

Mining **Future Skills**



MINING QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

FINAL REPORT

FINAL REPORT

FOR

**A STUDY TO IDENTIFY AND ANALYSE THE SPECIFIC MINING AND MINERAL
SECTOR (MMS)-RELATED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT NEEDS IN THE EASTERN
CAPE PROVINCE**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Background

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA), as a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) for the mining and minerals sector (MMS), plays a crucial role in skills development and training. It ensures that both the workforce and communities are equipped with the necessary skills and competencies to meet the current and future needs of the sector. This is achieved through the implementation of various programmes underpinned by the skills demands of the MMS. Central to this is skills planning that integrates local community needs, to ensure that training programmes are tailored to the socioeconomic contexts as well as opportunities found in specific geographical areas.

It is in line with these imperatives that the MQA initiated a study to provide insights into the specific mining and mineral sector related skills development needs in mining communities. By identifying the skills needed by communities, the study will help inform strategies that will lead to the implementation of targeted training programmes needed to address the skills gaps in communities. By identifying the skills needed by communities, the study will inform strategies that will ensure the implementation of targeted training programmes that address skills gaps and shortages in mining communities.

Study Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to provide insights into the specific MMS-related skills development needs in mining communities in the Eastern Cape province taking into account its unique economic landscape, minerals resources endowments, and their sectoral challenges. This aim is supported by several objectives, including an assessment of policies, legislation, and strategies that support skills development, as well as an analysis of the socioeconomic landscape of the province. Additionally, the objectives encompass establishing the status of the MMS in the province, highlighting its performance and contribution to the provincial economy. Identifying mining-related skills shortages and assessing skills development and training programs are also key objectives of the study. Given that the economy of the Eastern Cape province is supported by multiple economic sectors, the study also aims to identify cross-sector opportunities for skills development to foster an environment that supports skills transfer and application across sectors.

Approach to the Study

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data was gathered through surveys, workshops, and key informant interviews. In total, 330 community members participated in the survey, and a provincial workshop was conducted. Interviews were also held with representatives from mining companies and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Secondary data was obtained through a review of relevant literature, as well as analysis of the MQA's data from Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) and Annual Training Reports (ATRs).

Key Findings and Insights

The key findings from the study are outlined below, and these are presented to respond to the objectives of the study.

Objective 1 and 2: Analysing the effectiveness of current legislation, policies, and strategies driving skills development in the province as well as assessing the alignment of provincial frameworks with national strategies.

There are several legislative frameworks, policies and strategies that are driving skills development both nationally and within the province. Specifically, at the national level, there is a Constitution of South Africa, Skills Development Act as well as the National Skills Development Strategy that guides the implementation of skills development initiatives in the country.

In the mining sector, the MPRDA serves as the primary legislative framework. One of its core objectives is to promote the participation of historically disadvantaged South Africans in the mining industry. This objective is operationalised through sector-specific transformation tools such as the Mining Charter and the Social and Labour Plan (SLP). The SLP, in particular, places strong emphasis on human resource development, extending its impact beyond the workforce to include mining communities and labour-sending areas.

At the provincial level, strategies such as the Provincial Development Plan and the Provincial Economic Growth and Development Plan place skills development at the centre of socio-economic transformation. These plans are aimed at ensuring that skills initiatives are responsive to local economic needs and contribute to inclusive growth.

Overall, there is alignment between national frameworks, sectoral legislation and strategies and provincial development strategies. Skills development is recognised as a cross-cutting imperative that is central to achieving both the national and provincial objectives. Evidence of the implementation of these frameworks is reflected in various skills development initiatives that have benefited local communities in the province. While this is the case, there are challenges on both the supply and demand sides that affects skills development initiatives and these challenges needs to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of current and future initiatives.

Objective 3: Analysing the population demographics of the province (e.g., age distribution, gender, and racial representation, educational attainment levels and skillsets of working-age population).

