, she established her own ECD centre, providing access to quality early learning in her community while generating economic opportunities. Sixty of the Impact Coaches have become entrepreneurs, and the remaining sixty have secured permanent roles within The Unlimited Child.

Confronting systemic barriers in the ECD sector

While the progress achieved through this project is significant, it also highlights the systemic barriers that continue to constrain the ECD sector.

Noluthando Sawa, Impact Coach and ECD entrepreneur, The Unlimited Child



“ My name is Noluthando Sawa. Before joining the programme, I was volunteering at a local ECD centre without an income. Becoming an Impact Coach shifted everything. The change was not just financial. It was the confidence, the learning, and the exposure I gained. My story is proof that when someone is given a real opportunity, it can transform not only their life, but the lives of the people around them. ”

Noluthando Sawa, Impact Coach and ECD entrepreneur, The Unlimited Child.

| Barrier | Core issues | Key consequences |
|--|---|---|
| Infrastructure deficits | Most facilities do not meet DBE registration requirements. Common problems include inadequate sanitation, lack of perimeter fencing, insufficient space for age-appropriate groups, and centres operating from shared household or communal spaces. | Prevents registration; raises child protection concerns; limits ability to deliver consistent quality. |
| Financial fragility | Centres in low-income communities charge minimal fees, sometimes as low as R50 per month, and often accept children regardless of ability to pay. This prioritises access but undermines financial sustainability. | Unsustainable operating model; restricts investment in infrastructure, learning materials, and staff retention. |
| Administrative complexity | Registration documentation and compliance requirements are burdensome for practitioners without formal administrative training. Reporting systems add further technical and time-related pressure. | Processes become exclusionary rather than enabling without sustained, hands-on support. |
| Geographic and systemic isolation | Remote practitioners lack access to professional networks and peer learning. Government, funders, and NGOs work in parallel rather than in coordination. | Fragmented support landscapes; centres fall through the gaps between unaligned mandates and programmes. |

Lessons from the field



Candice Potgieter,
CEO of The Unlimited Child



A foundation for the future

The Early Learning Social Impact Project demonstrates what is possible when policy alignment, innovative delivery models, and targeted funding converge around a shared objective. Ultimately, investing in early childhood development is an investment in the country's future. Through sustained collaboration and a shared focus on outcomes, the Jobs Fund and its partners are helping to build a more equitable, resilient, and opportunity-driven South Africa, one child at a time. 🌱

“

As South Africa continues to strengthen its ECD ecosystem, initiatives such as this serve a dual purpose. They deliver immediate, measurable impact for children and communities, while also generating practical insights that can inform broader system reform. The lessons emerging from implementation, particularly around practitioner support, registration pathways, and ecosystem coordination, provide a valuable roadmap for scaling impact nationally.

Candice Potgieter,
CEO of The Unlimited Child

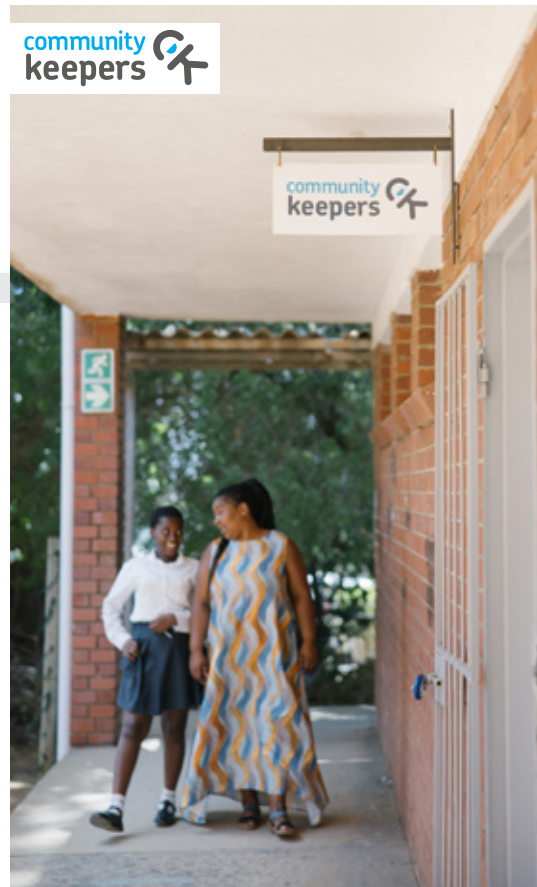
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HEALTH & POST-IMPLEMENTATION LEARNINGS

When schools become safe spaces: The case for mental health first aid in South African classrooms

In South Africa, the ratio of state social workers to learners stands at 1 to 23 000.² For millions of children growing up in under-resourced communities, the weight of poverty, trauma, and instability arrives at the school gate every morning. And yet, until recently, few schools had any meaningful mechanism for addressing what learners bring into the classroom.

