BINDING CONSTRAINTS LAB

REPORT

Public employment programmes (PEPs) and and foundation phase literacy: a rapid scan of PEP design and compatibility

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1. Report overview

An opportunity to solve pressing problems

Education in South Africa is in crisis: 4 in 5 children cannot understand what they are reading, in any language, by Grade 4,[1] and children who fall behind in the early years struggle to ever read at grade level.[2]

South Africa also has the highest unemployment rate in the world:[3] 60% of young people ages 15-24 are unemployed,[4] and 1 in 3 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).[5]

There is an opportunity to tackle these problems together. Many academic support programmes have successfully recruited and trained young people to deliver programmes that improve learning results - including Axium Education's Nobalisa programme,[6] Funda Wande's teaching assistant programme,[7] the YearBeyond bridging programme,[8] Click Learning's digital literacy and maths programmes,[9] and the Binding Constraints Lab's Zazi iZandi pilot.[10]

South Africa has several large, well-established public employment programmes (PEPs) that collectively create more than 750 000 jobs per year.[11] Some include education as a focus sector. But **much more could be done to leverage these public employment programmes to help children learn to read and write** - and to give young people concrete skills and quality work experience in the process.

1 Department of Basic Education 2023a
2 Pretorius and Spaull 2022
3 World Bank 2023
4 Statistics South Africa 2024. "Unemployed" is defined as the population of young people who are willing and able to work but not working.
5 Mudiriza and de Lannoy 2023
6 Axium Education 2024, Axium Education 2023
7 Moyo and Polzer Ngwato 2024
8 YearBeyond 2018
9 Borole et al. 2024
10 Fleisch et al. 2024
11 Own calculations based on 2023/24 numbers. See Figure 2, page 37.

The challenges of working with public employment programmes

While there are some pockets of best practice, and design improvements over time, **there is a need to better align and systematise efforts** seeking to deliver both employment outcomes for youth and learning outcomes for children. For organisations that want to improve education, navigating the public employment landscape is challenging:

- **Variation in programme design:** Across programmes (and sometimes within them), there is large variation in implementation modalities, requirements for partners, non-wage funding available and funding cycles.
- **Incomplete public documentation:** Information is often incomplete, hard to find or out-of-date.
- **Unpredictability:** Funding and tendering processes depend on budget allocations and political winds. Many PEPs only grant funding on a year-by-year basis, which makes it hard for non-profit organisations (NPOs) to plan ahead.
- **Closed calls:** Some PEPs run closed calls, largely due to limited capacity to manage large request for proposal (RFP) processes or onboard inexperienced new partners.
- **Different levels of flexibility and impact-orientation:** PEPS have varying degrees of understanding of the nonprofit space, openness to trying new things and flexibility. Some are heavily compliance-focused, while others are more focused on social impact.

About this report

This rapid scan of public employment programmes maps **key characteristics of PEPs**, and the degree to and ways in which they **work with the education non-profit sector**. It aims to demystify the complex landscape of PEPs and is intended for civil society actors and government officials working to improve literacy, reduce unemployment and upskill young people.

This report was compiled in the first quarter of 2025 based on public documents, such as annual reports, annual performance plans and departmental budget votes; and engagement with people in government who work on PEPs and people in civil society whose organisations have been contracted to implement them.

It was commissioned by the Binding Constraints Lab, whose goal is to identify high-potential opportunities to improve education and explore how they might be implemented at scale.

It covers the following programmes:

- Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI)
- Community Work Programme (CWP)
- Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), with a focus on two of the four programmes: the Non-State Sector and Social Sector
- National Youth Service (NYS)
- Social Employment Fund (SEF)
- Youth Employment Service (YES)[12]

12 Although YES is privately funded, it is governed by Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC) gazettes and by legislation, and partners with a number of NPOs. It is thus helpful to include YES in this scan and compare it to similar publicly-funded programmes.

For each PEP, the report explores:

- What makes the programme unique;
- To what degree it is well-suited to implement early literacy programmes;
- Programme overview (history, scope, key features, institutional arrangements, wages, working days, participant eligibility, contract duration and timing);
- Key information for prospective implementing partners13 (such as eligibility requirements, payment, and challenges);
- Whether education is a priority area, why or why not, and to what extent;
- Recent developments and shifts.

Two tables at the end summarise and compare key programme features and provide information about how to engage with each programme.

Cross-cutting themes and observations

A few common trends emerged from the research process. These include:

- To participate in any PEP, **NPOs need very strong administrative capacity**, and need to be ready to navigate a high degree of participant turnover.
- Some PEPs are scaling down, and some do not have much space for new implementing partners. NPOs seeking to access and work with PEPs may be more likely to secure funded posts by **approaching and partnering with current implementing organisations** than to secure contracts directly.
- NPOs implementing PEPs need to think about and plan for **participants' long-term trajectories and pathways into future employment**. All PEPs care about whether participants access new opportunities after participation (though expectations and data on this vary).

A shifting context

In the first half of 2025, GTAC (the Government Technical Advisory Centre) was completing a review of PEPs, which once released will inform changes to programme design, scope and budgets.

Even prior to the review, **some PEPs have already scaled up or down significantly**: SEF is growing, while the CWP, BEEI and EPWP have scaled back notably over the last two years. (YES's scope is driven by private-sector demand.) The CWP and EPWP received relatively stable three-year allocations in the March draft budget, while newer or revamped programmes – BEEI, NYS and SEF – only received one-year allocations while the GTAC review is outstanding.

13 Throughout the report, terms including "implementing partners," "partner organisations" and "host partners" are used to refer to NPOs or other non-state actors who secure contracts to implement employment programmes.

2. Programme overviews: BEEI

2.1 Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI)

KEY FEATURES

What makes the BEEI unique?

- The BEEI is the **largest-ever youth employment programme** in South Africa and reaches almost every public school in the country.
- It is **implemented by the Department of Basic Education** (DBE),[14] and places young people at schools as either education assistants (who support teachers in the classroom) or general assistants.
- It is focused on **supporting schools and improving learning outcomes**.
- Both schools and young people **view the programme very positively**.

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BEEI's potential for early literacy programmes

- The BEEI is committed to improving learning outcomes and a significant portion of education assistants (EAs) serve as **"Reading Champions**" or "Curriculum Assistants".
- Reading Champions are given a **broad mandate to promote a reading culture, with a focus on foundation phase**.
- The programme has **partnered with a few NGOs** in specific areas.
- Collaborations to improve foundation phase literacy may be more likely to take off if planned at a **provincial level**.
- For programmes that already target teachers to improve reading, **including education assistants in training** can strengthen implementation.[15]

2.1.1 Overview: BEEI

History, scope and key features

- The BEEI was **launched in October 2020** as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus.
- The programme **places young people in schools** full-time to serve as either Education Assistants (EAs), who support teachers in the classroom, or General Assistants (GAs), who help with tasks such as maintenance, security, food gardens and aftercare.[16]
- It is the **largest youth employment programme in South Africa's history**: 1,117,392 people participated in the first four phases, at ~23,000 public schools.[17]

14 Stipends will be administered by the IDC in Phase 5.

15 In the North West in 2024, provincially- and privately-funded TAs were trained alongside teachers as part of a foundation phase literacy programme. Early evidence showed that it has improved project effectiveness.

16 Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2024a

17 Ibid.

- In Phase 5, 1.9 million people applied for 202,000 posts. This is close to 40% of unemployed young people in the country.[18]
- Four phases were implemented between 2020 and 2023, with a break in 2024.[19] **Phase 5 will run from June to November 2025**.
- Early phases were not well-aligned to the school calendar, but Phases 3, 4 and 5 **run within the same academic year**.
- Feedback from participants and schools has been **overwhelmingly positive**. Levels of support from teachers and principals have consistently remained above 93%.[20]

Table 1: BEEI phases: time frames, scope and budget

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Dates	Dec '20-Apr '21	Nov '21-Mar '22[21]	April '22-Aug '22	Feb '23-Sep '23[22]	Jun '25-Nov '25
# of youth	~320,000	~274,000	~250,000	~240,000	~202,000
Budget[23]	R7 billion	R6 billion	R6.1 billion	R6.5 billion	R5.4 billion[24]

Institutional arrangements

- The BEEI is run by **the Department of Basic Education**, through the Provinces. In Phase 5, stipends will be paid through the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC).[25]
- **Provincial departments have some autonomy** in terms of how they implement the programme and what they prioritise, including training budget spend.
- While civil society organisations have at times played roles in support of the BEEI, mainly in relation to training, it **can be challenging for provinces to partner with NPOs**. Service providers must be on approved procurement lists, and partnership agreements take a long time to sign.
- Some **limited civil society partnerships have shaped the programme** to date (covered below under 'Education: history and priorities').

