

A BASIC PACKAGE OF SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET) IN SOUTH AFRICA

| POLICY BRIEF |

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The lives of young people in South Africa are marked by significant challenges across multiple dimensions of deprivation. These challenges – income poverty, low educational outcomes, poor housing, unreliable or expensive transport, poor physical and mental health, a lack of different and supportive social networks, etc. – are both structural and individual. Collectively, they can make youth particularly vulnerable.¹

Young people are especially at risk during their transitions through adolescence and into adulthood. Many leave school before completing matric; they enter the labour market without the necessary education credentials and skills; and are often ill-equipped to navigate access to further education and employment. In addition, the actual number of economic and education opportunities available to youth is severely limited.²

At the same time, a large number of these young people lose access to social protection services that were provided while they were minors, such as the Child Support Grant (CSG). Once they stop receiving the CSG and leave school without

connection to the labour market, they become 'invisible' to the existing administrative systems. At that point in time, they are not in employment, education or training (NEET) while also not able to access support through the country's social protection system.

Young people who are NEET are especially vulnerable, particularly when NEET for an extended period. They are at risk of longer term economic and social exclusion which may lead to discouragement and poor mental health, feeding a vicious cycle of exclusion and 'social drift'.

The characteristics of NEET young people differ between the younger and older age groups, meaning different approaches to supporting them are needed. For this reason, we focus on the development and provision of a package of support that first targets 15 to 24-year-olds. Approximately 30% of young people in this age group are NEET in South Africa, the equivalent of slightly over three million youth.³

About this policy brief

This brief outlines a proposed policy and programmatic approach for a Basic Package of Support (BPS) for South Africa's youth who are NEET. It makes a case for the implementation of this intervention to support young people through integrated, collaborative partnerships between government, the non-profit and private sectors. This approach, which is based on research evidence and international best practice, was developed by a research consortium in consultation with various stakeholders, including young people themselves. The first phase of the project, led by the Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit at the University of Cape Town, was in partnership with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Africa; Centre for Social Development in Africa, University of Johannesburg; DG Murray Trust; and The Jobs Fund; and with funding and technical support from the Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion, funded by the European Union, and based in the Government Technical Advisory Centre. The report and related research and working papers are at www.saldru.uct.ac.za/project/youth-related-research.



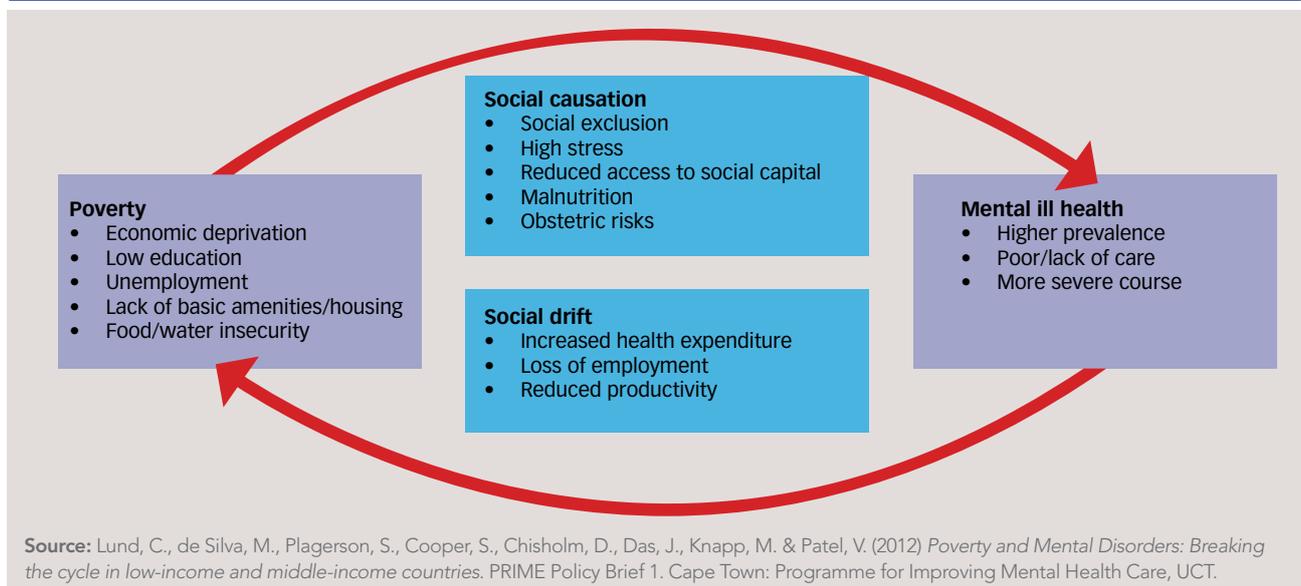
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Why focus on youth who are not in employment, education or training?