The study revealed strong parallels between the broader demographic and economic characteristics of the Eastern Cape and those of the community members who participated in the research. The key findings were that the population is dominated by female and so, there is a need to prioritise programmes that target women. In terms of age, the province has a young population calling for youth-tailored programmes.

The levels of education amongst the population remains a concern in the province and so there is need for multiple programmes targeting those that are illiterate, those that have grade 10 and 11 as highest levels of education, and those that have completed matric who are in need of financial support to pursue tertiary education. The study also revealed that there is considerable percentage of the population that lives with disabilities and so, there is a need for skills development opportunities that will cater for people living with mobility impairment, hearing impairment and developmental disability.

The issue of unemployment remains a concern in the province, and this came out in the study with community members highlighting the social consequences that emerge from lack of income to support families. This situation underscores the urgent need for targeted employment initiatives and skills development programmes to equip community members with the necessary skills and opportunities to enter the workforce and improve their economic prospects.

Objective 4: Establishing a detailed profile of the MMS in the province, including main commodities extracted and processed, size and composition of the existing workforce, types of companies operating in the sector.

While the MMS contributes the least to the economy of the province, it offers opportunities to communities. The province is home to several mineral deposits that remain untapped. There is potential for developing small scale mining projects that are led by community members. More so, as a labour sending area, there is a need continued provision of MMS-related skills to ensure that community members are able to secure employment in the MMS in other provinces. In particular, there is a need to look reskilling and upskilling programmes to ensure that those that were employed in the MMS and are within the working-age group are able to re-enter the MMS or move into other sectors of the economy within the province.

Objective 5: Analysing the economic performance of the MMS compared to other sectors in the provincial economy including assessing its contribution to GDP, job creation and revenue generation.

The provincial economy is supported by several sectors, with the tertiary sector—particularly personal services, finance, and trade—making the largest contribution to both GDP and employment. This is followed by the secondary sector, while the primary sector contributes the least. Within the primary sector, mining plays a minimal role to the provincial GDP and employment. These insights point to the need to prioritise skills development in the tertiary sector, where the greatest employment opportunities currently exist. In this context, a targeted analysis is important to identify specific subsectors within the province that offer the most potential for growth. It is equally important to determine the skills needed to unlock these opportunities – some of these skills may exist amongst those who worked in the MMS.

Objective 6 and 7: Identifying the existing mining-related occupational shortages and skills gaps within the province and reasons thereof as well as identifying the skills mismatches between the skills required by mining companies and the skills available in the community.

The key findings indicate that the majority of the working-age population are either semi-skilled or unskilled, with only a small proportion holding post-school qualifications. Among those with higher education, most have qualifications in education and health sciences, while there is a notable shortage of graduates in engineering and related technical fields. This highlights the need for skill development support that prioritises technical and vocational education and training to increase the number of graduates in engineering, mining and other technical qualifications.

Occupations identified as being in high demand include machine operators, artisans, and human resources professionals. Additionally, several hard-to-fill vacancies were highlighted, such as Mine Manager, Mine Deputy, Quarry Manager, Chief Mine Planner, Mine Design Planning Manager, and Mine Overseer or Superintendent (Planning). Skills gaps have also been identified in numerous skills including critical thinking, problem solving, communication, occupational health and safety.

One of the critical challenges affecting the availability of mining professionals in the province is the lack of accredited training service providers offering mining-specific education and skills development. As a result, the absence of relevant qualifications and practical experience continues to hinder recruitment efforts within the sector.

Objective 8 and 9: Assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of existing skills development programmes in addressing provincial needs as well as analysing the capacity offerings of technical colleges, universities, and industry-specific training providers in addressing the skills development in the province.

The Eastern Cape has several education and training institutions that supports skills development. These include universities, TVET and CET colleges. Collectively, these institutions offer a range of programmes designed to meet the needs of the provincial economy. In particular, TVET and CET colleges provide training in key areas such as engineering, business studies, hospitality, tourism, agriculture, and information technology.