Wages, working days and eligibility

- **Wages and days:** Participants work full-time and earn R4,000 per month (slightly below the National Minimum Wage).[26]
- **Eligibility:** Participants must be South African citizens ages 18 to 34 and live within a 5km radius of the school (or 30km if it is a small, micro or farm school).
- Education Assistants (EAs) need to have a matric certificate, and candidates with diplomas and degrees are prioritised. General Assistants (GAs) do not need a matric certificate.

18 Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2023a. In Phase 4, 1.5 million people applied for 255,000 posts.

19 The BEEI did not get funds from the fiscus in 2024. To try to keep the programme alive, agreement was reached that 140,000 placements would be funded from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) Labour Activation Fund. However, it ultimately did not run in 2024 due to the legal complexities of accessing allocated UIF funds.

20 Presidency 2025

21 Most Phase 2 participants continued into Phase 3 - see Presidency 2023.

22 Some provinces used their own resources to extend by a few more months.

23 Philip 2024

24 This includes R4 billion for stipends and R1.4 billion for training and project management.

25 The IDC is a government-owned development finance institution that falls under the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC). It also administers the SEF programme.

26 In Phases 1-4, participants earned the National Minimum Wage.

- People who are currently studying (full- or part-time), working, or on a training or learnership programme, are not eligible.
- **Application process:** Youth apply via SAyouth.mobi (a portal run by Harambee). SAyouth screens applicants for eligibility and gives each school a list of eligible candidates. Schools conduct interviews and finalise appointments, based on their specific needs.[27]

Contract duration and timing

- **Contract duration:** Contracts have varied per phase: Phases 1, 2 and 3 were each five months, Phase 4 ran for 8 months, and Phase 5 is planned to run for 6 months (June-November 2025).
- **Timing:** While Phases 1 and 2 fell over the December-January holidays, subsequent phases have aligned better to the school year.

2.1.2 Education: history and priorities

Overview

- The BEEI is **focused exclusively on education**.
- This includes providing **a wide range of support to schools**, such as maintenance, security, aftercare, repairs and information technology (IT) support, in addition to classroom-focussed teacher assistants.
- Public communications have increasingly emphasized the programme's **goal of improving learning outcomes** (in addition to offering employment opportunities for youth and relieving the burden on schools).[28]

Reading Champions

- In each phase, ~20,000 EAs were trained as **'Reading Champions'**.[29]
- According to the Reading Champions manual, they have a mandate to "promote a reading culture in schools and communities" by running a **broad range of reading-related activities**.[30]

Partnerships with civil society

- In past phases, the National Education Collaboration Trust **(NECT) commissioned some nonprofits to train and support Reading Champions**, but some Reading Champions do not receive formal training.
- In Phase IV (2023), a few **informal pilots demonstrated how BEEI youth could help improve learning outcomes**. These included:
  - **Zazi iZandi**, an early literacy pilot, worked with BEEI youth, via provincial education departments. This was not a formal partnership.
  - **Siyavula**, an established maths and science edtech organisation, has supported the BEEI as part of an existing partnership where Siyavula offered to add value (not a specific BEEI partnership).

27 Presidency 2023

28 This is evident in Presidency of the Republic of South Africa 2024a, which dedicated a spread to improving learning out comes and profiled the Zazi iZandi and Siyavula partnerships.

29 Presidency 2021, 2023b and 2024b

30 Department of Basic Education 2023b. The Reading Champions manual used in online training lists responsibilities including: activate and support teachers with DAAR (Drop All And Read) timeslots; run reading and writing for enjoyment clubs; celebrate literacy calendar activities; activate and transform reading spaces; create a print-rich environment with learners' work; display books.

2.1.3 Recent developments: Phase 5 launch

- After a year's break, Phase 5 is scheduled to run from **June to November 2025**.
- R4 billion from UIF is allocated for stipends. An additional R1.4 billion is split between national DBE and provinces: R410 million is for project management and training in National DBE,[31] and the balance is for project management, training and increasing numbers in the provinces.
- At this stage, **only a one-year budget** has been allocated.

31 National Treasury 2025a

2.2 Programme Overviews: CWP

KEY FEATURES

What makes the CWP unique?

- The CWP is one of South Africa's **largest and longest-running PEPs**: it was launched in 2009 and has >250,000 participants.
- There is **no time limit for participation**: participants can stay on the programme indefinitely.
- The CWP used to be implemented by NPOs, but **the state took over implementation** directly from October 2024 (via the Department of Cooperative Governance).
- A **new "Smart Partners" model** emphasises artisan and enterprise development, job creation and pathways to sustainable employment.

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Potential for early literacy programmes

- The CWP has **recently pivoted to focus on artisan and enterprise development** and sustainable job creation; education is not a priority focus area.
- Historically, it has been **admin-heavy and compliance-focused**, and shaped by complex politics and patronage at a local level.
- It has also been on a multi-year trajectory of **budget cuts**.
- The CWP has some advantages: unlike other PEPs, **participants can remain on the programme indefinitely**, which reduces the need to re-train participants.
- It has a **target of increasing youth participation**, so programmes that recruit youth (as many literacy programmes do) could help CWP achieve this goal.
- There is an **upcoming window of opportunity** to respond to a "Smart Partners" request for proposals (RFP).

2.2.1 Overview: CWP

History, scope and key features

- The Community Work Programme (CWP) is **one of South Africa's longer-running and larger public employment programmes**. It was first piloted in 2007 and reaches approximately a quarter of a million people each year.
- The CWP was the **first PEP in South Africa to place participants at NPOs** and community-based organisations (CBOs) to undertake "useful work" that strengthens community development.[32]
- This **"useful work" is chosen at a local level** by Local Reference Committees (LRCs), bodies composed of local government, civil society and community members.
- Most participants work **part-time** (8 days a month). This is to allow participants to pursue other income-generating activities on the days they are not working, and to reach more people with limited budgets.

32 Philip 2013

Table 2: CWP: annual scope and budget[33]

Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
# of people	263 259	250 000	269 889	200 000	178 860	178 860	178 860
Budget	R3.53bn	R3.83bn	3.60bn	R3.16bn	R3.31bn	R3.41bn	R3.56bn

Institutional arrangements

The CWP was incorporated into the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in 2009 and transferred to the **Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG)** in 2010,[34] where it is still managed today.

Wages, working days and eligibility

- **Wages:** Because the CWP programme is a social relief programme, the wages are pegged to the EPWP minimum wage, which is specified in an annual ministerial determination. In 2025/26 this is R15.83 per hour, 55% of the national minimum wage (NMW).[35]
- **Working hours:** Most CWP participants (>90%) work eight days per month at ~R1013 per month (R126.64 per day).
- A small proportion of participants work 20 days a month as supervisors or specialists and receive ~R2600 per month (R130 per day or R16.25 per hour).
- While not widely practiced, there is precedent for splitting the hours over more than eight days of part-time work per month.
- **Eligibility:** Participants must be South African citizens aged 18 to 54; unemployed or under-employed; and earning less than the national minimum wage in a particular month from other government employment opportunities.
- The CWP previously had no age limit, but contracts for people age 55+ were terminated at the end of March 2025 due to budget cuts.[36]

Contract duration and timing

- Unlike many PEPs, CWP participants are **allowed to stay on the programme indefinitely**. While this has drawn criticism, it can reduce the need to frequently re-train new participants.
- Contracts with Smart Partners are for **three years**. A new tender is slated to come out in 2025.

Challenges

- **Politics:** Local reference committees are often highly politicised. Patronage is embedded in the CWP model, which can make it difficult to introduce new programmes or select appropriate participants.
- **Compliance:** The top-down, compliance-focused approach and heavy administrative burden sometimes made it difficult for non-state implementing agents to run effective programmes.

33 National Treasury 2025b
34 Department of Cooperative Governance 2017
35 Department of Employment and Labour 2025a
36 Motaung 2025. 67,000 contracts were terminated in March 2025.