Large numbers of young people are NEET, both globally and nationally.⁴ Many studies have shown that being NEET has serious consequences for the individual and for society. For the individual, it can lead to deteriorating physical and mental health, substance abuse, uncertain job prospects, discouragement to seek work or further education, social exclusion, and increased risky behaviour.⁵ At a societal level, there are the risks of lost economic output, less government revenue, and higher public spending on social services, for example.⁶

Figure 1: The cycle of poverty and mental ill-health



For these reasons, there is a clear need to understand and respond better to young people who are NEET – both at a policy and programme level. There are several approaches to support these young people who are NEET.

International best practice

Youth employment programmes worldwide are more successful when using comprehensive approaches to support youth.⁷ The profiling of beneficiaries and individualised follow-up systems are crucial parts of these, while involving non-public actors in the programme delivery has positive effects. Programmes are more successful in middle- and low-income countries and their impacts are larger in the long term.

An example of an overarching strategy for youth unemployment – and supporting young people who are NEET more specifically – is the European Union (EU) Youth Guarantee. The YG is about finding ways to attract young people and to help them onto pathways appropriate to their individual circumstances that will lead them back into education, training or the labour market.⁸

EU countries can vary conceptualisation and implementation, nationally and locally, appropriate to their own economies; labour markets; policies; institutional frameworks; and profiles of NEET youth.⁹

Implementation generally focuses on integrating services for young people, including social, health, family and housing services. The aim is to provide more accessible and customer-oriented support that addresses the challenges that are barriers to young people accessing education or work. Integration requires sharing of information and coordination across service providers, and offering a single point of contact for young people.

The YG model, therefore, is an activation strategy more than a job-matching or job creation programme.