Skills development efforts in the province are further supported by various SETAs including MQA, MerSETA, LGSETA, AGRISETA, ETDP SETA, and CETA, among others. These SETAs have implemented numerous programmes in the provinces.

Objective 10 and 11: Identifying the common skills development needs of community members living near mining operations, beyond mining-specific jobs as well as analysing the demand for skills in related sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and service industries

Community members identified the several skills as being crucial to enable participation in both the MMS and other economic sectors in the province, namely health and safety, engineering skills, environmental management and technical mining skills. The other set of skills that were identified are those skills that will enable participation in other sectors of the economy. These include skills necessary for participation in the agricultural sector, the establishment of small businesses, and the support of community-based organisations. These set of skills include project management, financial management, leadership and supervision, digital literacy skills, business skills, entrepreneurial skills and others.

Objective 12: Assessing the need for entrepreneurial and business development skills for local economic empowerment.

The study highlighted interest in entrepreneurship among community members in the province, who expressed a need for training programmes that support small businesses. Communities noted several business opportunities in the province and noted the need for business and entrepreneurship skills.

Objective 13: Gathering insights on the community and companies' experiences in accessing skills development offerings from the MQA

The study revealed that most participants were unaware of existing training initiatives implemented in the province. Moreover, many reported challenges in accessing these programmes. The primary barriers identified included a lack of accessible information about available training opportunities, the high cost of participation, and the long distances to training centres. In response, community members proposed several recommendations to improve access and effectiveness. These included enhancing communication and outreach about training opportunities, developing programmes that support small business development, and investing in the improvement and expansion of local training facilities to make them more accessible and responsive to community needs.

Objective 14 and 15: Exploring the potential synergies between skills development needs of the MMS for upskilling and reskilling existing workforce for diversification into other sectors as well as identifying potential partners and stakeholders relevant to addressing skills development needs in the province.

Skills development initiatives in the Eastern Cape have been supported by a range of stakeholders, including the MQA. However, the study revealed that a considerable portion of community members are unfamiliar with the MQA and its role in local training efforts, highlighting the need for the organisation to enhance its visibility and outreach within communities. Participants also expressed the need for a diverse range of training programmes tailored to the varying needs of different community groups. Key recommendations also included the provision of stipends to support participation in training, the alignment of training with job opportunities, and the tailored programmes that support small business development. It was also suggested that the MQA should establish partnerships with stakeholders already involved in local skills development initiatives in the province to strengthen coordination and ensure that training efforts are accessible.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the key findings of the study and are structured according to the SMART framework, ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

Recommendation 1: A study to assess youth development initiatives implemented in the Eastern Cape province

Skills development in the province is supported by various stakeholders. To address the skills challenges, several initiatives have been implemented, with a focus on young people due to the province's youth-dominated population. High unemployment levels among the

youth, exacerbated by poor educational backgrounds have underscored the implementation of skills development programmes. In light of these initiatives, it is necessary to map and assess the impact of these programmes on the employability of the youth and participation in the economy. To this effect, it is recommended that MQA initiate a study that evaluates the effectiveness of skills programmes that have been implemented in the province to identify gaps. It is proposed that the findings of the study be used to develop a strategy that will support the implementation of MQA’s unemployment youth programme.

Activity	MQA must develop a strategy to support the implementation of its unemployed youth programme
Timeline	This study can be earmarked for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 2: A study to enhance women’s economic participation through assessing their skills needs and programmes’ effectiveness in the Eastern Cape

To tackle unemployment and poverty in the Eastern Cape, it is essential to focus on women, as they make up the majority of the province’s population. In the study, women ranked high the need for alternative skills for economic diversification. Several skills were highlighted as being crucial to support the participation of women in the economy. Against these insights, it is recommended that a study be initiated to provide detailed insights into the specific skills required, assess the effectiveness of MQA’s programmes in providing these skills and ascertain the impact of current skills offerings.