2.2.2 Information for host organisations

- From its inception until September 2024, the CWP used to contract non-state "Implementing Agents" (IAs) to deliver the programme.
- IAs managed one or more sites[37] of 1,000+ participants, and each site implemented a range of programmes in different sectors.
- From October 2024, **DCoG took over administration of the programme**. It no longer contracts NPOs to run its 200+ sites around the country.
- DCoG is now contracting **"Smart Partners"** that can upskill participants in **sectors with the potential for long-term job creation** like water, electricity, infrastructure and service delivery; create jobs; and create sustainable pathways into the labour market.
- Smart Partners can be **public- or private-sector organisations**. They create jobs in their field of expertise instead of creating many types of jobs in one geographic location.
- Detailed Smart Partner eligibility requirements and payment terms will be clear in an upcoming RFP that was planned for February 2024 but delayed.

2.2.3 Education: history and priorities

- The CWP previously took a broad approach to "useful work" in communities, which included the education sector.
- Most of the CWP's education sector work to date has focused on school environments and infrastructure – i.e. gardens, recycling, cleaning. Some participants served as Teacher Assistants or implemented programmes aiming to improve learning outcomes.
- Education is not a focus sector in the "reimagined CWP," launched in 2024, which is focused on artisan and enterprise development and sustainable job creation.[38]
- However, education-focussed Smart Partners will be considered in the upcoming RFP if they meet the requirements.
- An October 2024 brochure notes that the CWP will continue to support a broad range of programmes: "Beyond economic initiatives, the CWP invests in social development programmes that address critical community needs. These programmes focus on areas such as security, health, education, and social welfare, contributing to overall community well-being and resilience."[39]

2.2.4 Recent developments: state-led delivery, youth focus and budget cuts

- **State-led delivery and new partner model:** Two key 2024 developments have been covered above: the launch of the "Reimagined CWP" and "Smart Partners", and the in-housing of the CWP within DCoG.
- **Youth focus:** The CWP is also placing more emphasis on recruiting youth. In 2023/24 only 20% of its participants were youth (vs a 30% target).[40]

37 A site typically encompasses two or more wards.
38 Some examples of Smart Partners are available on this COGTA website, under "Approved Partnerships."
39 Department of Cooperative Governance 2024a
40 Department of Cooperative Governance 2024b

- **Budget cuts:** While CWP remains one of South Africa's largest PEPs, its funding was cut in 2023/24 and again in 2024/25. The proposed 2025-28 budget sustains current levels with modest inflationary increases: R10.3 billion over 3 years for a targeted 178,860 participants per year.[41]
- 70% of this budget is for stipends and 30% is for tools and materials, personal protective equipment (PPE), professional services and programme overheads.[42]
- **Upcoming RFP:** An RFP for new Smart Partners was planned for Q1 or Q2 of 2025, but was not yet published at time of writing this report.

41 National Treasury 2025b

42 Ibid.

2.3 Programme Overviews: EPWP

KEY FEATURES

What makes the EPWP unique?

- The EPWP has **four programmes, run by different departments**. This scan focuses on the Social Sector and Non-State Sector as most relevant to foundation phase literacy.
- **Programme design is hugely variable**. It is implemented at national, provincial and municipal levels; by state agencies and non-state implementing partners; with different remuneration levels, contract durations and host organisation requirements.

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EPWP's potential for early literacy programmes

- The EPWP may be challenging to work with on literacy programmes.
- The **Non-State Sector Programme's new focus areas** (introduced in 2024) **do not include education or ECD**, and its reach has scaled down over the last few years.
- The **Social Sector Programme** prioritises ECD, but **school-age academic support falls outside of its mandate**, and design and timelines vary across provinces and municipalities.

2.3.1 Overview: EPWP

The EPWP runs four programmes: Infrastructure; Environment and Culture, Non-State Sector and Social Sector. This report focuses on two of the four major EPWP Programmes – the Non-State and Social Sector programmes – because they have worked with the education sector in the past.

History, scope and key features

- The Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was developed after the 2003 Growth and Development Summit and **launched in 2004**.
- It is one of South Africa's **largest employment programmes**: from April 2004 to September 2021, it created close to 13 million work opportunities.
- Early stages of the EPWP focused on labour-intensive methods to improve infrastructure. Since then, it has expanded to include social, environment and culture, and non-state sectors.[43]
- The EPWP runs four programmes: Infrastructure; Environment and Culture, Non-State Sector and Social Sector.
  - » The **Non-State Sector (NSS) Programme** was founded in 2009.
  - » Its budget allocation was reduced by 35% in 2024/25.
  - » It aims to create 43,000 work opportunities per year from 2025-28 (down from 109,871 in 2022/23).[44]
  - » ~60 NPOs are currently contracted to implement the programme.

43 SA Cities Network 2021
44 National Treasury 2025c

Table 3: Annual scope and budget, EPWP Non-State Sector Programme

Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
# of work opportunities[45]	100 212	109 871	77 235	64 000	43 000	43 000	43 000
# of partners	not known			55-60		tbc	tbc
Budget[46.]	R0.96bn	R1.03bn	R1.05bn	R0.69bn	R0.72bn	R0.75bn	R0.78bn

- The **Social Sector Programme** is quite large, as shown in the table below.
- Social Sector budgets are not easily ring-fenced: funds flow to provinces through different allocations, and reporting and budgeting was recently consolidated with other EPWP Programmes.[47]

Table 4: Annual scope, EPWP Social Sector Programme

Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
# of work opportunities[48]	236 875	204 997	200 807	318 566	280 964	283 418	-

Institutional arrangements

- The EPWP's four sectors are led by different organs of state.[49] These organs of state may implement directly or tender for service providers.
- Budgets are allocated and programmes are implemented at **national, provincial and municipal levels**.
- The **Non-State Sector (NSS) programme** is led by the national Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI).
  - » It is **managed by the Independent Development Trust** (IDT), a state-owned entity that manages implementation and delivery of social infrastructure programmes and reports to the Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure.
  - » The IDT runs periodic requests for proposals and **contracts NPOs to implement the programme**.
- The **Social Sector Programme** is led by the national Department of Social Development (DSD) and implemented by the Social Sector Cluster, which is led by DSD and includes DBE and the Department of Health (DOH).[50]
  - » At a provincial level, it is managed via Social Sector steering committees, chaired by provincial DSDs, where each Department reports on its contribution to overall goals.

45 Independent Development Trust 2023 and 2025; National Treasury 2025c.

46 National Treasury 2025c

47 Ibid. While the Social Sector Programme used to receive a separate allocation from National Treasury, from 2025/26 this was consolidated with another EPWP grant to provinces.

48 Department of Social Development (no date)

49 While not reviewed in detail for this report, the Infrastructure Programme is led by the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure (DPWI), and the Environment and Culture Programme is led by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE).

50 Composition of the Social Sector Cluster varies per province: for example, in the Western Cape it also includes the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport and the Department of Police Oversight and Community Safety.

- Many departments report unskilled, low-wage work opportunities as part of the EPWP, whether or not these jobs were explicitly designed and funded as such. This makes it difficult to know exactly how many people are employed by the EPWP, or to compare features across projects.

Wages, working days and eligibility

Unlike other PEPs, there is **enormous variation** between the four programmes, and between provinces and municipalities, in terms of wage levels, work days, contract duration and programme design.

- **Wage**: EPWP participants earn at least R15.83 per hour as of 1 March 2025 (55% of NMW).[51]
- While implementing bodies (e.g. provinces or municipalities) have discretion to set the wage, it should remain below the National Minimum Wage to ensure EPWP does not compete with or displace people from permanent employment.[52]
- **Working days**: the number of working days per month varies between programmes.
  - » In the **Non-State Sector**, participants work 14 days a month, 8 hours per day.[53] They are encouraged to use their other days trying to find other work.
  - » In the **Social Sector**, participants generally work full time (20 days a month).
- **Participant eligibility** can vary per project, but generally participants should be unemployed or underemployed; live near the project site; and be willing to work at CWP wages.
- Projects should prioritise women, youth and people with disabilities. Community-based targeting should prioritise people in greatest need.[54]

Contract duration and timing

- At a high level, the EPWP runs in **five-year cycles** that coincide with elections and is currently in Phase 5.
- **Contract durations** for host organisations and participants vary depending on the implementing body.
  - » In the **Non-State Sector**, implementing NGOs currently have two-year contracts (2024-2026). The next round will likely be three years, starting in early 2026.[55]
  - » In the **Social Sector**, participant contract duration can range from 6 months to 12 months or more.
  - » In both sectors, there is typically high participant turnover.
- **Timing of contracts** also varies but typically follows the financial year in both the NSS and Social Sector programmes.
- In the Non-State Sector, the next RFP should come out near the end of the 2025/26 financial year (Jan/Feb 2026).

