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YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ACCELERATOR



**CAN THE GLOBAL
BUSINESS SERVICES
SECTOR GENERATE
DECENT WORK IN
SOUTH AFRICA?**

NOVEMBER 2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

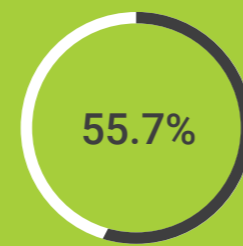


The Global Business Services (GBS) sector has been identified by the South African Government as a generator of youth employment opportunities. The country's high youth unemployment rate of 55.7% for those aged 18-35 years (Statistics South Africa, 2025), has made job creation an important focus but researchers and policy experts caution against overlooking exploitative working conditions in a quest to create more job opportunities. This report adds to existing literature on employment conditions within contact centres by exploring whether South Africa's GBS sector can generate decent work.

To answer this question, the study uses a mixed-methods approach framed against the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) four strategic pillars of decent work: employment creation, social protection, rights at work and social dialogue (ILO, 1999). The report findings show that:



SOUTH AFRICA'S EXPANDED YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT RATE (AGED 18-35 YEARS)

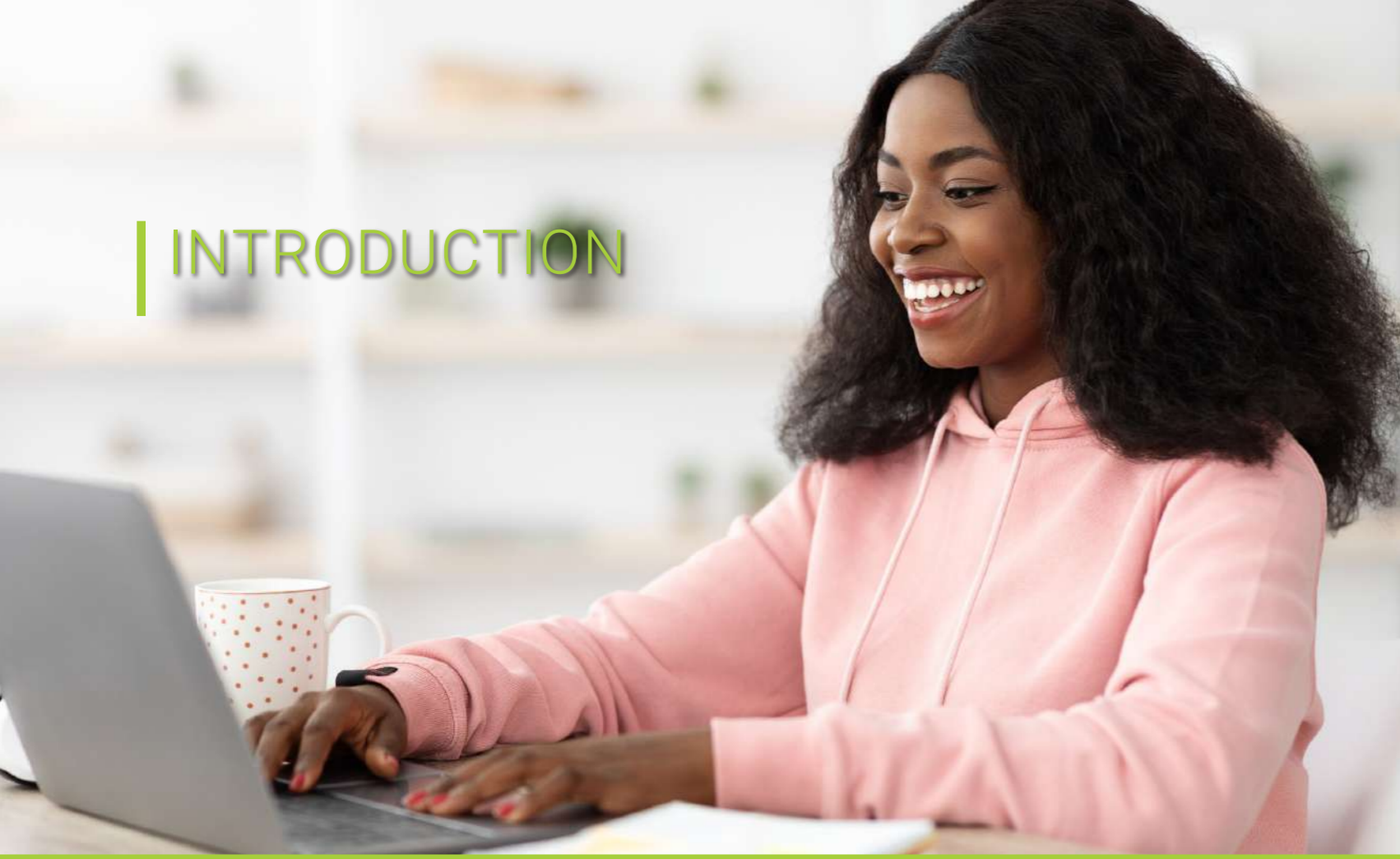


FEMALE REPRESENTATION AMONGST GBS EMPLOYEES



1. South Africa's GBS sector is creating large-scale, accessible and inclusive pathways into work for youth, persons with disability and in particular, women with an over 65% representation amongst employees.
 2. GBS is characterised by high job churn, and yet labour market retention remains strong, with 84% of survey respondents currently employed in formal employment - helping anchor young people in the formal economy through both entry-level jobs and pathways into permanent roles.
 3. Many GBS employers, particularly larger ones, offer social protection benefits beyond what is required legally, with many exceeding minimum wage requirements, investing in training and offering permanent employment contracts.
 4. These benefits extend to employee wellbeing in the form of work-life balance, transport and safety provision, which is a business priority amongst GBS employers.
 5. The sector relies heavily on internal HR processes to enable social dialogue within the workplace in the absence of formal union representation in the GBS sector.
 6. Digitalisation and AI are continually reshaping the GBS sector, driving a transition toward more technology-driven and AI-enabled services.
- In response to these insights, the report concludes with several policy recommendations for strengthening labour protections, and decent work standards in South Africa's GBS sector.

INTRODUCTION



South Africa continues to face high youth unemployment. By the second quarter of 2025, 55.7% of young people aged 18 to 35 years were unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 2025). Worryingly, even when the economy grows, youth employment does not keep pace. As Harambee (2024) highlights, jobs for young people have become increasingly disconnected from GDP growth. This shows that growth on its own is not enough to reverse the unemployment crisis. Instead, what is needed is deliberate action to create pathways into work, especially for women and other excluded groups.