Community Keepers, through the Mental Health First Aid Project, a Jobs Fund-supported non-profit initiative, set out to change that. Working in some of the country's most under-resourced schools, in collaboration with national and provincial departments, Community Keepers delivers on-site mental health support by addressing individual crises and transforming school cultures. Their experience offers compelling lessons for education and health policymakers



Community Keepers facilities

¹ H Z Jiang, South African children lack psychosocial support. 'Every school needs a social worker', Health-E News. <https://health-e.org.za/2023/09/13/south-african-children-lack-psychosocial-support-every-school-needs-a-social-worker/> (accessed 1 April 2026)

Lessons from the field

A model built around care

Community Keepers operates through the C.A.R.E.S. model, an integrated approach that moves from crisis intervention and counselling, through life-skills workshops, specialist referrals, and changes to the school environment, to structured stakeholder engagement that keeps learners at the centre of programme design. Crucially, the model does not target learners in isolation. It takes a whole-school approach, engaging educators, parents, guardians, and school management alongside learners themselves.

With Jobs Fund support, the organisation expanded from 35 to 79 school sites, more than doubling its footprint. At each site, Community Keepers works at a support ratio of 1 to 990, improving to 1 to 440 once mental health first aiders are factored in. While still far from ideal, this represents a meaningful shift from the state baseline and a model that others can build on.

Stories from the field

In Bonnievale, Western Cape, a school absenteeism support group run by a Community Keepers care practitioner helped turn around a learner who had struggled chronically with attendance. Not only did he begin attending consistently, but he also went on to assist fellow learners with their schoolwork. In Paarl, a learner on the verge of permanent suspension underwent a containment session with Community Keepers, returned the following day to personally



Community Keepers facilities

apologise to the school Principal, committed to attending his medical appointments, and asked for help rather than withdraw. The suspension was reviewed and lifted.

Perhaps the most striking story comes from Khayelitsha, where a Grade 12 learner's parents and educators had already given up hope. His behaviour was disruptive, and his academic performance had collapsed. A Community Keepers practitioner worked with him to identify his goals. Three months later, his class teacher reported that he had obtained a bachelor's pass. "CK has a magic touch when dealing with these children," the educator said. "We were really worried about this learner's future."

These are not isolated incidents. They are the outcome of a deliberate, structured approach to socio-emotional learning that equips learners with skills to manage their emotions, develop empathy, make responsible decisions, and work towards their goals. When these skills are nurtured, research consistently shows improvements in classroom behaviour and academic performance.



A child at Community Keepers facilities

Impact of Jobs Fund's partnership with Community Keepers



R13.6 million
Jobs Fund funding



R7 million
Matched funding



68
New permanent jobs created



79
School sites



40
Trained participants

The numbers are compelling. But it is the individual stories that bring the model to life.



Learnings from implementation

The project's rapid expansion, from 35 to 79 sites, highlighted both the scalability of the model and the pressures that come with growth.

| Key learning area | Summary of challenge | Implication / Lesson for future projects |
|--|---|---|
| Expansion vs Sustainability | Rapid expansion strained existing capacity. Limited follow-on funding and broader funding cuts further impacted sustainability. | Growth strategies must be matched with clear sustainability plans, including secured follow-on funding and phased expansion models. |
| Workforce Transition | Individuals transitioning from long-term unemployment into full-time roles faced physical and emotional adjustment challenges. | Introduce gradual onboarding and support mechanisms to help new recruits build resilience and adapt to workplace demands. |
| Training and Recruitment Pipeline | Restrictive training approaches led to insufficiently skilled candidates, recruitment delays, and missed capacity-building opportunities. | Adopt a more flexible, scalable training pipeline to ensure an adequate supply of skilled candidates to meet project needs. |

Sustainability and path forward

Post-implementation learnings point to the need for a more enabling policy and funding environment, one that recognises mental health support as a core component of educational success. This includes embedding mental health practitioners within schools, strengthening referral networks, and exploring innovative solutions such as virtual care models to extend reach.