51 Department of Employment and Labour 2025b

52 SA Cities Network 2021. Anecdotally, some departments (eg. Western Cape DOH) subsidise EPWP wages so they can pay the national minimum wage.

53 Ibid. Depending on the specific programme, work can be structured on an hourly or task-based basis.

54 Ibid.

55 To align with the five-year Phase 5.

2.3.2 Information for host organisations

Host organisation eligibility

- Host organisation eligibility varies per programme, province, municipality and funding round.
- In the **Non-State Sector Programme's** most recent NSS call for proposals, NPOs:
  - had to meet **compliance requirements** (such as a valid COIDA[56] certificate, proof of UIF registration and NPO registration, DSD and tax compliance letters, and an audited or bookkeeper financial statement of the previous year);[57]
  - had to **pass a due diligence site visit**; and
  - were evaluated on **readiness** to implement the new EPWP focus areas; **capacity** to manage work; **governance**; programme understanding and **detailed implementation plan**; and ability to raise **co-funding**.[58]
- In the **Social Sector**:
  - Requirements vary per programme, province, municipality and funding round.
  - For provincial programmes, organisations **should be registered on a provincial database to tender**.

Payment to host organisations

- Contributions to non-wage costs also vary.
- **In the Non-State Sector,** which takes a standard approach nationally:
  - **implementing NGOs receive 10% of the wage bill for non-wage costs:** 7% for administration (which can be spent as needed), and 1% each for COIDA, UIF and bank charges (for which the NGO must provide bank statements to prove it was spent as intended).
  - The 7% admin fee is slated to drop to 6% in 2026.
  - Additionally, the NSS programme budgets 3% of wage costs for protective equipment and 3% for training. This is managed by the IDT and NGOs do not have access to this funding or control of how training funds are spent.[59]
- **In the Social Sector:**
  - Non-wage contributions vary from 10-25% and depend on the department and available budget.[60]
  - Operational costs usually have some flexibility re: how they can be spent. Some tenders and departments set conditions for certain line items.

Challenges

- EPWP has a **heavy administrative load** and extensive monthly reporting requirements[61] that must meet government compliance requirements.
- **Non-wage funding is often insufficient** to cover programme costs.
- Some contracts are short-term, which makes it hard to recruit for and implement projects.

56 Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act

57 Department of Public Works and Infrastructure 2024

58 Ibid.

59 The IDT provides training in basic, general topics like managing home finances, and limited access to SETA-accredited upskilling in trades aligned to the focus areas like welding, plumbing and general building maintenance.

60 As an example, the Western Cape Department of Social Development gives a 12% allocation.

61 Reporting must follow government guidelines. See SA Cities Network 2021, page 27

2.3.3 Education: history and priorities

- Neither the Non-State Sector or Social Sector include academic support as a priority area.
- In the Non-State Sector Programme, Phase 5 focus areas do not include education, though some work at ECDs still takes place.[62]
- In the Social Sector, Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a major focus, and a large share of funding goes to ECD. This includes training ECD practitioners and home visiting programmes to support early learning.
- However, Foundation Phase academic support falls outside the Social Sector mandate.
- School-focussed EPWP projects mainly focus on non-academic work, such as food gardens or nutrition programmes.[63]

62 Department of Public Works and Infrastructure 2024. The Phase 5 focus areas are cleaning and maintenance of public facilities; cleaning, beautification of public and open spaces; road maintenance; waste management; energy-related projects; art and craft, specifically for people with disabilities; food security and farming support; and gender-based violence and femicide [prevention, ostensibly].

63 SA Cities Network 2021

2.4 Programme Overviews: NYS

KEY FEATURES

What makes the NYS unique?

- The NYS is conceptualised as a **stepping stone to employment**, with a strong emphasis on community service, "giving back" and social impact.
- Unlike some programmes, **youth without matric can participate**.
- It **expects youth development to be built into programme design** (not treated as an add-on or "nice to have").

ALIGNMENT

NYS's potential for early literacy programmes

- In some ways, the NYS is a good fit for foundation phase literacy: academic support is one of its nine service sectors, and it emphasises social impact.
- Only 3% of NYS1 and NYS2 participants worked in academic support, indicating there may be room to grow this service sector.
- However, the programme's timing and duration (six-month contracts that run from October to March) are not well-aligned with the school calendar, and it has scaled down since its 2022 relaunch.
- In the most recent round, the NYS prioritised renewing contracts with existing implementing partners.

2.4.1 Overview: NYS

History, scope and key features

- The NYS was established by the National Youth Service Act 2005.
- **The "Revitalised NYS" was designed in 2021 for 2022/23 implementation** via the Presidential Youth Employment Initiative (PYEI) and has since run three rounds (NYS1, NYS2 and NYS3).
- It is conceptualised as a paid service opportunity that is a stepping stone to employment – part of a journey "from learning to earning"[64]. It places a strong emphasis on giving back, community building and social cohesion.
- The NYS is relatively small compared to other PEPs: in the most recent round, 10 implementing partners provided paid service opportunities to ~15,000 young people.

64 Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (no date)

Table 5: Revitalised NYS phases: time frames, scope and budget

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Dates	~Oct22–Mar23	~Oct23–Mar24	~Oct24–Mar25	~Oct25–Mar26
# of SIPs	Unknown	10	10	~10 (tbc)
# of young people[65]	33,186	22,306	~15,000	tbc
Budget[66]	R599m	Unclear[67]	Unclear	R549.8m

Institutional arrangements

- The NYS is **led by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons With Disabilities (DWYPD)**.
- It has been part of the PYEI since 2022/23.[68]
- The first year of the "Revitalised NYS" (2022/23) was administered by the Jobs Fund. Since 2023/24 it has been **administered by the National Youth Development Agency** (NYDA), part of the DWYPD.

Wages, working days and eligibility

- **Working days:** Participants work 16 hours per week. They must work at least 6 hours for the day to count.
- **Stipends:** In NYS3 (2024/25), regular workers earned R23.19 per hour, 84% of the minimum wage (~R1400 per month) and team leaders earned R28.99 per hour (~R1800 per month).
- The stipend was progressively lowered over the last few years. It is pegged below minimum wage because the NYS targets people without matric who cannot access many other youth programmes, and because it wants to be a stepping stone to minimum wage jobs. Pay is framed as appreciation for community service, rather than "wages."
- **Eligibility:** The programme is open to youth ages 18-35, including those without matric.

Contract duration and timing

Duration: The programme runs for six months (though NYS funding can contribute to a longer, co-funded programme).[69]

Timing: Contracts typically run from October to March and are sometimes extended by 1-2 months.

65 National Youth Development Agency 2023 and 2024; National Youth Service input

66 NYDA 2023 and National Treasury 2025d

67 The budgets for these years are difficult to piece together because the NYS had multiple funders. Public documents cover different time frames and provide differing information.

68 Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (no date)

69 While NYS provides six months of funding, implementing partner YearBeyond runs a 10-month programme that is co-funded by the NYS's six-month contribution and additional funding from the Western Cape Government. This is the only one of the NYS's 10 current partners that takes this approach.

2.4.2 Information for host organisations

Host organisation eligibility[70]

- The NYS works with nonprofits[71] with "well-established structures, the capacity to offer service opportunities at scale and strong existing linkages to the community they serve."[72]
- **Focus area alignment:** These NPOs, known as Implementing Partners, must work in one of the NYS's nine focus areas.
- **Track record:** Partners need a verifiable track record of at least 3 years' technical experience in the area of interest; be able to enrol, onboard and ensure youths have a bank account; be able to monitor activities using manual/paper-based and electronic platforms; and demonstrated capacity and robust operating systems to pay stipends to 3,000[73] youth, including systems to manage monthly payroll and UIF issues.
- **Compliance:** Partners must also be registered as an NPO or Non-Profit Company (NPC) for at least 2 years; be fully compliant with administrative requirements, including tax requirements; and have at least 3 years of audited financial statements.
- **Funding:** Partners must have existing funding contracts that secure at least 50% of funding over the next year.
- **Liquidity:** The NYS reimburses partners in the month after stipends are paid, so partners need sufficient liquidity to front the stipends.
- **Service and youth development:** Partners should emphasize community service and giving back, and "demonstrate how principles of youth development are included in the delivery of community service rather than as separate training programmes."
- **Transition support:** Partners should support NYS participants to access their next opportunity and must report on how many have done this. (In NYS2, 1 in 5 of its 22,000 participants transitioned into a new opportunity.[74])
- **Capacity building:** The NYS expects partner NPOs to work with smaller CBOs and build their capacity.