Amid this challenge, the GBS sector has emerged as a vital 'sunrise sector'. Encompassing business process outsourcing, captive contact centres, digital services, finance, and IT support, the sector has proven its ability to generate jobs at scale. The sector has experienced a 421% increase

in employment from 2015-2023, a stark contrast to employment in the overarching Financial Services and Business Sector that GBS falls under, which grew by a mere 23% (Breaking Barriers, 2025). Furthermore, it is committed to inclusive hiring, which the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (dtic) defines as hiring candidates who are "between 18 and 34 years old and are South African citizens".

Inclusive hiring in the sector also keeps improving. In 2024, it made up 38% of new jobs compared to only 10% of new jobs in 2018. Furthermore, on average between 2020 and 2024, the percentage of new jobs created for youth and women was 87% and 69%, respectively (BPESA, 2025).

This growth has been made possible by a unique mix of advantages: South Africa's neutral accent and time-zone alignment

with major markets, government incentives, and strong coordination between the dtic; industry body, BPESA (Business Process Enabling South Africa), and intermediaries like Harambee.

Even more, the sector's contribution to employment is accelerating. In 2024 alone, 20,518 new jobs were added, nearly all of them going to young people (BPESA, 2025). With the GBS Masterplan targeting 500,000 jobs by 2030, there is a strong focus on impact sourcing which aims to bring excluded youth, women, and people with disabilities into the workforce.

For many young people, GBS roles are their first step into formal employment (Anwar & Graham, 2019). Typical entry points include customer service, sales, legal, accounting and HR services. Yet the sector is not just about entry-level jobs: it also provides pathways

into supervisory, digital, and AI-enabled roles. Through targeted training and work-readiness programs, youth are beginning to move into areas like data support and chatbot engineering connecting GBS directly to the future of work.

As South Africa searches for solutions to its unemployment crisis, the GBS sector offers a compelling example of what coordinated action can deliver. It shows how private-public partnerships; inclusive hiring, and targeted training, can open opportunities for young people at scale. At the same time, important questions remain about the quality of these jobs: wages, job security, career progression, and workers' voices. Addressing these issues will determine whether GBS can both reduce unemployment and deliver dignified, long-term employment for South Africa's youth.

BACKGROUND

The concept of Decent Work, introduced by the ILO, has shaped global conversations about how employment contributes not only to economies but also to people's lives. The ILO states that "securing decent work for women and men everywhere... is the most widespread need, shared by people, families and communities in every society, and at all levels of development" (1999).

The ILO defines decent work as the aspiration for fair income, stability, security, rights, voice, family balance, personal development, fairness, and gender equality. It is not only about the number of jobs created, but about whether those jobs provide people with dignity and opportunities to grow (Nam & Kim, 2019).

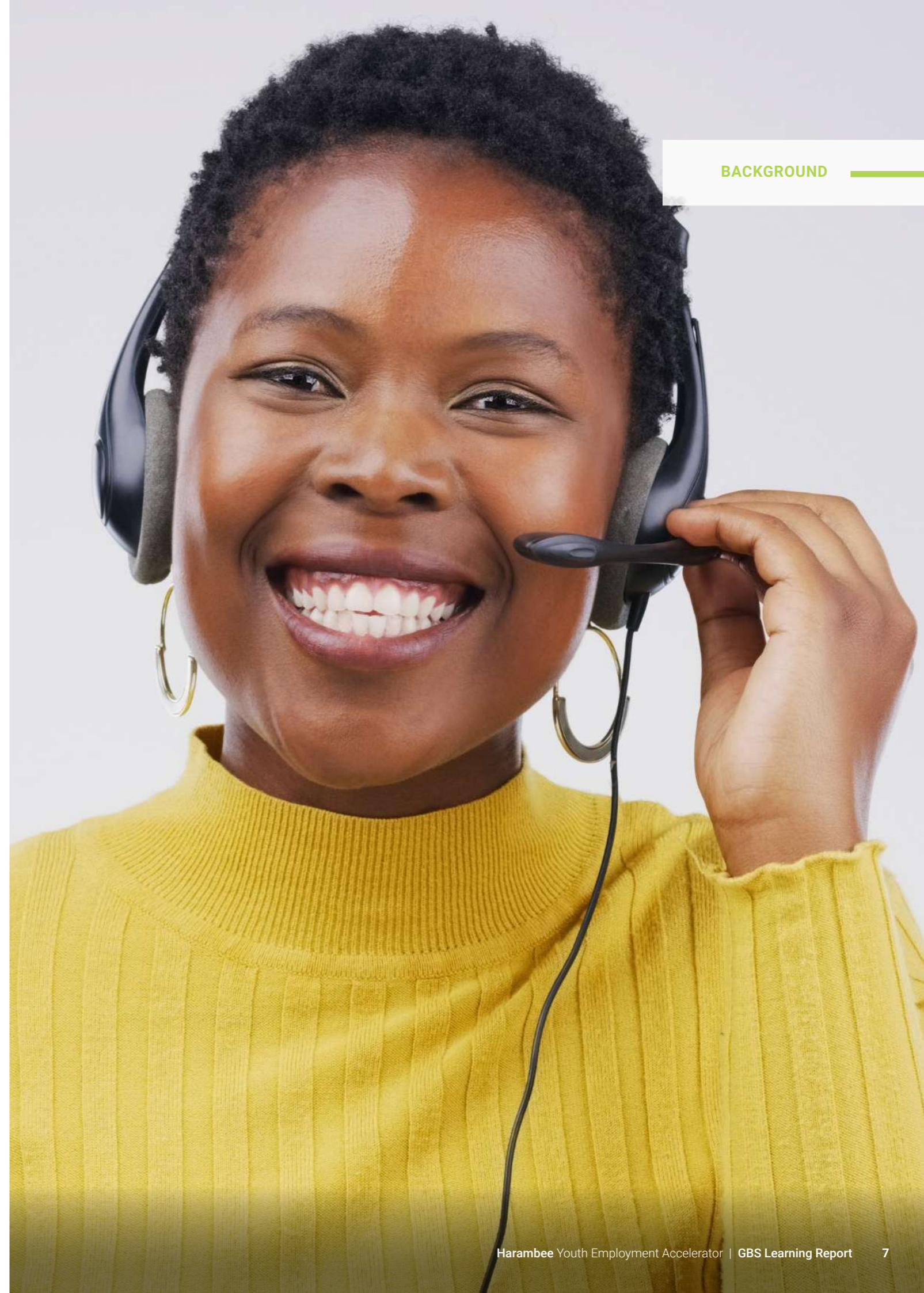
The ILO's framework rests on four pillars:



