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Portal to understand youth challenges in South Africa expands into tool for service mapping and referrals

The richest mine of data on youth in South Africa, the [Youth Explorer Portal](#) – which gives statistics on different aspects of health, education, employment and living conditions across all nine provinces and across all wards within those – has now been expanded into a tool for service mapping and referrals.

The portal was developed in 2017 by researchers at the University of Cape Town's Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (SALDRU) in collaboration with OpenUp and government partners.

When the portal was launched, its main aim was to help grow a coherent, quantitative understanding of the multiple deprivations experienced by young people in South Africa. Such a detailed understanding of deprivation at different geographical levels is considered key to development efforts to support young people as it helps to inform youth-specific poverty and inequality interventions that aim to address these deprivations.

Identifying gaps and targeting interventions

The new version of the Youth Explorer now presents point data information on a range of services crucial to supporting youth, alongside data on well-being or deprivation among the youth cohort at various geographical levels.

Chief researcher at SALDRU, Dr Ariane De Lannoy said: "This means that the portal can illustrate where service provision seems imbalanced, allowing for a first-level gap analysis between the profile of young people in a community and available support services in the area. For example, the location of institutes of higher learning in a certain area in relation to the proportion of young people with matric in the same area."

The new Youth Explorer provides an understanding of what the youth cohort in a particular municipality looks like, and of the inequities in socio-economic outcomes and service delivery that exist between different communities within the municipality. For example, understanding the level of education and various deprivations that these youth would potentially enter a post-schooling learning or job opportunity with can indicate the kind of additional support that they may need.

“This innovation of mapping the services available to young people in every community to identify gaps and target interventions to the areas of greatest need was referred to by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the parliamentary debate on the 2021 State of the Nation Address.”

Using the Youth Explorer to provide guidance to young people

In addition, the portal also allows users to access specific information on service provision at the local level. For example, details on labour centres that were collected and verified in collaboration with the Department of Employment and Labour. It, therefore, enables researchers, non-profit organisations, the media and members of the public, especially those working with and supporting young people, to look up youth-relevant services for specific locations. The data can also be downloaded from the website in different formats.

Since 2019, De Lannoy said the portal has become an important tool for the Basic Package of Support (BPS) research team and project partners to understand and visualise the demographics of, and deprivations experienced by, young people aged 15-24 who are not in employment, education or training.

The BPS was developed by a SALDRU-led consortium of research institutions, government departments and development organisations. Importantly, it is part of the National Pathway Management Network – a key component of the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) – which President Ramaphosa launched on Youth Day. The Youth Explorer will be a key tool in the upcoming pilot of the BPS.

BPS guidance counsellors and mobilisers working with youth – as well as other civil society organisations – can now use the Youth Explorer to refer young people to available services in their immediate surroundings and beyond.

In addition, protocols are in place to give the relevant government departments and partners of the PYEI access to the complete, verified services database for their own use, such as on youth-facing applications like SAYouth.mobi that bring the relevant information directly to young people.

Data gathering and verification of information on existing services are ongoing. The SALDRU and OpenUp teams work closely with a range of departments to bring the most accurate information onto the portal and into the database. However, in some instances, in-person verification may be needed.

“Starting with the first BPS pilot area – Atlantis in the Western Cape – in-person verification of services is underway in collaboration with support from the Western Cape Government and the Capacity Building Programme for Employment Promotion, funded by the European Union and based in the Government Technical Advice Centre. “Additional and verified information will be used to update the central youth services database and the Youth Explorer, and shared with PYEI partners”, added De Lannoy.

The [BPS programme](#) will be piloted later this year.

[Read more](#) about the BPS pilot.

[Basic Package of Support](#): short video explaining the intervention from a participant’s perspective.

[BPSY dialogue](#): eight short videos on what South Africa's youth face and need during the transition from education to employment.

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