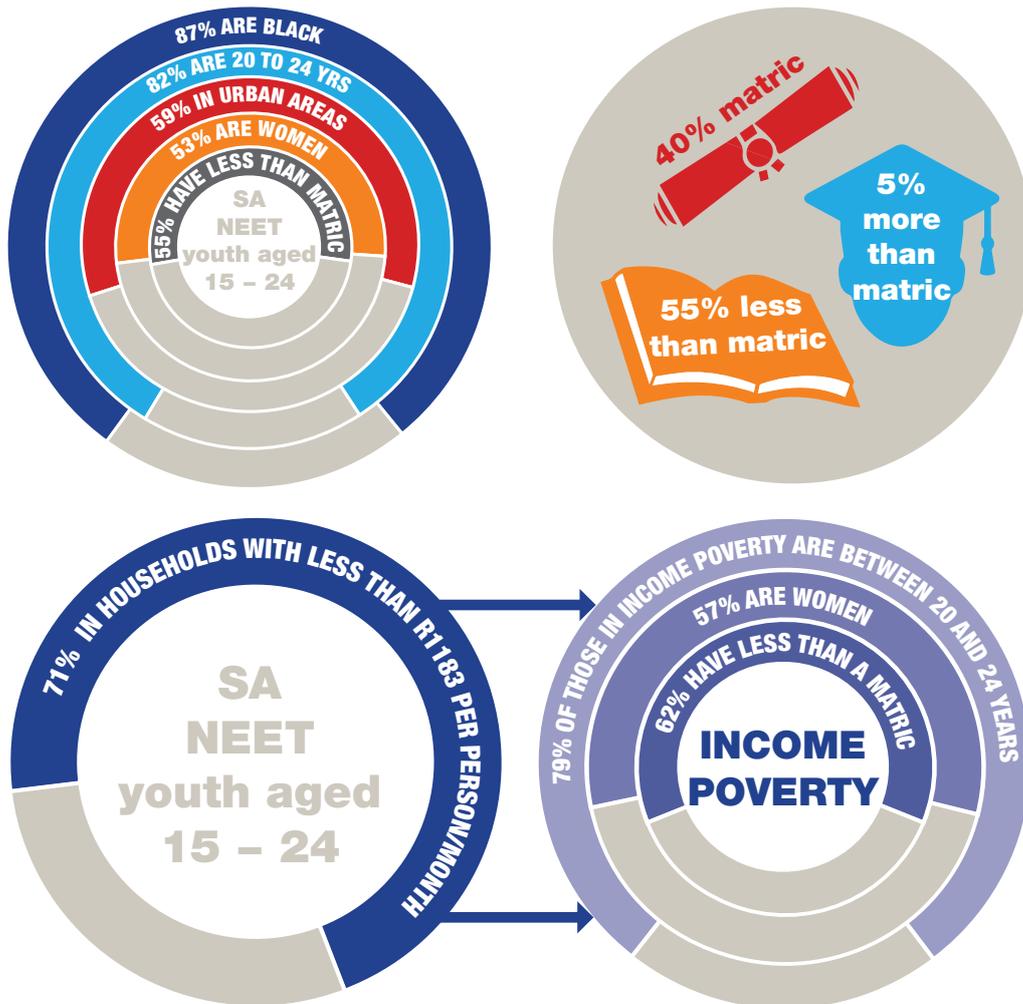
A more holistic approach to youth unemployment through integrated services geared to young people's needs¹⁰ has also been embraced in Turkey, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Palestine and Egypt¹¹; while South Korea, the Gulf region and Ghana are exploring implementing components of the YG.

Who are South Africa's 15 – 24-year-olds who are NEET?

The youth who are NEET are a diverse group that are faced with multiple, intertwined, individual and household factors. In the second quarter of 2019, the NEET rate for young people aged 15 to 24 was around 30%¹² – this has been fairly consistent since 2014. The majority of these young people were unemployed – but also expressed the wish to work

and were not 'inactive' as is often assumed. In this age group, 48% were actively seeking work, while 21% said they wanted to work but were discouraged and have stopped looking. The vast majority of these young people are living under conditions of income poverty.¹³

Figure 2: Characteristics of young people, aged 15 – 24, who are NEET in South Africa



What is the Basic Package of Support for young people?

The ultimate aim of a BPS for young people who are NEET in South Africa is to help them (re)connect to education or training opportunities, or to enter the labour market as part of a successful transition into young adulthood. However, different subgroups of youth need different types of interventions and support to help them successfully navigate the education and training environment, into a shifting labour market, or into a new stage of their lives, such as parenthood. Therefore, a tailored, multi-faceted approach to support NEET youth will address these young people's challenges better.

The BPS strives to provide young people with a sense of possibility and to support their agency and ability to take up pathways towards sustainable livelihoods.

The programme is a compound activation and guidance intervention that proactively seeks out young people who are NEET. The emphasis is on offering face-to-face, tailored and multi-faceted support that meets the various needs of a young person.

The BPS provides advice, resources, credentials, a sense of possibility and belonging while strengthening young people's navigational capacities. This means young people no longer have to figure out pathways to (re)connection on their own.