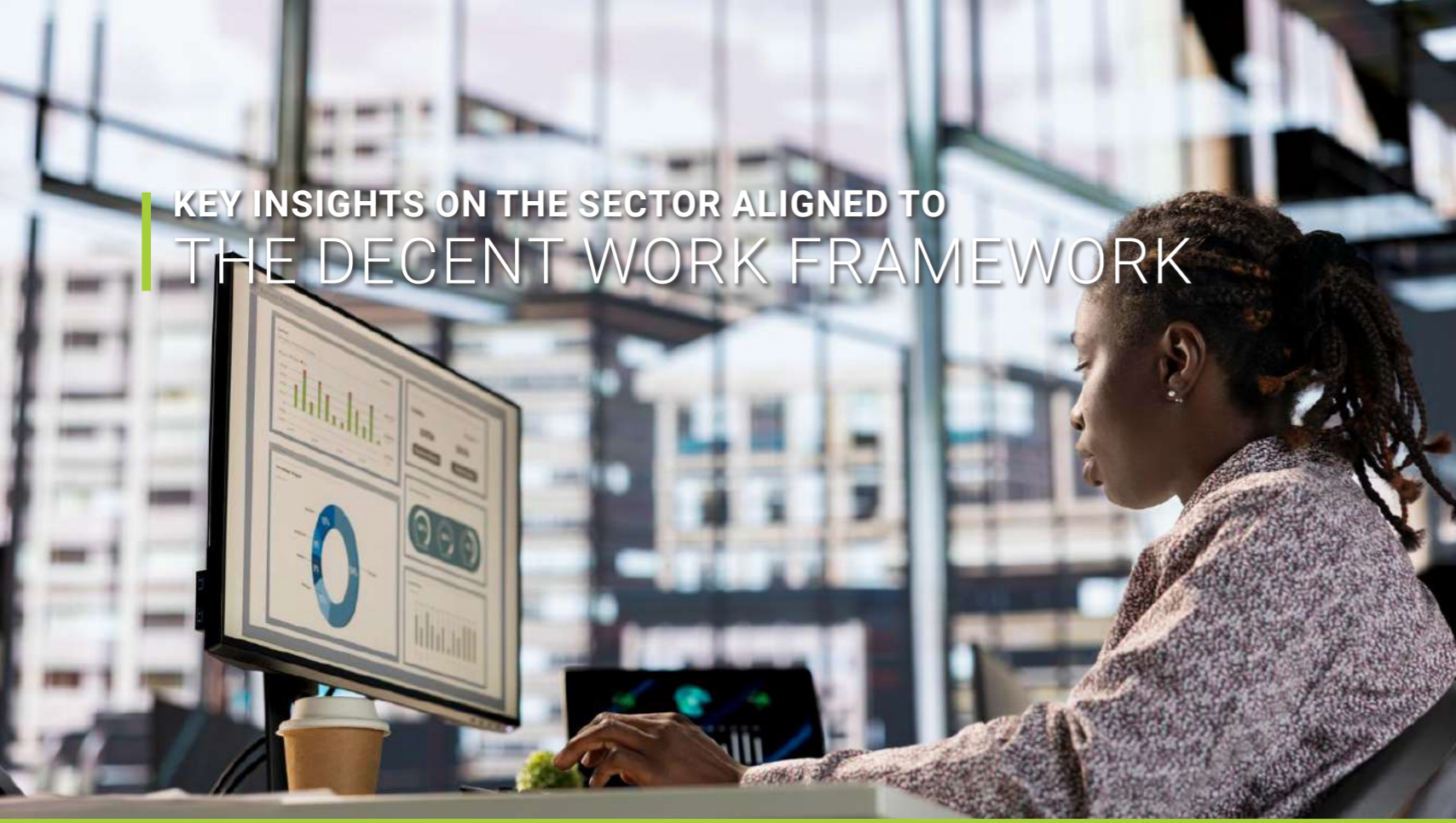
This vision is now embedded in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8): "Decent Work for All."

In line with this agenda, this study seeks to assess whether South Africa's GBS sector can deliver decent work, particularly for young people. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, this entails a combination of qualitative insights from six key informant

interviews with GBS employers and stakeholders, alongside quantitative data from a survey of 751 young people (aged 18–34 years) who were placed into earning opportunities in the sector in 2023. Together, these insights provide a balanced picture of the sector's potential to reduce unemployment while ensuring fair and dignified work for South Africa's youth.



KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK



KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK

This learning report captures six key insights that reflect the GBS sector position when it comes to decent work. They include inclusive job creation, labour market retention, social protection and employee rights, employee wellbeing, social dialogue, and the impact of digitalisation and AI.

1. The GBS sector is creating accessible and inclusive pathways into work: Over 65% of employees are women.

The GBS sector is characterised by inclusive job creation with high participation of youth and women, as well as opportunities that can be made accessible to persons with disabilities. In 2023, 91% of new entrants were youth, followed by 89% in 2024 (BPESA, 2024; BPESA 2025). Furthermore, survey results indicate that 67% of individuals placed and retained into GBS opportunities are women (aligned to the broader sector representation of 68%). This contrasts to other sectors such

as agriculture, transport and utilities who have a minority representation of women, and manufacturing and construction who have had a declining representation of both women and youth over the past ten years (Statistics South Africa, 2025). **The GBS sector is set apart by being both a high-growth sector and having high inclusivity with GBS organisations deliberately opening opportunities to groups that are often excluded from formal employment.** Employers emphasise this commitment to inclusivity, with a Senior Manager at a mid-sized contact centre noting that their organisation is “inclusive by design, sourcing through the SA Youth platform, with targets of at least 70% women and 3% people with disabilities”. Disability inclusion is also becoming more visible, with two-thirds of survey respondents who disclosed a disability reporting that they received adequate support, including accessible roles and tailored accommodations.

Importantly, GBS roles are not limited to those with higher education. The study found that young people with educational qualifications of a matric or even less (e.g. Grade 11) were able to secure employment opportunities. Compared to

other sectors, which require specialisation and high levels of education for complex work, this flexibility in entry requirements demonstrates the sector’s capacity to reach youth who may otherwise be locked out of the labour market.