Payment to host organisations

- Host organisations receive **17% of the stipend bill for non-wage costs**.
- This is allocated into set categories, including uniforms/PPE, technology, training, management overheads, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E).
- **Amounts are specified for some categories**, like uniforms and tech; **other categories are more flexible**.

Challenges

- Since the programme pays in arrears, **partners need sufficient cash flow from other sources to cover stipends** until they are reimbursed.
- Like other programmes that work with young people, there can be a high level of management and human resource (HR) issues.

70 This section based on Jobs Fund (no date) unless otherwise cited.

71 While one partner (YearBeyond) is a Western Cape government programme, NYS funding to YearBeyond is channelled via the Community Chest, a non-profit organisation.

72 Presidential Youth Employment Initiative

73 Jobs Fund (no date). Eligibility requirements posted for NYS1 said organisations must onboard at least 3,000 youth, but in NYS2 and NYS3 most partners did not have 3,000 youth.

74 National Youth Development Agency 2024

2.4.3 Education: history and priorities

- **Academic support programmes** are listed as one of the NYS's nine service sectors.[75]
- The NYS's **main education partner is YearBeyond**, a Western Cape Government bridging programme that places many of its 3000+ annual participants in academic support roles. A few other partners have tutoring programmes or work at ECD centres.[76]
- **Only 3% of NYS participants participated in academic support programmes** – the second-lowest rate of all service sectors.[77]

2.4.4 Recent developments

- While growth was planned initially,[78] the **NYS has decreased in size**: from ~33,000 participants in NYS1[79] to just 15,000 in NYS3 (2024/25).
- A budget of R549.8 million was announced in the tabled 2025/26 budget.[80] The NYS plans to put out a tender around August 2025 and appoint partners in September 2025 for October 2025-March 2026 implementation.
- The NYS ran open tenders for rounds 1 (2022/23) and NYS2 (2023/24). For **NYS3 (2024/25), it extended the contracts of its existing 10 partners**. NYS4's approach is not yet confirmed: it may retain existing partners who have performed well, and onboard some new partners.
- **Plans after this next phase are unclear**: the 2026/27 budget vote allocation drops sharply to just R20.5 million, and the PYEI allocation will end after the 2025/26 financial year.[81]

75 National Youth Development Agency 2024

76 NYDA 2024. In NYS2 and NYS3, implementing partners included Cricket South Africa, Charisma Music Foundation, Community Chest Western Cape (YearBeyond), the South African Association of Youth Clubs, Youth Life, the Sport for Social Change Network, Kwetso Foundation, Spotlite Education Foundation and Seriti Institute.

77 NYDA 2024. The 2023/24 annual report appears to report on both NYS1 and NYS2 (total 70,000 participants), but this is not clear.

78 NYDA 2024 reported: "Ideally, the Agency will explore ways to see this programme institutionalized in the Government budgeting process, to be able to maintain our baseline in 2023/2024 and double to 100 000 participants by 2025."

79 NYDA 2024

80 National Treasury 2025d

81 National Treasury 2025e

2.5 Programme Overviews: SEF

KEY FEATURES

What makes the SEF unique?

- The SEF is **designed to enable civil society organisations** to do what they do best. It drew on lessons from previous PEPs to build an impact-orientated, flexible and collaboration-focussed programme.
- **Implementing organisations** (known as Strategic Implementing Partners, or SIPs) **have helped shape the SEF** since its inception and collaborate via the Social Employment Network community of practice.
- The SEF **pushes collaboration** to build community-based organisations' capacity and extend impact. In Phase 3, ~90% of SIPs work in a consortium, and in Phase 2 the 37 SIPs partnered with more than 1,000 community-based organisations.[82]

ALIGNMENT

The SEF's potential for early literacy programmes

- The SEF is **well-suited to deliver foundation phase literacy** programmes.
- It is **designed to support NPOs** to do what they do best, and already supports several education and academic support programmes.
- It has a **larger non-wage allocation** for project costs than most PEPs.
- Becoming an implementing organisation (SIP) has a high bar, and there will be **limited spots for new partners** unless significant additional funding is mobilised. Collaborating with existing SIPs may be an easier way to get involved.

2.5.1 Overview: SEF

History, scope and key features

- SEF is part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES), launched in **October 2020** to catalyse economic recovery and reduce unemployment.
- It supports non-state actors to deliver "**work for the common good**" that aligns to their existing strengths and programmes.[83]
- SIPs are also **part of the Social Employment Network** (SEN), an active and constructive community of practice that shares lessons, builds capacity and supports collaboration.
- SEF **explicitly sets out to strengthen civil society**: it builds SIPs' capacity as "intermediary organisations" that can work with big business, the state and regulatory bodies, as well as with small CBOs and businesses. SIPs are expected to work with smaller NGOs and build their capacity.
- **Phase 3 ended** in May 2025. This phase has 35 SIPs and aims to create 50,000 work opportunities.

82 Huston and Thompson 2024
83 Ibid.

Table 6: SEF phases: time frames, scope and budget

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Dates	Jul22–Jul23	Aug23–Jul24	Aug24–May25	June 2025+
# of SIPs	28	37	35	~35 (tbc)
# of work opportunities	~65 000 (target 50 000)	~52 000	~50 000	50 000
Budget[84]	R0.86 billion	R0.79 billion	R1.13 billion	R1.29 billion

Institutional arrangements

- SEF is part of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition's (DTIC) social economy strategy.
- It is **managed and implemented by the Industrial Development Corporation** (IDC).

Wages, working days and eligibility

- **Wages**: At least 90% of participants earn the National Minimum Wage.
- 10% of participants can be paid up to 175% of the NMW.[85] It may be possible to negotiate exceptions on a case-by-case basis.
- Participants are only paid for the days they work - a "pitch and pay" model (as opposed to a monthly stipend or salary).[86]
- **Working days**: Most participants work 16 hours per week, structured as two full days or four half days. This should total 75 days over 10 months.
- Technical and supervisory staff can work 40 hours per week.
- **Eligibility**: Participants must be South African citizens ages 18-59 (or people with confirmed refugee status entitling them to work); [87] job-seeking; not enrolled in any other PEP; and not receiving the Old Age Pension or NSFAS[88] funding.
- People receiving the Social Relief of Distress (SRD) Grant can apply but are ineligible for the SRD while enrolled in SEF.[89]
- Enrolling participants who are already doing meaningful work as volunteers is encouraged and many SIPs have done this.
- Some NGOs top up working days, hours or pay with other funding.
- Generally, participants are not meant to repeat across phases. Some SIPs have negotiated to have a percentage of participants repeat to support programme quality, continuity and on-the-job learning.

Contract duration and timing

- Thus far, each Phase has run from 9-13 months, starting in July or August.
- The duration of Phase 4 contracts will likely be similar.

84 National Treasury 2025f
85 Industrial Development Corporation 2024. This can be an aggregated total, not a per-person cap.
86 Huston and Thompson 2024
87 Industrial Development Corporation 2024. Participants over 60 can be included on an exception basis, with express permission from the IDC
88 National Student Financial Aid Scheme
89 IDC 2024

2.5.2 MaInformation for host organisations

Host organisation eligibility[90]

- **Eligibility is not limited to NPOs**. Any non-state organisation with a legally recognised registration can apply, including social enterprises registered as co-operatives and for-profit companies. For-profits will face a higher level of scrutiny to ensure the work is for the common good and no part of the funding accrues to profits.
- The organisation **must be able to create a minimum of 1,000 jobs**. (They may do this by forming a coalition of smaller organisations.) In Round 3, SIPs could request up to 2,500 jobs.
- **SIPs must be experienced implementers** with a track record of at least two years, and demonstrated ability to onboard participants, ensure they have a valid bank account and ID, monitor in-time attendance and activities, accurately account for SEF allocations and manage payment authorisation workflows.
- They must have at least two years' Audited Financial Statements, be financially solvent and liquid, meet KYC[91] requirements (e.g. FICA[92] and Tax Compliance), and have a functional Board that meets regularly.
- Beyond these capability and compliance requirements, **SEF prioritises SIPs that partner** with public, private, civil society and/or community structures; support and **strengthen grassroots organisations**; prioritise skills transfer and **consider exit strategies; demonstrate social innovation** (smart ways to solve problems); offer value for money (reasonable costs and quality outcomes); **and have co-funding**.
- SIPs can increase participant's hours with private funding, but not with other government funding like EPWP or CWP.[93]
- SIPs can simultaneously implement another PEP, but participants and funding may not overlap and they must declare this in their application.