The key objectives of the BPS are to:

1. Clarify available pathways to education, training or work for youth who are NEET to give them a sense of 'imminent possibility'.
2. Connect young people to different support services in their community and beyond to strengthen their well-being, agency and ability to take up and complete available pathways.
3. Connect young people to employment, education and training opportunities.
4. Provide a continuum of support and loop-back option to support young people's ability and willingness to complete pathways and remain connected over time.

The BPS is designed to work with different public and non-profit service providers to help make them more accessible and useful to NEET youth through active connection.

Regular evaluation of the BPS will lead to better articulation between the different public and private and not-for-profit systems, higher levels of accountability for delivery of services and, ultimately, stronger, more integrated support for young people in the country. The approach has strong synergies with and is complementary to the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention.

“... [A]s from today, we begin the implementation of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention – six priority actions over the next five years to reduce youth unemployment. First, we are creating pathways for young people into the economy. We are building cutting-edge solutions to reach young people where they are – online, on the phone and in person. This will allow them to receive active support, information and work readiness training to increase their employability and match themselves to opportunities.”

Pres. Cyril Ramaphosa, State of the Nation Address 2020

Figure 3: The location of the BPS in the ecosystem of available support to South Africa's youth



The BPS programme components

The BPS is founded on seven pillars – or principles – that were informed by a review of the EU YG best practices alongside international research on promising interventions to support various aspects of youth well-being.

As depicted in figure 3, these BPS principles together aim to provide a comprehensive and integrated basket of services that can be offered in a tailor-made way to a diverse group of young people.

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|  | <p>The BPS approach requires a detailed understanding of 1. the characteristics of sub-groups of youth who are NEET; 2. the challenges affecting their outcomes; and 3. the services, labour market and education opportunities available to them in their own contexts. This knowledge needs to be built on analysis of local-level data and the gathering of information on available services. These services also need to be validated for their accessibility, effectiveness and level of youth-friendliness.</p> <p>For planning purposes, the BPS programme will make use of information on the youth population and services available at the local level via a revised version of Youth Explorer, an online tool with a wide range of data on domains of youth well-being across different geographical areas in South Africa.¹⁴</p> |
|  | <p>While communication and awareness building can take place via mainstream and social media, different outreach methods are needed to engage more isolated youth. The BPS emphasises pro-active outreach to these young people in the spaces where they find themselves and engagement in a non-judgmental and emphatic manner.</p> <p>Young people may also not spontaneously access the programme because of disappointing experiences of interventions in the past which may have led to a distrust in government and other services. Instead, youth express higher levels of trust in their peers. Thus, the BPS provides for a cohort of young, peer-to-peer 'mobilisers' in each BPS site – their role is to reach out to other youth in the community to provide information about the programme, and to conduct local area service mapping and service checks.</p> |
|  | <p>The BPS mobilisers connect young people to guidance workers at the BPS sites. Guidance counselling plays a central role in many of the YG interventions to help the young person to understand the various available services best suited to the individual's needs and circumstances. Quality guidance counselling involves a hands-on, person-centred approach that is both systematic and individualised, and that assists the development of individual action plans together with each BPS participant. Guidance workers and mobilisers are themselves mentored by more specialised staff who can also provide more specialised psychosocial support to NEET youth when required.</p> |
|  | <p>The BPS includes a 'starter pack' made up of a bundle of 'first-line' interventions that serve as initial support to NEET young people, signal to BPS partner organisations that specific youth are programme beneficiaries, and give the young persons a sense of belonging and possibility. The starter pack for young people who enrol in the BPS includes a reference letter template, data bundle, CV template and information on how to get an identity document, tax number and bank account.</p> |



Assessment and referral tools are needed to gather necessary information that can be translated into individualised action plans that – in turn – set out a longer-term career or life goal and outline the actionable steps to move closer to the goal. Alongside understanding their employment history and intention, the BPS assessment tool takes into account that, for youth in South Africa, likely challenges pertain to (physical and mental) health, family situation, poverty, and basic levels of education. Importantly, the guidance worker and the young person develop the action plan collaboratively, allowing youth to be involved in designing their own solutions. This approach is seen to help retain their participation in the programme in the long run.