Ultimately, the Mental Health First Aid Project demonstrates that investing in mental health is foundational to educational success. By addressing the social and emotional barriers that hinder learning, the project not only supports individual well-being but also contributes to more inclusive, resilient, and effective education systems. 🌱



Mr Khumbulani Dladla

HUMAN STORY FROM AN ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT

Restoring land, restoring dignity: Khumbulani Dladla's sugarcane journey

In the rolling hills of Efaye in the Noodsberg mill area of the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands, 43-year-old Khumbulani Dladla is breathing new life into land that once stood idle. A participant of the South African Farmers Development Association (SAFEDA) and the Jobs Fund initiative, Mr Dladla represents a powerful example of how targeted agricultural support can restore not only land productivity but also dignity, livelihoods, and community pride.

Mr Dladla comes from a family with a long history of farming communal land. His parents once actively cultivated maize and vegetables but were forced to stop due to financial constraints, leaving their land fallow and overgrown with grass. For years, the fields remained unused, and with that, the economic opportunities they once provided for the local community disappeared.

In 2024, he applied for support through the SAFEDA and Jobs Fund programme and was approved for funding to establish 10 hectares of sugarcane. By February 2025, he had successfully planted his crop, transforming the once-neglected land into productive agricultural land. The sugarcane he planted will be harvested and delivered to the Illovo Noodsberg mill in Darnall.

The impact of this intervention has gone beyond cultivation. The Dladla family had long been respected in the community for their farming activities, which also created employment for local people. When farming ceased, that sense of recognition faded. Today, with Mr Dladla's return to the land, both community employment and the family's standing have been restored.

Local labour and contractors were engaged during the planting phase, bringing immediate economic benefits back into the area. As people were employed during the planting season from February to the end of March 2025, the Easter holidays that year were especially joyful. With wages paid, individuals had the means to improve their livelihoods, afford travel to attend Easter celebrations, and purchase food for their families.

Impact of Jobs Fund's partnership with SAFEDA



R23.2 million
Jobs Fund funding



R23 million
Matched funding



283
New permanent jobs, placements, and internships created



Mr Dladla planted the N54 sugarcane variety, recommended by the South African Sugar Research Institute for its high sugar content, frost tolerance, and resistance to pests and diseases common in the region. While establishing a new crop comes with a learning curve, access to SAFDA-supported training through the Industry Grower Development Account (GDA), along with technical guidance, has enabled him to adopt improved agronomic practices, including proper land preparation, planting, and crop maintenance.

The land itself has also benefited. Previously fallow and prone to degradation, it is now cultivated, contributing to improved soil structure, stabilisation, and reduced erosion. Although the Noodsberg area is rainfed and does not rely on irrigation, careful crop management has ensured the efficient use of natural rainfall.

Looking ahead, Mr Dladla is optimistic about the future. With the first harvest expected between 18 and 24 months after planting, around the 2027 season, he anticipates



Mr Dladla's land being cultivated

yields of between 75 and 90 tons per hectare. The use of improved seedcane, along with ongoing crop maintenance, including timely weeding, is expected to result in higher sugar content, translating into better income for his family.

The role of the SAFDA has been central to this success. As an industry association, SAFDA has not only facilitated access to funding but has also provided critical training through the GDA. This includes both theoretical and practical support, equipping farmers like Mr Dladla with the knowledge needed to improve productivity and sustainability.

Beyond individual support, SAFDA plays a broader role in advocating for small-scale and land reform farmers. It acts as a vital link between growers and the wider sugarcane value chain, connecting them to millers, input suppliers, and government programmes. This ensures that participants are not operating in isolation but are integrated into a structured and supportive agricultural ecosystem.

For Mr Dladla, the project has been transformative. What was once idle land is now a source of opportunity, not only for his family but for the wider community. His story illustrates the importance of industry-led support in land reform initiatives, showing how the right partnerships can unlock the full potential of both land and people. Through this project, he created 22 jobs, including 5 permanent positions. 🌱



THE LEGAL CORNER

Why some JF12 applications fell short: Key lessons from the appraisal process

The conclusion of the Jobs Fund’s 12th Funding Round (JF12) offers an important opportunity to reflect on what distinguishes successful, investment-ready proposals from those that fall short.