Figure 1.0 Demographic characteristics

Indicators	Breakdown	Male (count)	Female (count)	Percentage
Sample		114	208	
Province	Eastern Cape	4	2	1.9%
	Gauteng	26	53	24.5%
	KwaZulu-Natal	54	77	40.7%
	Northern Cape	0	1	0.3%
	Western Cape	30	75	32.6%
				100%
Qualification level	Grade 11	2	2	1.2%
	Matric and below	83	152	72.9%
	Vocational/Occupational certificate	13	17	18.3%
	Diploma	12	21	18.5%
	Advanced diploma	1	0	0.3%
	Bachelor’s degree	2	13	4.6%
	Postgraduate degree	1	3	1.2%
				100%

Source: GBS Tracer Survey Demographics, 2025 (n = 322)

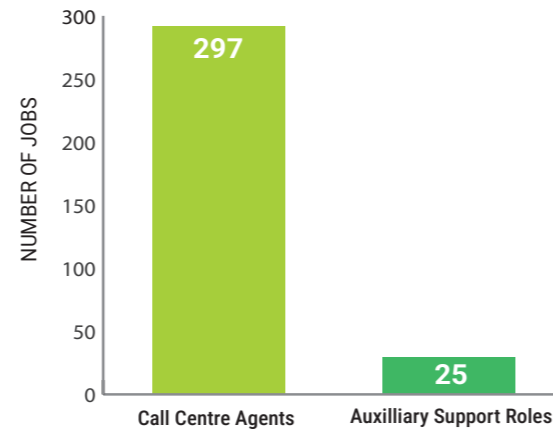
KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK

In addition, while most opportunities are concentrated to South Africa's key GBS hubs Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Western Cape, the study also found representation from provinces such as the Eastern Cape and Northern Cape, signaling a gradual broadening of opportunities across regions.

Furthermore, employers interviewed for the study highlighted how **work readiness programmes and training programmes by some GBS organisations and stakeholders are equipping individuals with the skills required to thrive in the sector as well as being a critical driver of inclusion.** This assertion is supported by a Jobs Fund report (2025) which found that work readiness programmes have helped underserved youth get on-the-job training, mentorship and placement into high demand roles in the digital and services sectors.

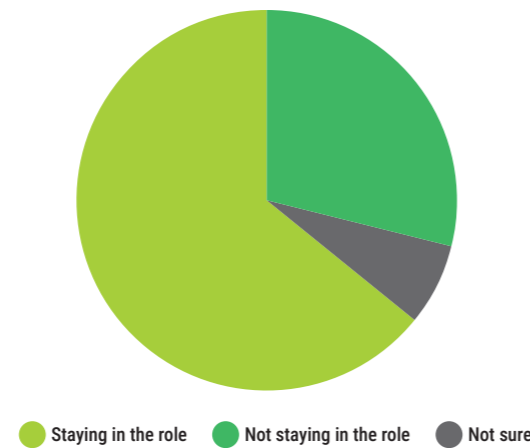
In summary, the data shows that **inclusive hiring does translate into a more diverse workforce.** Despite GBS employers experiencing some attrition, the proportion of women starting training, being placed into employment and retaining their job remains consistent at around 68% of the sample. Similar proportional breakdowns are seen against demographic factors such as education levels and geography. This reflects the inclusivity of GBS jobs and the work of employers to ensure that intentional inclusive hiring results in long-term retention.

Figure 1.1 GBS jobs according to roles



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Employment Outcomes, 2025 (n = 322)

Figure 1.2 Future perception of the role



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Employment Outcomes, 2025 (n = 322)

Taken together, these findings highlight how the GBS sector is not only creating jobs but is also intentionally broadening access to excluded groups. By embracing impact sourcing and flexible entry points, the sector is offering many young South Africans their first foothold in the formal economy, laying the foundation for both employment and inclusion at scale.

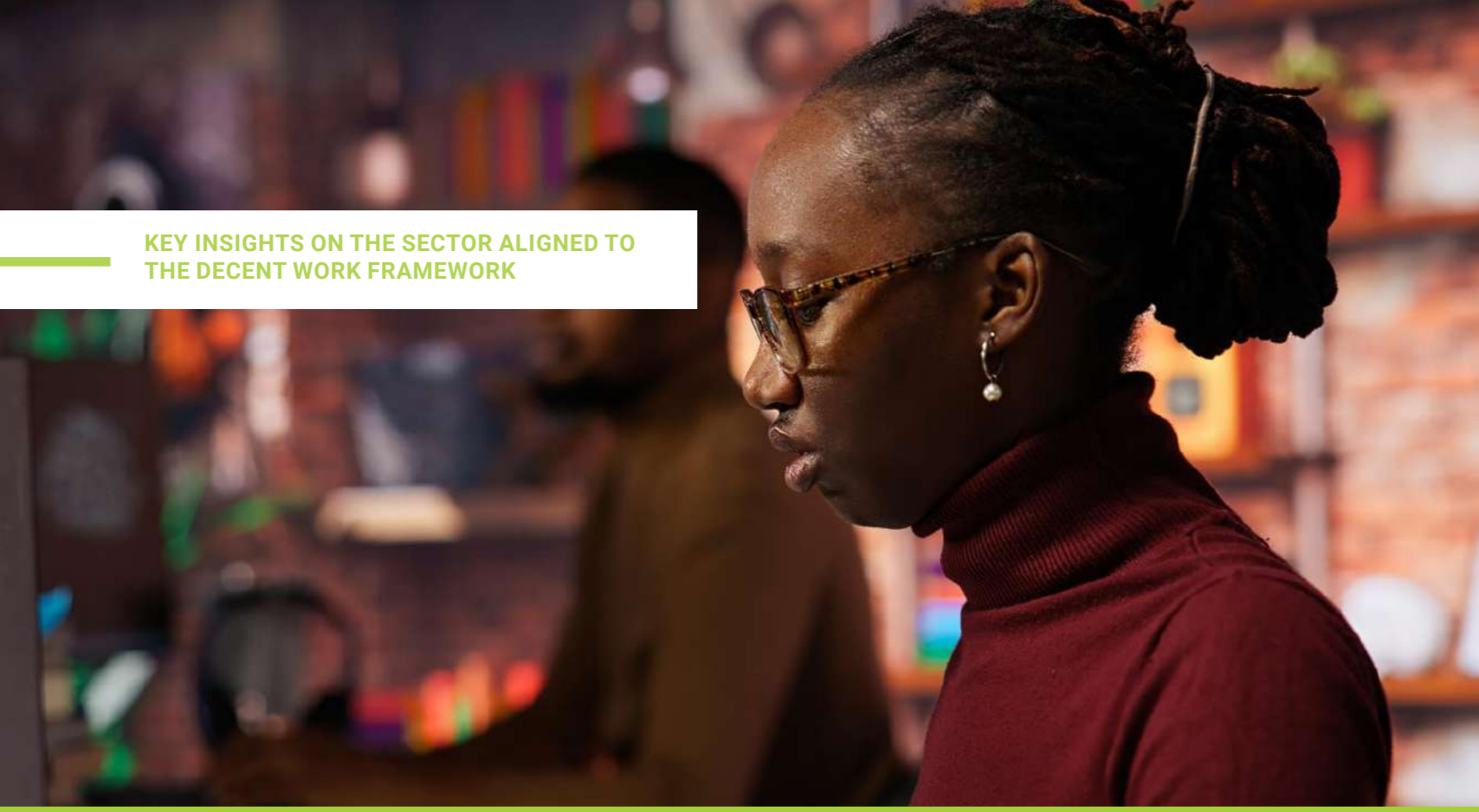
KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK

2. GBS is characterised by high job churn but, despite this, labour market retention remains strong, with 84% of survey respondents currently employed in formal employment.