Activity	MQA must develop a gender strategy to guide the implementation of its skills development and programmes
Timeline	This project can be earmarked for the 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 3: Career guidance campaigns targeting youth not in employment, education, and training (i.e., NEET)

The Eastern Cape province hosts several post-school education and training (PSET) institutions that offer programmes across various disciplines serving different economic sectors in the province. Despite this, there is a considerable percentage of the youth have only completed grades 10 and 11 and are seeking avenues to further their education and improve their employability. There is also a sizeable percentage of youth that have completed matric who are in need of opportunities to pursue tertiary education. It is recommended that MQA, in collaboration with local stakeholders, launch career guidance campaigns targeting youth who are not in employment, education, and training. These campaigns should be hosted within communities in venues that will be accessible to all, ensuring maximum participation and engagement from the youth.

Activity	MQA in collaboration with local stakeholders to host career guidance campaigns targeting youth not in employment, education and training
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Timeline	The campaigns can be rolled out within a year, and this includes the preparation and discussions that will need to take place between MQA and the relevant stakeholders.
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Recommendation 4: Community outreach programme to increase the visibility of MQA and its programmes in the Eastern Cape province

Despite the implementation of skills programmes by the MQA in the province, there is concern about the level of awareness and knowledge of its programmes. There is a need for MQA to increase its visibility and presence in communities within the province. It is recommended that MQA implement a community outreach programme where representatives visit local communities to provide information, conduct workshops, and engage directly with community members. This approach will help ensure that more people are informed about the available opportunities and how to access them. Directly connecting with community members will also build their confidence in MQA-supported research, as they witness it being translated into tangible activities that support community-based skills development.

Activity	The MQA must launch an outreach programme aimed at increasing its visibility amongst communities in the Eastern Cape province.
Timeline	Information sessions can be arranged in areas/communities where research studies have been conducted. These can serve as feedback sessions where the key findings of the research studies are shared with communities as well as way forward in terms of interventions that will be implemented. Through these engagements, participants will feel acknowledged and valued and are likely to share the information with others in their communities thereby increasing awareness, trust, and community ownership of the initiatives.

Recommendation 5: A study to investigate skills needs of community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape province

There is a growing footprint of community-based organisations that are involved in several projects aimed at addressing the challenges facing communities and also creating opportunities for them. The need for MQA to better coordinate with local stakeholders for increased impact of training initiatives was highlighted in the study. It is recommended that a regional stakeholder matrix be developed to map the current (“as-is”) landscape of stakeholders operating in the Eastern Cape. This should be complemented by an analysis of existing MQA-supported projects in the province, compared against the identified skills needs. Such an approach will help pinpoint gaps, align interventions, and identify opportunities to leverage existing community structures for greater reach and sustainability.

Activity	MQA must initiate a study that maps skills development programmes implemented by community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape province.
Timeline	The study can be part of the 2026/27 research agenda.

Recommendation 6: The MQA must establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders involved in entrepreneurial initiatives across the province

Recognising the challenges of securing traditional employment, there is a considerable percentage of community members who are self-employed. The study revealed the interest of community members in entrepreneurship and the need for skills that support small businesses was reiterated during the study. It is proposed that MQA must identify entrepreneurial initiatives that exist in the province and establish partnerships with the stakeholder driving these initiatives. For example, the MQA can partner with the Department of Small Business Development and/or its agencies (Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency) with the goal of identifying synergies to increase the impact of existing programmes in the province.

Activity	The MQA must establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders involved in entrepreneurial initiatives across the province.
Timeline	This project can be considered for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 7: The MQA should initiate the implementation of training on occupational health and safety in mining operations in the province

Several skills gaps have been identified amongst those working in mining operations. Occupational health and safety have consistently emerged as the most prominent skills gap across the majority of occupations. Given the current state of health and safety in the MMS, there is a need to ensure that mine employees are adequately trained to manage workplace risks and uphold safety standards. Working with mining companies and accredited service providers, the MQA should initiate the implementation of occupational health and safety training programmes in mining operations across the province.