While many applications demonstrated strong developmental intent and innovative thinking, a significant proportion were not approved due to a combination of legal, financial, and implementation-related gaps.



| Theme | Summary of challenge | Implication for project viability |
|---|---|--|
| Implementation readiness & capacity | Strong concepts were not matched with credible implementation plans. Key elements such as delivery models, timelines, systems, and partner roles were underdeveloped or unsupported. Organisational capacity, including governance and experienced teams, was often insufficient. | Creates uncertainty around execution, increasing delivery risk and reducing confidence in the project’s ability to scale. |
| Financial viability & sustainability | Financial models were often fragile, with unsecured co-funding, overly optimistic projections, and heavy reliance on grant funding. Limited evidence of long-term sustainability of jobs and income outcomes. | Weakens long-term impact potential and raises concerns about whether benefits will endure beyond the funding period. |
| Value for money & additionality | High cost-per-job ratios, disproportionate administrative costs, and unsustainable business models. In some cases, projects did not clearly demonstrate why Jobs Fund support was necessary. | Undermines the case for investment and reduces confidence that funding will deliver optimal, catalytic impact. |
| Evidence, documentation & compliance | Incomplete or weak supporting documentation, including a lack of binding agreements, insufficient market demand evidence, and weak M&E frameworks. Legal and regulatory compliance gaps were also identified. | Limits the ability to verify claims, increases risk, and can disqualify otherwise promising proposals. |
| Governance & risk management | Unclear governance structures, insufficient financial controls, and weak participant protections. Overly complex “catch-all” projects lacked accountability frameworks. | Increases fiduciary and operational risk, reducing fundability and the ability to manage public funds responsibly. |
| Sectoral & institutional fit | Different organisation types faced distinct challenges ranging from the design of the intervention, showcasing long-term sustainability of concepts to demonstrating additionality. | Highlights the need for all applicants, regardless of type, to meet consistent standards of feasibility, evidence, and accountability. |
| Legal & governance as enablers | Legal compliance and governance were often treated as secondary considerations rather than core components of project design. | Clear governance structures, robust financial controls and full alignment with regulatory requirements are essential to unlocking sustainable, scalable impact and securing funding support. |

Did you know?

Of the **31** proposals assessed at **Stage 2** of the 12th Jobs Fund Funding Round, **20** were approved — approximately **65%**.

THE JOBS FUND'S 13TH FUNDING ROUND

Catalysing demand-led growth in the Green and Informal Economy

Jobs Fund – 13th Funding Round



FOCUS

The Jobs Fund invites proposals that will address critical employment barriers in South Africa's green and informal economies. We seek sector intermediaries from the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors with implementation expertise and track record to propose innovative, implementable solutions that will create sustainable jobs and stimulate economic growth.



THE GREEN ECONOMY



Includes economic activities aimed at reducing environmental risks and addressing ecological scarcities



Promotes sustainable development through green jobs that play a significant role in protecting or restoring the environment.



Aims for sustainable development without degrading the environment include:

- ✔ renewable energy
- ✔ waste management
- ✔ energy efficiency
- ✔ sustainable agriculture
- ✔ green transport
- ✔ water management



THE INFORMAL ECONOMY



Includes economic activities, enterprises, jobs and workers that are not covered by formal arrangements

Includes:

- ✔ street vending
- ✔ small retail
- ✔ construction
- ✔ care work
- ✔ waste picking
- ✔ repair and maintenance services
- ✔ informal transportation
- ✔ artisanal work
- ✔ market trading
- ✔ home-based work
- ✔ small-scale farming



The funding round will be implemented using challenge-fund principles, and it will adopt a portfolio approach in its evaluation of proposals.

Please ensure you access the Funding Round Term Sheet, the Online Application User Guide, the Briefing session recording & presentation and the Frequently Asked Questions guide on our website: www.jobsfund.org.za

Jobs Fund Performance Update: 31 March 2026

FUNDING

OVERVIEW

R23.5 billion

total portfolio size

R7.8 billion

grant funding disbursed

R15.8 billion

matched funding leveraged from partners

1 : 2,04

matched funding ratio

R42 million

average grant disbursed per project

COST PER JOB

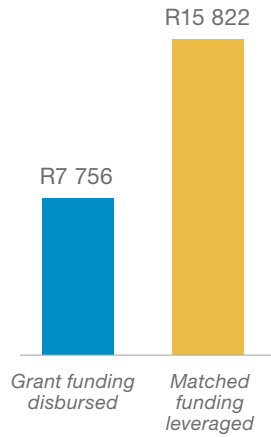
R23 796

grant cost per job

(includes the grant disbursed +

Jobs Fund operating costs – training costs)