Several studies have highlighted the role of GBS jobs as a critical anchor for young people in the formal economy, even in the context of high levels of churn (Anwar & Graham, 2019; Harambee, 2024). While employers in this study acknowledged that many employees move frequently between contact centres, or leave for opportunities in other sectors, the survey data also demonstrates strong overall labour market retention. Among the 749 young people surveyed who participated in GBS training, **81% became gainfully employed following the completion of training.** Of this group, 45% are still with the same employer, primarily within the GBS sector.

Reflecting on the subset of 163 youth who transitioned to a new income earning opportunity following their original placement in GBS, 30% transitioned into formal sector employment in sectors such as retail, hospitality, banking and communication, 31% to another GBS employer, 7% went into public employment programmes, specifically the Basic Education Employment Initiative and 32% to self-employment. This is significant because **over a third of young people transitioned within GBS, not just within the formal sector.** Overall, if we include GBS as part of the formal economy, 61% of the young people who transitioned to a new employer, moved to a formal sector employer.





Again, work experience in the GBS sector stands out as an especially powerful enabler of sustained access to the labour market. Harambee’s SA Youth data shows that **young people who have worked in GBS are more likely to secure a subsequent opportunity in the formal economy compared to those employed in other industries.** This trend is also reflected on the SA Youth platform, which connects young people to earning and learning opportunities and is composed of 65% women. Among platform users who recorded more than one work experience in the formal economy, 74% reported securing another formal role. This figure rises to 84% for those with prior GBS experience.

This distinction matters because formal employment remains the most desirable form of work, given its longer duration and higher earnings relative to self-employment or public employment programmes. Consistent with this is Harambee’s income data which indicates that approximately 57% of young people who remain in wage employment experience real earnings growth within six

months, with an anticipated increase of 5–10% for those who stay in the same job. These findings underscore the benefits of entering and sustaining employment in the formal economy. The growth in earnings is also reflected in the survey data, where there is a larger proportion of those earning in the higher income brackets amongst those placed and retained in GBS employment compared to those who were just placed in GBS employment, or those who began training. Furthermore, 72% of those placed in GBS roles currently earn above R5,000 (which is above minimum wage for full-time employment), but this proportion shifts to 85% amongst those still in the same job. These findings are backed by SA Youth placement data (n=242,460), which found that GBS jobs generally provide higher typical earnings than formal sector jobs across most of the earnings distribution. It is clear that GBS jobs serve as a critical gateway for young people, particularly women, to access, contribute to, and remain in stable work (Harambee, 2025).

Figure 2.1: Breakdown of earnings



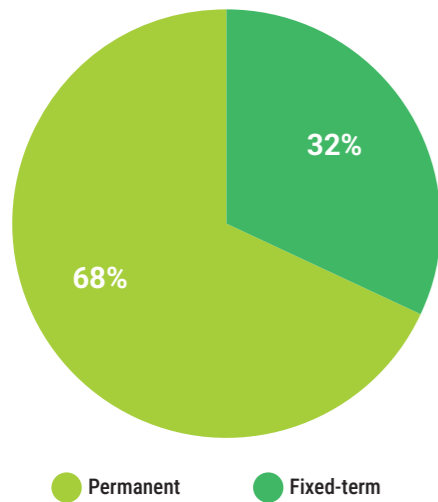
Source: GBS Tracer Survey Employment Outcomes, 2025 (Did training n = 342, Got a job after training n = 291 Still at the job = 190)

Employers also identified impact hiring as a valuable strategy for improving retention. An Executive at a large GBS operator noted: “We are onboarding 150–180 agents a month. Growth is real, but attrition also happens. Impact hires tend to stay longer and show stronger motivation”. This observation aligns with findings from the Everest Group (2023), which reported that **impact sourcing in South Africa’s GBS sector has reduced attrition by drawing in highly motivated workers who are less likely to leave their roles.** This increases the return on investment by reducing operating costs associated with frequently replacing candidates. In parallel, other GBS providers, particularly Business Process Outsourcers (BPOs), have adopted recognition and reward schemes that highlight performance milestones, teamwork, and individual growth. Such initiatives have been associated with a 10% reduction in agent turnover compared

to the industry benchmarks for BPO organisations, where attrition averages 60% (BPESA, 2025). Collectively, these strategies suggest that inclusive recruitment and recognition practices not only widen access but also contribute directly to workforce stability.

Further evidence of retention is reflected in employment contracts. Of the 322 respondents currently working in the GBS sector, **68% had transitioned into permanent roles**, while 32% remained on fixed-term contracts. For many young people, this move into permanent employment represents more than job security; it signals the opportunity to establish a longer-term career trajectory in a sector that often serves as their first point of entry into formal work.

Figure 2.2: Contract types



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Employment Outcomes, 2025 (n = 322)

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that despite the sector’s churn dynamics, GBS plays an increasingly effective role in retaining youth in meaningful employment. It strengthens South Africa’s formal labour market by adding new and good talent to the labour pool, and creates pathways toward stability, career progression, and long-term earnings growth.

3. GBS employers, particularly larger ones, offer social protection benefits beyond what is required legally, with many exceeding minimum wage requirements, investing in training and offering permanent employment contracts.

Social protection and employee rights in the GBS sector highlight how many employers adopt practices that extend beyond the legal minimum, offering wages, benefits, and training that exceed statutory obligations. Large international operators, in particular, reported going well beyond the requirements of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA, 1997). Employers described their practices as follows:

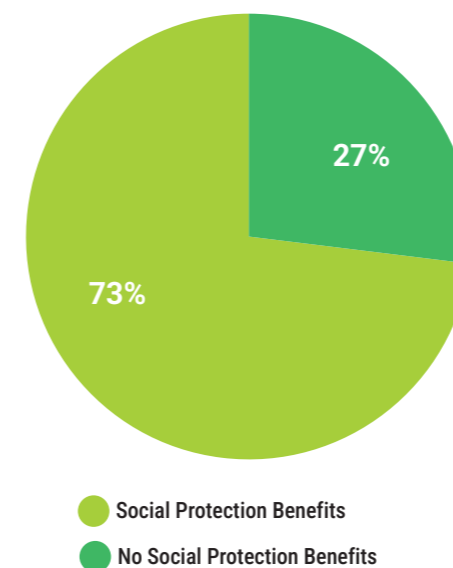
“Our salaries are 80% above minimum wage. We also provide group life, disability, and funeral insurance, plus transport support for night shifts” (Executive at a large GBS operator).