Payment to host organisations

- **80% of project budgets must go to wages**, and up to 20% can be used for non-wage costs. (To compare to other PEPs, this is equivalent to 25% of the wage bill.)
- Non-wage cost categories include inventory (tools, materials, PPE); services (technical services and training); programme management (transport, IT, overheads, M&E, etc.); and other.
- **Allocation of non-wage costs is flexible** but must be approved by the IDC.
- The IDC pays participants directly, so only the 20% non-wage budget is paid to the SIPs. However, SIPs must track attendance and working hours and submit payroll data to the IDC.

Challenges

- Like most PEPs, the SEF has a heavy admin burden and **requires strong admin, HR, M&E and financial systems**.
- **SEF prefers new participants each Phase**, which can be challenging for NPOs (although as noted above, some SIPs have negotiated to keep a percentage of participants across phases to support programme outcomes and on-the-job skills transfer).

90 This section is based on IDC 2024 unless otherwise cited.
91 Know Your Customer
92 Financial Intelligence Centre Act
93 Industrial Development Corporation 2025

- Timing is **not aligned to the school year**.
- Mentoring small NPOs can be challenging and time-consuming.
- SEF prioritises partners who have proven they can execute its demanding programme at scale. NPOs **may be more successful at accessing SEF if they partner with existing SIPs**.

2.5.3 Education: history and priorities

- SEF is o**pen to a wide variety of work**, as long as it contributes to the common good. **Education support is included** on its "indicative and non-exhaustive" list of "typical theme areas."
- **Several SIPs currently work in education**, including The Learning Trust, Nal'ibali, Impande, Siyakholwa, Seriti, Thembalethu and Lima, and some (including The Learning Trust) offer foundation phase literacy support.

2.5.4 Recent developments

- The 2025/26 budget tabled on 12 March allocated **R1.292 billion for SEF, a 14% increase** over the 2024/25 budget.[94]
- This continues a trend of increased funding for SEF: it jumped by 43% between 2023/24 and 2024/25 (as shown in the table above).
- A GTAC review of PEPs has delayed long-term allocations, and **funding beyond 2025/26 is not yet clear**.
- There is recognition in the Presidency and Treasury that SEF is working well, but increasing its reach would require co-funding from sources such as the private sector, social impact funds, crowdsourcing, Competition Commission fines, and the Transformation Fund.[95]
- **If co-funding is mobilised, the SEF is open to running special windows**: application rounds dedicated to a specific sector, such as ECD or literacy. R200 million could create 10,000 jobs.

94 National Treasury 2025f

95 The Transformation Fund is an idea DTIC is exploring that would centralise broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) socio-economic development (SED) spend from businesses.

2.6 Programme Overviews: YES

KEY FEATURES

What makes YES unique?

- **YES is not a public employment programme**. It incentivises the use of private-sector funds to create 12-month jobs. Job placements are usually hosted within the sponsoring company, but approximately ~25% of YES Youth are placed through approved YES partners.
- YES **requires its host partners to absorb at least 10% of participants** into permanent roles after their 12-month placement.
- YES is **particularly focused on a "quality work experience"**, which includes being paid at least the minimum wage, and on what kinds of skills and mentoring young people gain on the job.

ALIGNMENT

YES's potential for early literacy programmes

- YES is **somewhat well-suited to implementing education programmes**. Some partners, such as Click Learning, are effectively using YES Youth to implement Foundation Phase literacy programmes.
- However, it is **challenging to meet YES's requirement of at least 10% absorption in social sectors** like education, where market-led job creation is not possible and NPOs rely on government, corporate or philanthropic funding to pay salaries.
- To make it work, **NPOs need to bring resources to the table**. The R4,000-per-youth fee paid to NPOs is typically insufficient to cover operational costs, and co-financing or partnerships are required to meet the absorption targets.

2.6.1 Overview: YES

History, scope and key features

- YES was **established by an August 2018 government gazette**.[96]
- It aims to reduce youth unemployment by connecting business, government and youth and helping businesses meet their B-BBEE requirements and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) goals.
- **Companies get B-BBEE points** when youth complete their year-long placements and when host companies absorb a targeted percentage of young people. Current targets range from 10% for NPOs to 30% for corporates.[97]
- Youth participants complete a 12-month "quality work experience."
- In 2023/24, YES created ~40,000 placements for youth.[98]
- Approximately three-quarters of them were placed at the companies sponsoring their placement. 1860+ companies have participated in the programme.[99]

96 DTIC 2018

97 While the Gazette stipulates a minimum of 2.5-5% absorption, sponsoring corporates and government stakeholders expect higher absorption levels.

98 Youth Employment Service 2024a

99 YES 2024b

- **Approximately one quarter of youth are placed through YES-vetted partners, many of whom are NPOs**. (YES calls these off-site placements its "turnkey solution.")
- In 2023/24, ~22 implementing partners hosted 10,155 youth. ~10% of them worked in education.[100]
- YES's budget in 2023/24 was R221 million. (This excludes youth wages.)
- Since its inception, YES has created more than 187,000 jobs for South African youth and injected R10.7 billion into the economy through salaries.[101]

Institutional arrangements

- YES is **run by the Youth Employment Service, a nonprofit organisation**.
- It is governed by gazettes issued by the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (DTIC).
- **For-profit companies pay to create jobs**. These jobs can either be at the sponsoring company, or at a YES host partner, which can be a non-profit organisation.

Wages, working days and eligibility

- **Working days**: YES roles are full-time.
- **Wages**: Pay starts at the National Minimum Wage of R28.79 per hour (though sponsoring companies can choose to pay more).
- **Eligibility**: Participants must be Black[102] South African citizens aged 18-35.
- Youth must stay on the programme for at least eight months for the sponsoring company to earn B-BBEE points. If a participant drops out before the eight months, the host organisation must replace them.

Contract duration and timing

- **Duration**: Each placement lasts 12 months.
- Participants cannot repeat or stay more than 12 months (though host organisations are encouraged to retain them and pay their salaries).
- **Timing**: YES works "on demand": it does not have an application window. It onboards new youth on a rolling basis (approximately 3,000-4,000 per month) depending on corporate sponsorships.
- This means it also onboards new host partners on an as-needs basis: there is no set time of the year to apply.
- The YES "Contact" page on its website allows prospective host partners to send an inquiry.[103]

100 YES 2024a
101 YES 2024b
102 As defined by the B-BBEE Act of 2003.
103 See https://www.yes4youth.co.za/contact-us.

2.6.2 Information for host organisations

Host organisation eligibility

Implementation partners must be **able to provide hundreds[104] of youth with quality work experiences** in the specified focus sectors.

- They must be **registered entities with payroll capability**.
- Implementation partners must be **able to permanently absorb at least 10%** of youth after the 12 months has ended. (NPOs must raise other funding to cover this cost.)
- Additional selection criteria will apply, depending on the sector and corporate sponsor requirements.
- When an organisation is otherwise well-suited but cannot take more than 200 participants, YES refers them to existing, established implementation partners so they can become a "host organisation".[105]

Payment to host organisations

- Partners receive **R4000 per youth**, which can be used as needed during the 12 months. (This is ~6.7% of the annual wage bill.) They receive 80% of this (R3200) up front, and 20% (R800) on absorption post-programme.
- YES also provides **in-kind support to participating youth**, including data-free access to all YES apps, online training and certification, mental health support and call centre support.[106]

Challenges

- YES expects its NPO partners to **absorb at least 10% of youth**.
- A young person **must complete at least 8 months** for sponsoring companies to receive their B-BBEE points. When youth leave before 8 months, the host organisation should replace them.

2.6.3 Education: history and priorities

- **Education is listed as one of the sectors in which YES places youth**.[107] and current host partners (including Click Learning, Youth@Work and Afrika Tikkun) work in education and early childhood development.
- However, **placements in education (and other social sectors) have declined over the last few years** because these sectors struggle to meet their absorption targets. These are a non-negotiable priority for YES, which has shifted to emphasise sectors with higher absorption prospects.

104 While formal materials for implementing partners say they must be able to host "thousands," in practice each implementing partner hosts an average of ~500 youth, and some host 200-300.