Activity	The MQA should initiate the implementation of training on occupational health and safety in mining operations in the province
Timeline	This project can be considered for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 8: The MQA should convene a stakeholder engagement session with mining companies operating in the province

The analysis of the WSP-ATR data reveals a significant gap between the number of training programmes planned and those actually implemented by mining companies in the province. This discrepancy highlights a need to understand why companies are unable to fulfil

their training commitments. It is recommended that the MQA convene stakeholder engagements with mining companies operating in the province to identify and unpack the underlying causes of non-implementation. These discussions should aim to provide clarity on the barriers to training delivery, whether logistical, financial, or related to capacity. During these engagements, support mechanisms that could enable companies to meet their training obligations should be explored.

Activity	The MQA should convene a stakeholder engagement session with mining companies operating in the province
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 9: The MQA should develop a capacity building programme for potential service providers to obtain accreditation on artisan skills training

A major challenge affecting skills development in the province is the lack of accredited training service providers offering artisan programmes in critical trades such as diesel mechanics and plant fitting. These occupations are in high demand, yet companies report difficulty in recruiting qualified individuals. Data from hard-to-fill vacancies indicates that diesel mechanics and electricians are among the most challenging roles to fill, primarily due to a shortage of candidates with the required qualifications. It is recommended that MQA establish a capacity building programme for potential service providers which will assist them with meeting the accreditation requirements. By assisting potential service providers to obtain accreditation, the MQA can expand access to artisan training, address critical skills shortages, and strengthen the province’s capacity to meet industry workforce needs.

Activity	The MQA should develop a capacity building programme for potential service providers to obtain accreditation on artisan skills training. This can be done after engaging with them to assess existing training capacity and identify specific gaps particularly in high-demand trades such as diesel mechanics and plant fitting.
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 10: The MQA should initiate the establishment of a stakeholder forum dedicated to bringing stakeholders involved in skills development in the province together

There are several stakeholders that are involved in skills development in the province. In order to maximise impact, particularly in response to the skills needs of emerging key industries such as petrochemicals, renewable energy (i.e., wind turbines), green technology manufacturing, agro-processing and auto-manufacturing, there is a need for a coordinated platform that bring together stakeholders in the province. It is

recommended that the MQA initiates the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform focused on skills development. The overarching goal of this platform should be to bring together key stakeholders, including industry representatives, government departments, education and training institutions, labour organisations, and community groups; to facilitate data sharing and labour market intelligence, ensuring that training programmes are informed by industry trends and demands; and to promote collaborative programme design and delivery, including co-funded initiatives, shared infrastructure, and integrated learner support systems.

Activity	The MQA should initiate the establishment of a stakeholder forum dedicated to bringing stakeholders involved in skills development in the province together
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 11: The MQA should implement the Small Scale Mining Programme in the province

The Eastern Cape has a relatively small footprint in large-scale mining compared to other provinces in South Africa. However, the region is endowed with untapped mineral resources that present significant opportunities for the development of small-scale mining projects. Additionally, there are already community members engaged in small-scale mining activities, indicating both interest and potential for growth in this segment of the sector. The MQA should implement its Small-Scale Mining Support Programme in the Eastern Cape. This programme should aim to build technical capacity and skills among small-scale miners to ensure they can operate safely, efficiently, and in compliance with environmental regulations.