“Our employee package at the moment includes an onsite clinic. All our agents get free medical insurance which entitles them to virtual doctor’s consultations on site, in-person nurse consultations” (Executive at a large BPO provider).

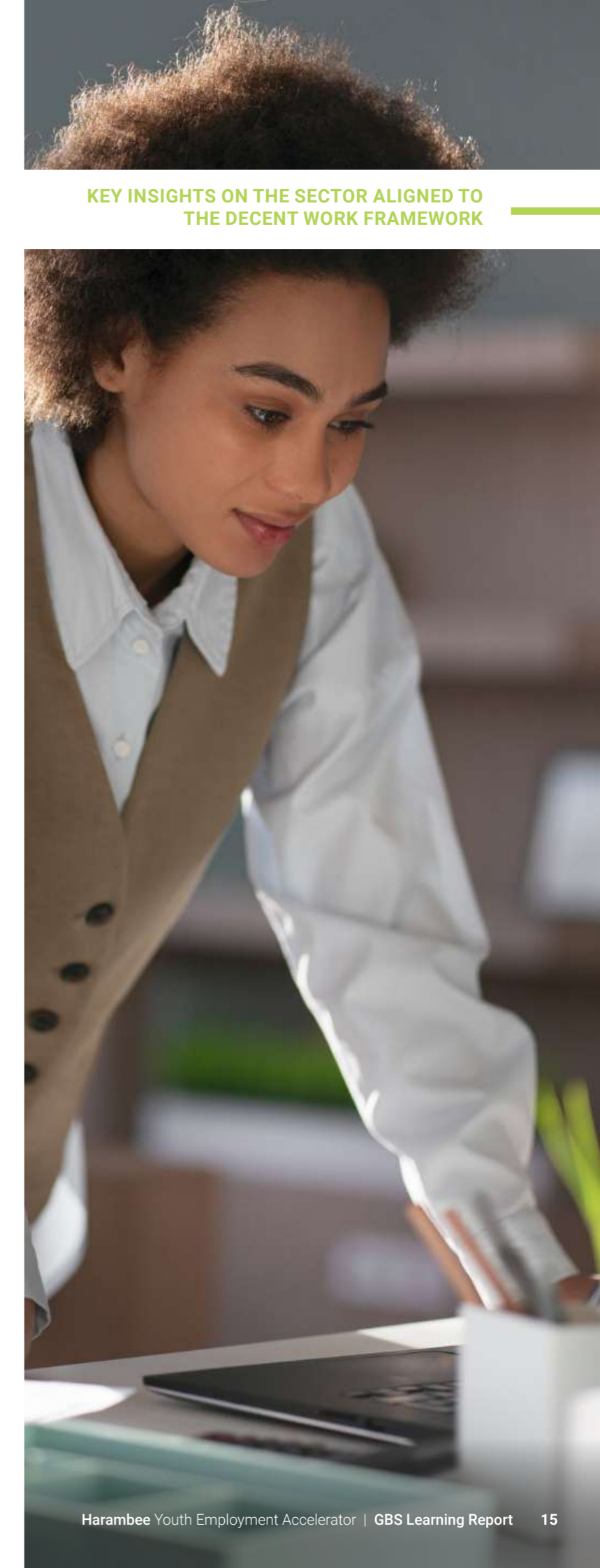
“We offer only permanent employment and an extensive training and skills development programme to get individuals ready and equipped to do the job” (Executive at a large GBS operator).

Survey responses corroborate these employer claims. **73% of employees reported receiving some form of benefit such as medical cover, pension contributions, funeral cover, or transport allowances.** In addition, 57% of employees reported accessing financial literacy and budget support, equipping them with essential tools to manage income and reduce financial vulnerability. While not legally mandated, the inclusion of financial literacy training appears to be an emerging practice within the sector. Intermediaries and skills development organisations have also mainstreamed financial literacy as a component of learnership programmes, despite not functioning as traditional employers (Harvard University, 2023).

Figure 3.1: Social Protection Outcomes



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Social Protection Outcomes Summary, 2025 (n = 322)



KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK

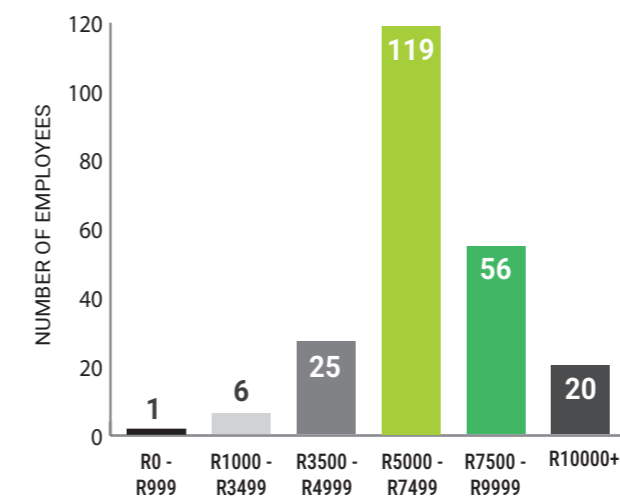


KEY INSIGHTS ON THE SECTOR ALIGNED TO THE DECENT WORK FRAMEWORK

Current earnings data further reinforces these insights. Of those surveyed, 220 employees (97%) reported earning wages above R3,500 – a close estimation of minimum wage for full-time employment - however, a minority, 7 employees (3%) earn below. In these cases, factors such as reduced working hours or commission-based contracts may explain the discrepancy.

Insurance Fund (UIF), established under the Unemployment Insurance Act, No. 63 of 2001, excludes employees on learnership stipends, a common entry point for youth into the GBS sector, from accessing unemployment benefits. This exclusion leaves many young entrants particularly vulnerable in the event of job loss, especially if they are not necessarily absorbed into a role post-learnership.

Figure 3.4: Earnings amongst those in GBS Employment

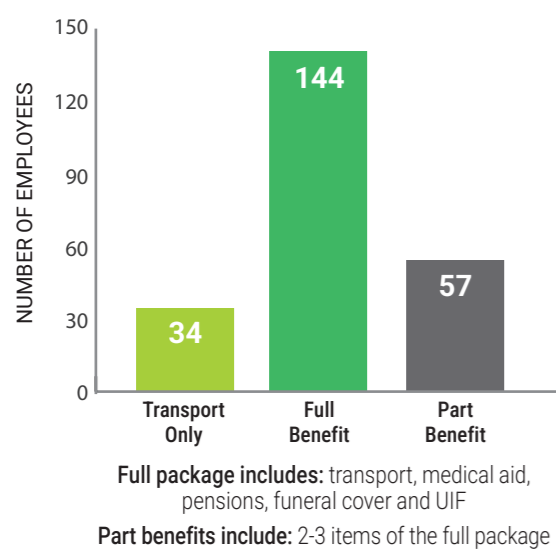


Source: GBS Tracer Survey, 2025 (n = 227)

4. Employee wellbeing in the form of work-life balance, transport and safety provision is a business priority for employers.