Total funding for
job creation (R millions)

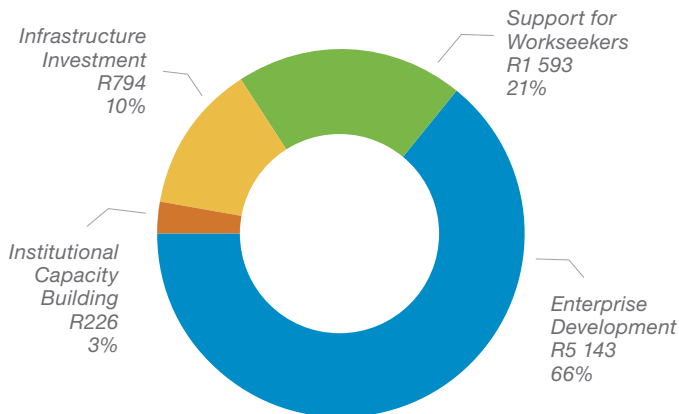


R25 526

grant cost per job

(includes the grant disbursed +
Jobs Fund operating costs + training costs)

Grant disbursed by funding window (R million)



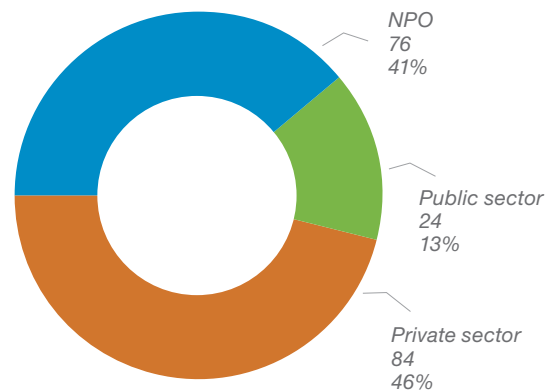
JOBS FUND PARTNERS

OVERVIEW

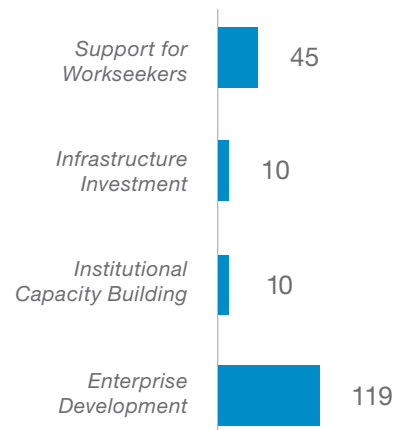
184

contracted projects

Projects by implementer type

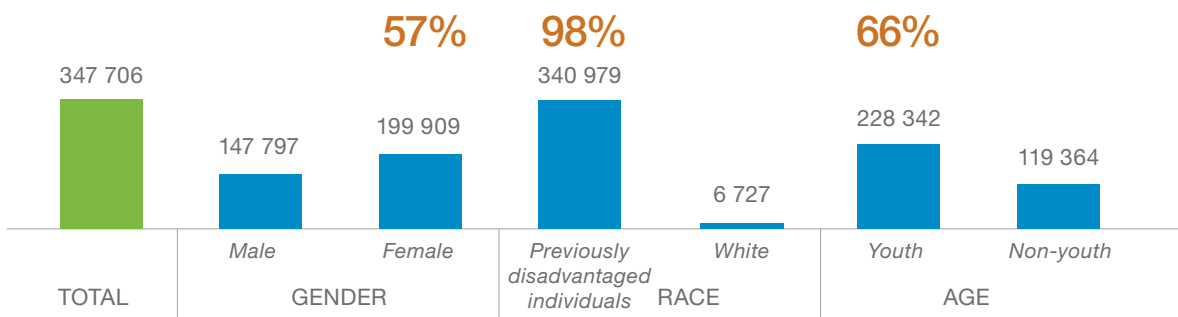


Projects by funding window



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 (16 813), and 592 812 participants were supported with job-related training.

Source: Jobs Fund database (showing actual figures reported by projects as at 31 March 2026)