



Young worker crisis: NEETs, apprenticeships and role of shop stewards

South Africa's youth unemployment crisis remains one of the country's greatest socio-economic challenges. Millions of young people are eager to work, learn and contribute, yet many remain excluded from employment, education, and training opportunities.

According to Statistics South Africa's *Quarterly Labour Force Survey* (Q1 2026), unemployment amongst young people aged 15 to 24 stands at 62.4%. Unemployment amongst those aged 25 to 34 is at 41.7%. At the same time, approximately 3.9 million young people aged 15 to 24 are classified as NEETs (not in employment, education or training). These statistics reflect a generation whose potential is being underutilised.

One of the most effective ways to break this cycle is through apprenticeships, internships, and learnerships. These programmes provide practical workplace experience, mentorship, and industry-specific skills that help young people move from education into employment. They also build confidence, professional networks, and the workplace readiness that employers increasingly demand.

The PSA believes that expanding apprenticeship and learnership opportunities is essential for reducing unemployment and addressing critical skills shortages across the public service and broader economy. Government departments, state-owned entities, educational institutions, and organised labour must cooperate to create more opportunities for young people.

Shop stewards have a vital role to play in this effort. As workplace representatives, they can help identify training opportunities, monitor fair implementation of internship and apprenticeship, ensure that young workers are not exploited, and advocate for transparent recruitment processes. Shop stewards can also guide young employees on their workplace rights, encourage participation in skills development initiatives, and engage employers on expanding entry-level opportunities.

Investing in young workers is not merely a social responsibility – it is an investment in South Africa's future. Every apprenticeship created and every young person given meaningful workplace experience strengthens the public service, supports economic growth, and helps build a more inclusive labour market.

The PSA is committed to advocating for opportunities that give young South Africans the skills, experience, and support they need to enter the world of work with dignity and hope.

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