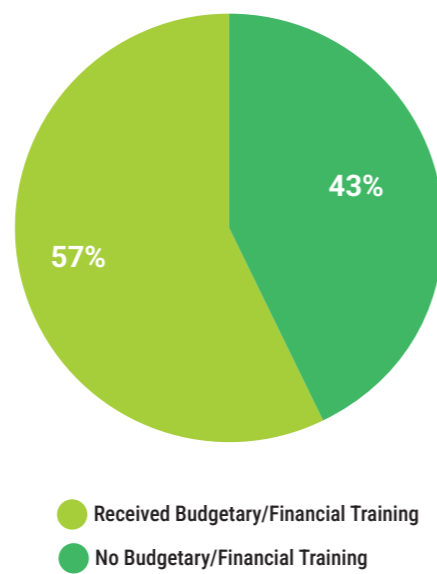
Employee wellbeing explores how employers address work-life balance, transport, and safety for a largely shift-based workforce. Contact centre work is structured around shift work and while many young people value the stability of formal jobs, the demands of long or irregular hours can strain their ability to manage family responsibilities, health, and personal lives. The study found that **72% of respondents reported having access to family leave to attend emergencies, aligning with the BCEA provisions.** While many organisations comply with the minimum standards, there are still uneven experiences with work-life balance, particularly for women who often carry the dual burden of work and care responsibilities.

Figure 3.2: Social Protection Benefit Classification



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Social Protection Outcomes Summary, 2025 (n = 235)

Figure 3.3: Budgetary/Financial training



Source: GBS Tracer Survey Social Protection Outcomes Summary, 2025 (n = 322)

Despite these encouraging practices, **gaps remain in the social protection framework.** Notably, South Africa's Unemployment

Out of 322 respondents		
72% indicated that they have work life balance.	2% of respondents disclosed a disability, of which two thirds receive support.	Of the 63% of survey respondents who work shifts, 72% indicated that they feel their safety is considered during the night shift.

One of the most significant wellbeing interventions employers reported is transport provision. With many contact centre agents working evening or night shifts, reliable and safe transport is critical to reducing absenteeism, improving punctuality, and ensuring staff safety. Employers emphasised that transport support is no longer viewed as a “perk,” but as an expected employer offering. As one GBS skilling provider explained, “...It’s no longer an incentive package. It’s almost like business as usual at the moment... [and] if you turn off transport, then there’s a problem... If you work [until], some say either 6:00 or 7:00 PM [then] you need to provide transport”. Another Executive at a large GBS operator noted, “We provide transport... we run shuttles... and if you finish at 7:00 PM or later... we provide you door-to-door transport for free. We transport 3,000 people a day [to their homes]. It certainly helps with attendance, with being on time and just also retaining our people”.

This investment in transport not only enhances operational efficiency but also directly supports inclusivity, as it enables more women to take on shift-based roles safely. Indeed, the survey found that among night-shift workers, 72% reported feeling safe, a figure that employers attributed to structured transport solutions, meal allowances, and improved workplace security. These measures are particularly important given that women make up most of the workforce, and safety concerns can otherwise limit their ability to participate fully in the sector.

Taken together, these findings suggest that employee wellbeing is increasingly recognised by employers as a business imperative rather than a peripheral issue. By embedding measures such as family leave, transport provision, and safety protocols, the sector is helping young people manage the realities of shift work while improving retention and satisfaction.

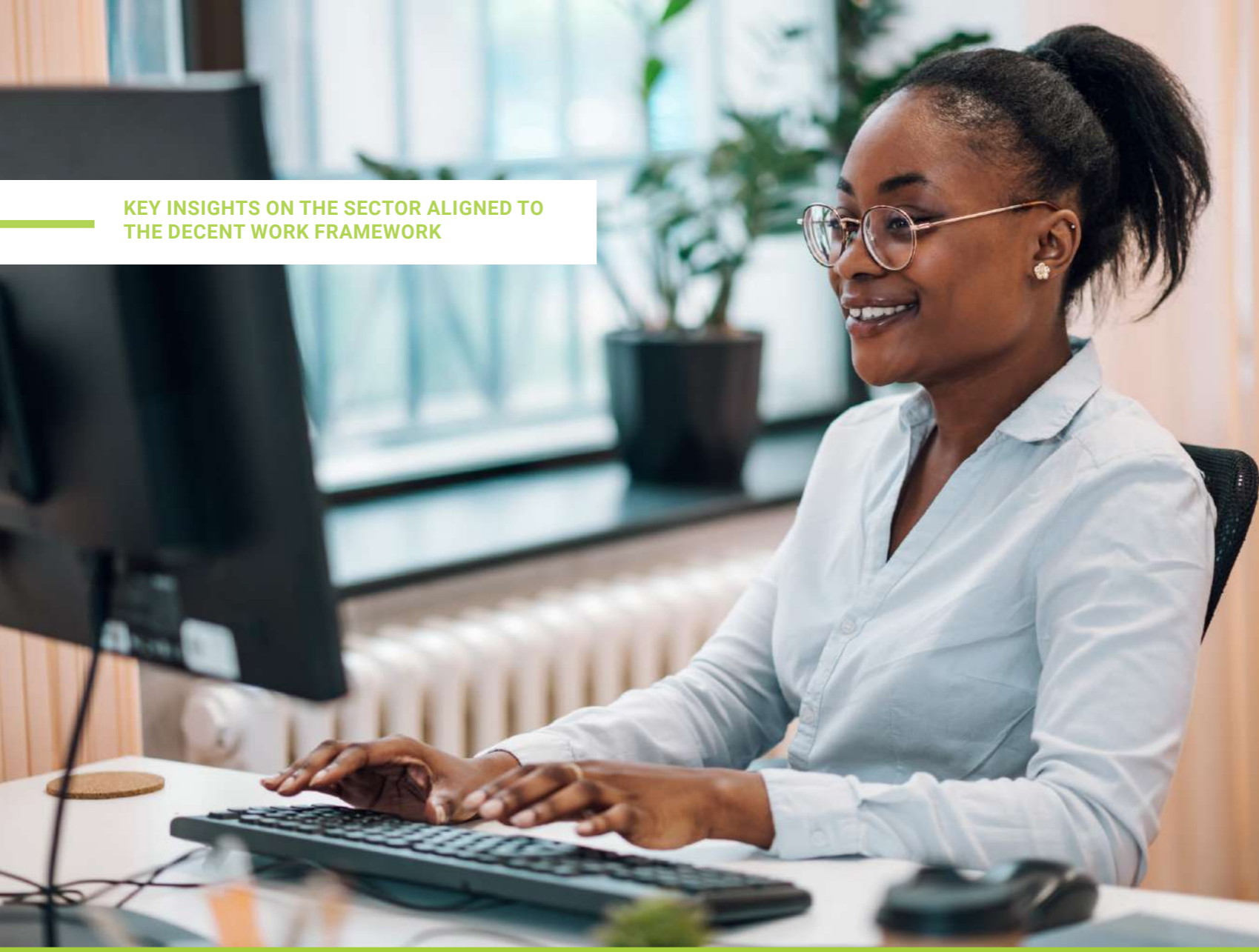
5. Employers often rely on internal processes to enable social dialogue within the workplace in the absence of formal union representation in the GBS sector.