Activity	The MQA should implement its Small Scale Mining Programme in the province
Timeline	This project can be earmarked for 2026/27.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation/acronym	Description
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
ADM	Amathole District Municipality
ATR	Annual Training Report
CALS	Centre for Applied Legal Studies
CET	Community Education and Training
CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DMR	Department of Mineral Resources
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
ECDC	Eastern Cape Development Corporation
ECSECC	Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council
ECYDA	Eastern Cape Youth Development Agency
EE	Employment Equity
ELIDZ	East London Industrial Development Zone
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDSA	Historically Disadvantaged South Africans
HDSA	Historically Disadvantaged South Africans
HRD	Human Resource Development
JET	Just Energy Transition
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
LGSETA	Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
MerSETA	Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
MMS	Mining and Minerals Sector
MPRDA	Mineral and Petroleum Resource Development Act
MQA	Mining Qualification Authority
NDP	National Development Plan
NEV	New Energy Vehicle

NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
PDP	Provincial Development Plan
PEDS	Provincial Economic Growth and Development Strategy
REE	Rate Earth Elements
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SMME	Small, Micro and Medium Enterprise
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WSP	Workplace Skills Plan

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) is a Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) for the mining and minerals sector (MMS) in South Africa. It was established in terms of the Mine Health and Safety Act No. 29 of 1996, and it is a recognised SETA in terms of the Skills Development Act No. 97 of 1998 as amended¹. The MQA's vision is to lead skills development and training in the MMS so as to build a "competent, health and safety oriented mining and minerals workforce". This is achieved through several programmes that are embedded within six strategic objectives which encompass the following:

Box 1: MQA's strategic objectives

- Promote efficient and effective governance and administration.
- Improve skills development planning and decision-making through research.
- Promote work-based skills development to support transformation in the mining and minerals sector.
- Facilitate access to occupationally directed learning programmes for the unemployed.
- Support mine community training initiatives to access economic opportunities.
- Ensure the delivery of quality learning programmes in the mining and minerals sector.

The need to support mining communities through skills development and training directly responds to the objectives of the Broad Based Socio Economic Empowerment Charter for the Mining and Minerals Sector (i.e., Mining Charter). The Mining Charter is a key policy instrument aimed at transforming the MMS by addressing historical inequalities and promoting socio-economic development. This overarching goal is supported by several objectives, one of which speaks to the need "utilise and expand the existing skills base for the empowerment of historically disadvantaged persons" (Government gazette, 2018:12). This is in recognition of the shortage of skills in mining communities which continue to hinder their participation in the mining sector.

Against this background, the MQA has initiated a study that provides insights into the specific mining and mineral sector (MMS) related skills development needs in mining communities. By identifying the skills needed by communities, the study will help inform strategies that will lead to the implementation of targeted training programmes needed to address the skills gaps in communities. This study takes a case study approach and focuses on the Eastern Cape province as one of the major labour sending regions in the country. Through the Mining Charter,

¹ Source: <https://mqa.org.za/company-overview/>. [Accessed: 27 November 2024].

mining operations are required to support socioeconomic projects in both host communities and labour sending areas. This is because, labour sending areas, such as the Eastern Cape, continue to depend heavily on mining for their livelihoods.

1.2. Problem statement

The Eastern Cape province faces significant challenges related to employability, with an unemployment rate of approximately 39.7% in the first quarter of 2022, well above the national average of 32.9% (Statistics South Africa, 2025). According to Statistics South Africa (2025), the province's Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) stands at 49.2%, the lowest in the country. This means that less than half of the working-age population is either employed or actively seeking employment, indicating a high level of economic inactivity. Such a low participation rate also suggests that many individuals are discouraged from seeking work because of the several barriers including low levels of education and skills.

According to Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (2018), a large percentage of the working-age population is either semi-skilled or unskilled. This reflects skills gaps across the province, particularly in key sectors that require specialised training. These gaps hinder the ability of individuals to access employment and other economic opportunities in growing sectors of the economy. The skills levels in the province are worsened by its poor education landscape. As noted by the Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Consultative Council (2024), the link between unemployment and low educational attainment is well known in the province. With only 10% of the population aged 20 years and older having post-school qualifications (Statistics South Africa, 2022).