Once the plan is agreed on, support is provided to help the young person to implement the plan – often in the form of active referral to services identified as important for the youth. Follow-up on action plan progress takes place during regular conversations between the guidance worker and the young person.



Mutually dependent partnerships on dedicated collaboration and careful coordination between relevant stakeholders are needed to provide supported pathways for young people. The BPS model treats these partnerships as 'communities of practice' that facilitate collaboration between the various services (e.g. skills training, job-search support, child and health care) and bring their collective offering to young people as an integrated platform of support. Building such communities of practice at local level will help ensure efficient referrals and a continuum of support to BPS participants. Including young people in these communities of practice is essential.

At the national level, collaboration and alignment with the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention provide the strategic framework for implementing the BPS, while partnerships at the local (municipal) level are responsible for the service delivery.



When a young person has connected with a support service, the system needs to be set up to ensure the youth does not become disconnected again. Follow-up and loop-back options for the young person to explore other services are therefore essential. The BPS embraces such a positive youth development approach that seeks to walk alongside a young person as they reconnect to services, and invites them to return to the programme when a particular opportunity or service has been utilised, whereafter the youth is supported to take the next step in their trajectory.

Collectively, these seven principles are meant to provide an activation strategy and a 'seamless' experience for NEET youth. They combine peer-to-peer outreach, guidance counselling, referral to services within a community of practice, and are supported by a case management system that ensures a continuum of support. These principles form the guiding framework and building blocks of the BPS programme for NEET youth in South Africa. In a next phase, BPS pilots will be developed to achieve proof of concept.

The next phase

The implementation of the seven pillars of the BPS, including the development and nurturing of the communities of practice, will form part of the next stage of the project. In 2020, the team enters the preparatory stage with the aim of rolling out several pilot sites in different parts of the country from the beginning of 2021. This work continues in close collaboration with various key partners, including the multi-stakeholder team that is designing the National Pathway Management Network as part of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention. These high-level partnerships and the successful implementation by government, civil society and the private sectors are needed to realise the promise of more comprehensive and targeted support to youth who are NEET. This nested approach requires strong, cooperative and dynamic communities of practice.

For more information

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Citing this brief

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How to realise the vision of integrated services for South Africa's NEET youth?

The implementation of the BPS will be based on integrated partnerships between role players responsible for the well-being of South Africa's young people. The framework requires collaboration and an inter-sected approach at government level: that leading departments engage at national level, and that coordination and implementation structures are set up at provincial and local government levels.

While the mandate to serve youth sits across different departments and agencies, those with the most direct mandates include departments of Employment and Labour; Basic Education; Higher Education, Science and Technology; Health; and Social Development. Those with the mandate to address the needs of young people in a cross-cutting, integrated way are the National Youth Development Agency and the Department for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities in the Presidency; and the Department of Social Development. Other departments such as Economic Development; Arts and Culture; and Public Works and Infrastructure also have roles to play.

The BPS will assist young people to access these departments' services, based on their individual needs and pathways. It is in many ways in synergy with and complimentary to the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention.

As part of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention, a National Pathway Management Network (NPMN) is being set up with the aim to grow a national network reaching three million young people through multiple channels. These youth will receive active support, information and work-readiness training to increase their employability and get matched to opportunities.

Five prototype sites of the NPMN will be implemented in 2020. The BPS will coordinate its work with the key partners of the NPMN to ensure alignment of both programmes and to keep the experience for young people as seamless as possible.

While aligning its work to the National Pathway Management Network, the BPS also fits the Presidency's drive for a district-level coordination model for efficient use of resources and improved coherence, efficiency and effectiveness of government services.