105 For example, YES partner Youth@Work works with more than 1,000 smaller host organisations.

106 Youth Employment Service 2024b

107 YES 2024c. Priority sectors include ICT, Green Economy, Manufacturing, SMMEs, Drones, Tourism, Automotive, Retail and Education.

3. Summary tables

Table 7: Programme comparison: key programme features

Programme	Brief description	Key actors/ institutions	Scope: participants
BEEI	DBE places youth in schools for 5-8 months, in classrooms or as general assistants, to improve school environments and learning outcomes.	DBE runs programme, procures training. IDC pays stipends.	~250,000 youth per phase
CWP	DCoG employs people 8 days a month to do "useful work" in communities at the EPWP minimum wage, focused on artisan and enterprise development. It also contracts Smart Partners in sectors with potential for job creation.	DCoG runs programme directly. "Smart Partners" (nonprofit or for-profit) tender for contracts.	>250,000 people/year
EPWP: Non-State	NPOs employ people 14 days a month to carry out useful, labour-intensive work in eight priority focus areas. Education is not a focus.	DPWI coordinates. IDT (an SOE) manages programme. NPOs tender for contracts.	~64,000 people in 2024/25 FY 43,000 target for 2025/26+
EPWP: Social	Social Sector Cluster departments run programmes at both provincial and municipal levels. Design varies widely, but participants usually work full-time at the EPWP minimum wage (~54% of NMW). ECD is a focus, but academic support is not.	DSD leads at national and provincial level. DBE, DCAS and DOH also part of Social Sector cluster and implement programmes. NPOs can tender for contracts.	~200,000 to 300,000 per year ~280,000 target for 2025/26 and 2026/27 FYs
NYS	NPOs hire youth 16 hours a week in paid service opportunities aligning to 9 focus areas, including academic support.	Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities leads. National Youth Development Agency implements. NPOs can tender for contracts.	~15,000 people in 2024/25
SEF	NPOs employ people 8 days a month to carry out a broad and unrestricted array of "work for the common good."	Department of Trade, Industry and Competition leads Industrial Development Corporation implements Non-state actors including NPOs tender for contracts.	Target 50,000 in Phase 3 (underway)
YES	Businesses create or sponsor 12-month "quality work experiences" for youth and earn B-BBEE points. Approximately 25% of youth are placed at host partners, some in education.	Implemented by YES, a nonprofit organisation. DTIC gazettes govern implementation.	~40,000 per year

108 Wages are based on the February 2025 Ministerial Determination, which specifies minimum wages from 1 March 2025 to 28 Feb 2026, unless otherwise specified (NYS uses 2024/25 data).

109 This is 30km for rural/farm schools.

110 A small percentage of CWP participants work full-time as supervisors and earn a slightly higher wage.

111 Team leaders: R28.99 per hour in 2024/25.

112 A small percentage of technical and supervisory staff are paid higher wages (up to 175% of the NMW) and work full-time.

Scope: host organisations	Budget	Participant eligibility	Wages & hours[108]
n/a – youth work directly for DBE A few ad hoc partnerships with NPOs	Phases 1-4: R6-7bn per phase Phase 5: R5.4bn (R4bn from UIF for stipends + R1.4bn for training and management allocated to DBE)	Age 18-34 South African citizen Within 5km of school[109] Have never participated before Not studying, working, on training or learnership programme Education Assistants: need matric, graduates prioritised General Assistants: do not need matric	Full-time R23.08 per hour (national minimum wage) ~R4000 per month
20 Smart Partners (Mar 2025)	R3.31 bn in 25/26	Age 18-54 South African citizen Unemployed or underemployed Not earning >min wage from another gov employment programme	8 days per month[110] R15.83 per hour ~R1013 per month
~55-60 nationally	R717m in 2025/26	Unemployed or underemployed Live locally Willing to work at CWP wage Projects should prioritise women, youth and people with disabilities, and community-based targeting should prioritise participants in greatest need.	14 days per month Stipend varies; minimum R15.83 per hour Minimum R1773 permonth
Difficult to confirm – programmes are run at province and municipal level	R305.7m in 2024/25. From 2025/26, budget line item merged with another EPWP programme. Combined R627.2m in 2025/26.	Unemployed or underemployed Live locally Willing to work at CWP wage Projects should prioritise women, youth and people with disabilities, and community-based targeting should prioritise participants in greatest need.	20 days per month. Stipend varies; minimum R15.83 per hour Minimum R2533 per month
10 NPOs nationally	R549.8m in 2025/26	South African citizens ages 18-35 with minimum Grade 10 or equivalent	16 hours per week **In 2024/25: R23.19 per hour (84% of NMW)[111] ~R1484 per month
35 implementing partners working with >1000 small organisations	R1.292bn in 2025/26	South African citizens ages 18-60, not enrolled in any other PEP or receiving NSFAS or Old Age Pension. Participants cannot receive Social Relief of Distress Grant while participating.	8 days per month[112] R28.79 per hour (national minimum wage) ~R1843 per month
~22 implementing partners each take 200+ youth. These partners work with 1000+ smaller “hosts”.	R221 million excluding wages in 2023/24. 2023/24 wage bill est. >R.3 billion (own calcs).	Black South Africans ages 18-35.	Full time R28.79 per hour (national minimum wage) ~R4991 per month

Table 8: Programme comparison: information for host organisations

Programme	Focus on education?	Contract duration and timing
BEEI	Priority. Wholly focused on basic education. Holistic support to schools, not only learning outcomes.	Phases 1-4 ran from 5 to 8 months. Phase 5 will run June-Nov 2025.
CWP	Not a priority. Some history of basic ed work, but not a focus in new strategy. (Some work may still happen.)	Participants: indefinite Host orgs: 3 years
EPWP: Non-State	Not a priority. Some history of basic ed work, but not a focus in Phase 5 (2024-29).	Participants: varies; can be short (6-12 months) Host organisations: currently 2 years (2024-26); next tender likely to be 3 years.
EPWP: Social	Not a priority. ECD a strong focus, but school work is focussed on food gardens/nutrition. Academic support falls outside its mandate.	Participants: usually 6-12 months; varies. Host orgs: varies. Usually 12 months, sometimes longer if budget available.
NYS	Priority. Academic support is one of 9 service sectors with ~3% of participants.	6 months
SEF	Priority. Education support is on a list of typical theme areas. It is not a particular focus: SEF is open to many types of work if demonstrably “for the common good.”	~10 months per Phase (often extended to 12)
YES	Listed focus area, but lower priority. Education is one of nine supported sectors, but the education footprint has decreased over the last few years because it is hard to absorb youth into permanent jobs.	12 months Rolling basis

Host organisation requirements	Payment to host organisations	How to apply
n/a – youth work directly for DBE. NPOs seeking to train BEEI youth should be on provincial education departments' approved service provider lists.	n/a – no host orgs.	n/a – no national, formal partnerships. Some collaboration has happened informally in provinces.
RFP forthcoming, but should train participants, create jobs, offer pathways to employment.	Unclear – pending RFP	RFP to be released in Q2? of 2025
1 year audited or bookkeeper financials + other compliance docs. Assessed on readiness, capacity, governance, planning and co-funding.	10% of wage bill, including 7% admin fee (flexible) and 1% each for COIDA, UIF and bank charges. Additional 3% for PPE and 3% for training are managed nationally and do not go to NGOs directly.	Next RFP to come out in early 2026. Prior round tender documents here.
Varies – specified in tender documents.	Varies: can be 10-25% for operational costs.	Varies – usually align with financial year (come out a few months before for work to kick off in new FY).
At least 3 years' audited financial statements + other compliance docs. Assessed on track record, capacity, alignment to focus areas, work with smaller NPOs, helping youth transition to next opportunity, 50% co-funding.	17% of wage bill (some flexible, some restricted). NYS pays in arrears – reimburses monthly for wages already paid.	Next tender to go out ~Aug 2025.
Not limited to NPOs (but for-profits face higher scrutiny). Able to create at least 1,000 jobs. At least 2 years' audited financial statements + other compliance docs. Assessed on partnerships with small orgs; skills transfer and exit strategies; innovation; value for money; co-funding.	20% of full budget (25% of wage bill) paid to host orgs for non-wage costs. Non-wage budget is flexible but must be approved by IDC. IDC pays stipends directly; host orgs only receive the non-wage budget.	Next tender to come out soon (current Phase ends May 2025).
Registered entity with payroll capability. Able to provide 200+ youth with a 12-month quality work experience. Able to absorb 10% of youth into permanent jobs.	R4000 per youth (R3200 at start, R800 after 8 months). Some host organisations also access the Employment Tax Incentive (R1500 reduction per month in tax liability).	Visit the YES website and submit an inquiry: https://www.yes4youth.co.za/contact-us

4. Summary charts:

Budgets and participant numbers

4.1 Budget trends

The chart below shows how the budgets of five PEPs have shifted over the last five years, and gives a picture of overall spend on PEPs over time.