Social dialogue, the ILO’s fourth pillar refers to all types of negotiation, consultation, and exchange of information between employers and workers or with the government. This pillar is pivotal in building a sustainable and equitable labour market. Most employers in South Africa’s GBS sector rely on internal measures to support social dialogue, given the limited presence of formal unions in the industry. These measures include open-door policies, structured HR processes, regular “huddles,” and monthly team-building sessions where staff can raise concerns.

As an Executive at a large GBS operator explained, “Our HR policies are strong, and that may explain why employees don’t feel

the need for unions”. Another Executive from a small GBS operator highlighted that “We’ve got... our HR managers, obviously we’ve got senior managers... So, if there’s any violation or any concern within our employees, they know we’ve got a very open-door policy”.

From the employee perspective, survey data revealed that only **2% of respondents reported using formal grievance channels to address workplace issues**, and just one individual noted that the issue was successfully resolved. Similarly, when asked about family-related emergencies, only 3% acknowledged access to formal communication channels, with most relying instead on immediate supervisors or informal interactions. This suggests that while employers do provide spaces for feedback, the effectiveness of this is reliant on the employer’s willingness to prioritise. As such, more may need to be done to capture broader concerns around working conditions or rights.



Employers also acknowledged a generally low level of union representation within contact centres. Instead, they pointed to robust human resource policies and clearly documented grievance procedures as mechanisms to safeguard employee rights. These processes, often reinforced by external legal counsel, were cited as effective in resolving workplace disputes and maintaining labour standards. According to one employer, the efficiency of these internal mechanisms helps explain the limited number of referrals to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, South Africa's statutory dispute resolution body. While some stakeholders shared this

view and considered employee concerns to be adequately addressed, the absence of strong collective representation or independent bodies raises questions about the long-term sustainability of such reliance on employer-driven systems.

The reliance on employer-led systems raises both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, such structures can be efficient and responsive, creating a sense of psychological safety in smaller teams. On the other hand, the absence of independent bodies questions the extent to which employees influence decision-making, negotiate collectively, or safeguard long-term rights.

6. Digitalisation and AI are continually reshaping the GBS sector, driving a transition toward more technology-driven and AI-enabled services.

Digitalisation is rapidly reshaping the GBS sector, moving it beyond traditional voice-based roles into digital and AI-enabled services. Employers highlighted that this shift is already creating new opportunities for young people to transition into areas such as IT support, data analysis, and AI-focused positions like chatbot engineering. **What were once primarily entry-level, routine jobs are increasingly serving as a platform for progression into higher-value, technology-driven careers.**

To keep pace with these changes, many employers are redesigning training curricula into "role-readiness programmes". These programmes are **deliberately tailored to sector needs, focusing on equipping youth with digital literacy, multi-channel communication skills, and hands-on exposure to AI tools.** Such adaptations are essential in ensuring that young employees can move beyond entry-level contact centre roles and participate in the digital economy.

Employers have noted the success of this approach. An Executive at a large GBS operator explained: "Our AI engineers started as contact centre agents. With intentional training, we prepared them for higher-value digital careers". This not only demonstrates the sector's capacity for internal mobility but also its role in bridging the gap between basic employment and specialised digital work.

This transformation positions the GBS sector as more than a job creator, it becomes a launchpad into the digital economy. By combining accessible entry-level roles with targeted training and progression opportunities, the sector is directly linking South Africa's youth to the future of work, while also strengthening the country's global competitiveness in technology-enabled services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the past five years, South Africa's GBS sector has made significant investments to align with the decent work agenda. The sector has created tens of thousands of jobs, absorbed large numbers of youth into the formal economy, and implemented inclusive hiring practices that have brought women and people with disabilities into the workforce. Employers have introduced mechanisms such as impact sourcing, training programmes, and transport support to strengthen retention and wellbeing. These strategies demonstrate that the sector is not only creating jobs, but also providing young people with the skills and experience needed to get a foothold in the formal labour market.

At the same time, the study highlights critical areas where further progress is needed to ensure that GBS jobs consistently meet the standards of decent work.

First, **the sector can invest more in disability inclusion.** While some organisations have intentionally tried to hire more disabled youth, and create inclusive work environments for them, the representation of people with disabilities is still very low in the sector.

Second, while many employers offer internal grievance systems and HR-led feedback processes, the absence of independent institutions representing the worker's voice remains a major gap. **Establishing stronger, sector-wide mechanisms for representation** would provide employees with a platform to negotiate, influence decision-making, and secure long-term rights. This would also align with international evidence showing that workplaces with stronger worker representation tend to have lower attrition and better job quality.

Third, while many employers exceed the BCEA (1997) and provide additional benefits, gaps remain in social protection coverage, particularly

for young people entering through learnership programmes. Currently, individuals receiving stipends under learnership agreements are excluded from the UIF, leaving them vulnerable to sudden income shocks. **Expanding UIF coverage to include learners, alongside broader reforms to ensure equal access to medical insurance, pensions, and financial literacy training,** would help build resilience and protect those most at risk of precarious employment.

Fourth, employers have begun investing in digital training and role-readiness programs to prepare youth for a rapidly changing world of work. To sustain this momentum, additional solutions could include **sector-wide training partnerships with higher education institutions, pooled resources for AI and digital literacy programmes, and public-private funding models** to ensure that smaller domestic operators are not left behind.

Finally, the sector would benefit from **embedding job quality benchmarks covering wages, benefits, career pathways, and workers' voices into the GBS Masterplan and government incentive schemes.** This would incentivise employers not just to create jobs, but to create good jobs that can sustain long-term economic participation.

In conclusion, GBS employment is an inclusive and valuable entry point into the labour market. It has already proven its ability to absorb young people at scale and provide them with the training, networks, and first formal work experience that can set them up for future opportunities. Strengthening independent worker institutions, extending social protection, and embedding quality standards are critical steps in making South Africa's GBS sector not only a global leader in job creation, but also a champion of decent work for all.

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