Figure 1: Five-year PEP budget overview

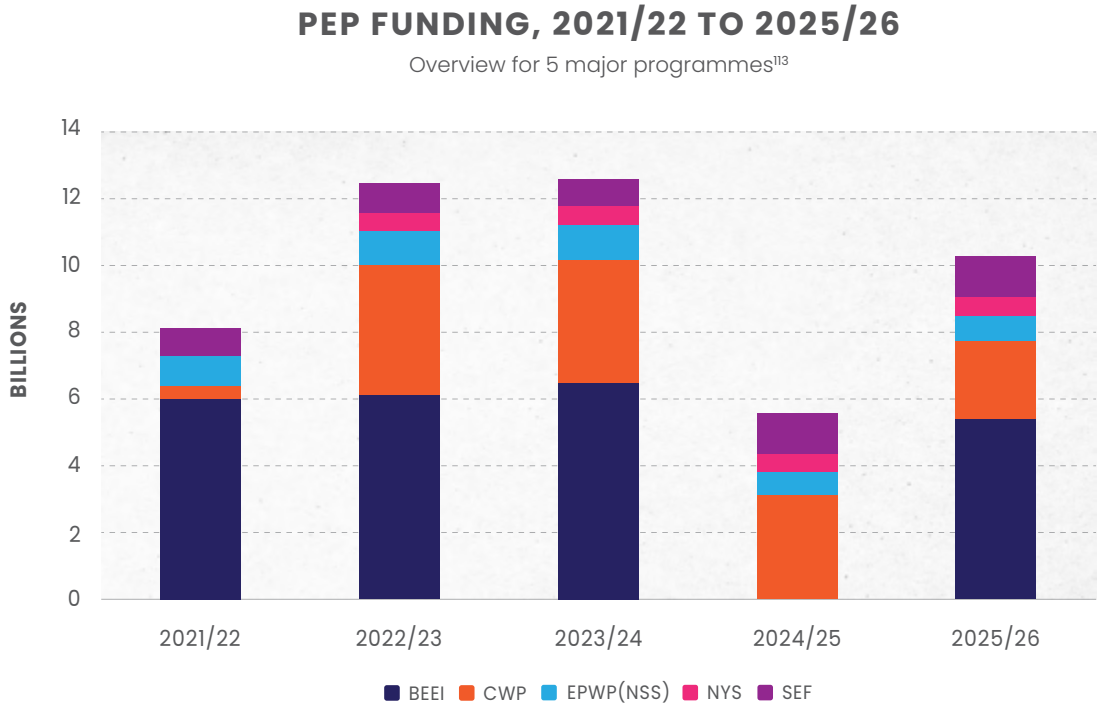


Chart 1: PEP budgets (in millions)

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
BEEI	6,000	6,100	6,500	0	5,400
CWP	353	3,834	3,603	3,153	3,306
EPWP (NSS)	956	1,033	1,052	690	717
NYS	not known	599	550	550	550
SEF	800	862	788	1,130	1,292

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4.2 Participant scope

The chart below shows the approximate number of work opportunities per PEP over the last five years. This is difficult to compare directly (see notes below), but the chart illustrates the high-level trend of reduced reach over the last three years after a peak in 2022/23, and the negative impact of the BEEI "lost year".

Figure 2: Number of participants in 5 major PEPs, 2021/22 to 2025/26

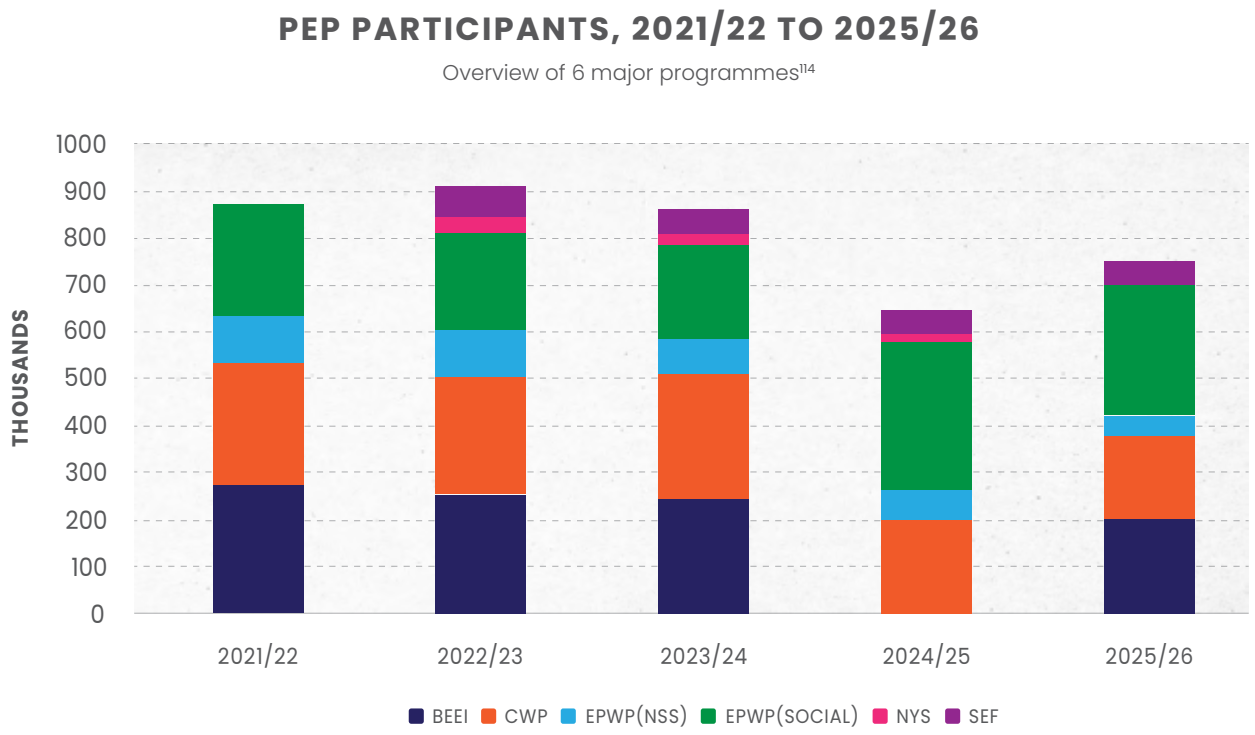


Chart 1: PEP participants

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
BEEI	274,000	250,000	240,000	0	202,000
CWP	263,259	250,000	269,889	200,000	178,860
EPWP (NSS)	100,212	109,871	77,235	64,000	43,000
EPWP (Social)	236,875	204,997	200,807	318,566	280,964
NYS	n/a	33,186	22,306	15,000	tbd
SEF	n/a	65,000	52,000	50,000	50,000

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Notes on 4.1 (Budget trends):

- The “lost year” of the Basic Education Employment Initiative, which did not run in 2024/25, led to an enormous overall dip in PEP funding. (The BEEI made up more than 50% of the overall spend shown from 2021/22 to 2023/24.)
- The EPWP Social Sector Programme is not included, as part of its budget is reported together with other EPWP programmes.
- YES is not included: it is not a PEP, and its budget is not reported in an easily comparable way to the others.
- Placeholder figures of R550m per year are used for the NYS, as its 2023/24 and 2024/25 budgets are not easily available in the public documents reviewed (see footnote 67 on page 22). As it is the smallestPEP, slightly different numbers will not change the overall picture.

Notes on 4.2 (Participant scope):

- It is difficult to compare the reach of various PEPs: different PEPs quantify participation differently. The BEEI, CWP and NYS track the number of individual people reached, while EPWP and SEF track the number of work opportunities created (even if more than one individual filled the role during the contract duration). EPWP also tracks the number of “FTE equivalent roles” created (230 person-days of work).
- However, it is still worth putting together a quick visual comparison to show high-level reductions over the last three years after a peak in 2022/23, and the negative impact of the BEEI “lost year” on the reach of government employment programmes.

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Public employment programmes (PEPs) and foundation phase literacy:
a rapid scan of PEP design and compatibility

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