In line with the country's National Development Plan, the Provincial Development Plan (PDP) has identified five priority areas that are crucial to addressing the challenges facing the province. Amongst this is the need for a *"an educated, empowered and innovative population"*. This places skills development at the centre of its growth strategy, highlighting the need to understand skill development in the province.

1.3. Aim and objectives

The aim of the study is to provide insights into the specific MMS-related skills development needs in mining communities in the Eastern Cape province taking into account its unique economic landscape, minerals resources endowments, and their sectoral challenges. The objectives of the study are to:

- 1) Analysing the effectiveness of current legislation, policies, and strategies driving skills development in the province.
- 2) Assessing the alignment of provincial frameworks with national strategies.
- 3) Analysing the population demographics of the province (e.g., age distribution, gender, and racial representation, educational attainment levels and skillsets of working-age population).
- 4) Establishing a detailed profile of the MMS in the province, including:
 - Main mining commodities extracted and processed.

- Size and composition of the existing workforce
 - Types of companies operating in the sector (national, multinationals, small-scale miners).
- 5) Analysing the economic performance of the MMS compared to other sectors in the provincial economy.
 - Assessing its contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), job creation, and revenue generation.
 - 6) Identifying the existing mining-related occupational shortages and skills gaps within the province and reasons thereof.
 - Identify the skill mismatches between the skills required by mining companies and the skills available in the community.
 - 7) Assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of existing skills development programmes in addressing provincial needs.
 - Analysing the capacity offerings of technical colleges, universities, and industry-specific training providers in addressing the skills development in the province.
 - 8) Identifying the common skills development needs of community members living near mining operations, beyond mining-specific jobs.
 - Analysing the demand for skills in related sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and service industries.
 - Assessing the need for entrepreneurial and business development skills for local economic empowerment.
 - 9) Gathering insights on the community and companies' experiences in accessing skills development offerings from the MQA.
 - 10) Exploring the potential synergies between skills development needs of the MMS for upskilling and reskilling existing workforce for diversification into other sectors.
 - 11) Identifying potential partners and stakeholders relevant to addressing skills development needs in the province.

1.4. Significance of the study

The Eastern Cape province holds numerous economic opportunities in various economic sectors including manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, tourism, renewable energy and others. According to the ECSECC (2024), the province holds substantial potential for renewable energy development, particularly in wind and solar power. This potential is expected to drive economic growth, create employment opportunities, and enhance energy security both provincially and nationally.

In line with its economic growth and development strategy, the Eastern Cape aims to achieve a 5% Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate by 2030 (ECSECC, 2024). This goal is underpinned by eight strategic economic enablers, one of which focuses on cultivating "future skills for the economy" to ensure the province's workforce is equipped to meet the demands of its economy. Against this background, a study that investigates skills development needs of the province is important as it will offer insights into skills needs, existing skills gaps, emerging industry requirements, and opportunities ensuring alignment between skills development and training initiatives with the province's economic priorities.

2. LITERATURE AND POLICY REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

The chapter presents the literature and policy review covering the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The chapter also discusses the socioeconomic landscape of the Eastern Cape province and provides an overview of the current state of the mining and minerals sector (MMS) in the province. This discussion is followed by a skills analysis which provides insights on the province workforce composition and skills profiles, skills shortages and gaps and highlights key factors contributing to skills gaps in the province. The chapter also provides a landscape of education and training in the province and discusses skills development policies and initiatives seen in the province aimed at skills development and training.

2.2. Socioeconomic landscape of the province

2.2.1. Locality

The Eastern Cape province is located on the south-eastern part of the country. It is bordered the Western Cape to the west and the Northern Cape to the northwest. It is the second largest province by area extent (i.e., which is about 168 966 km²). The province has two metropolitan municipalities, namely, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality and Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality. It also has six district municipalities and 27 local municipalities. The six district municipalities are Alfred Nzo, Amathole, Chris Hani, Joe Gqabi, OR Tambo and Sarah Baartman. These are depicted on figure 1 alongside the local municipalities that fall under them.

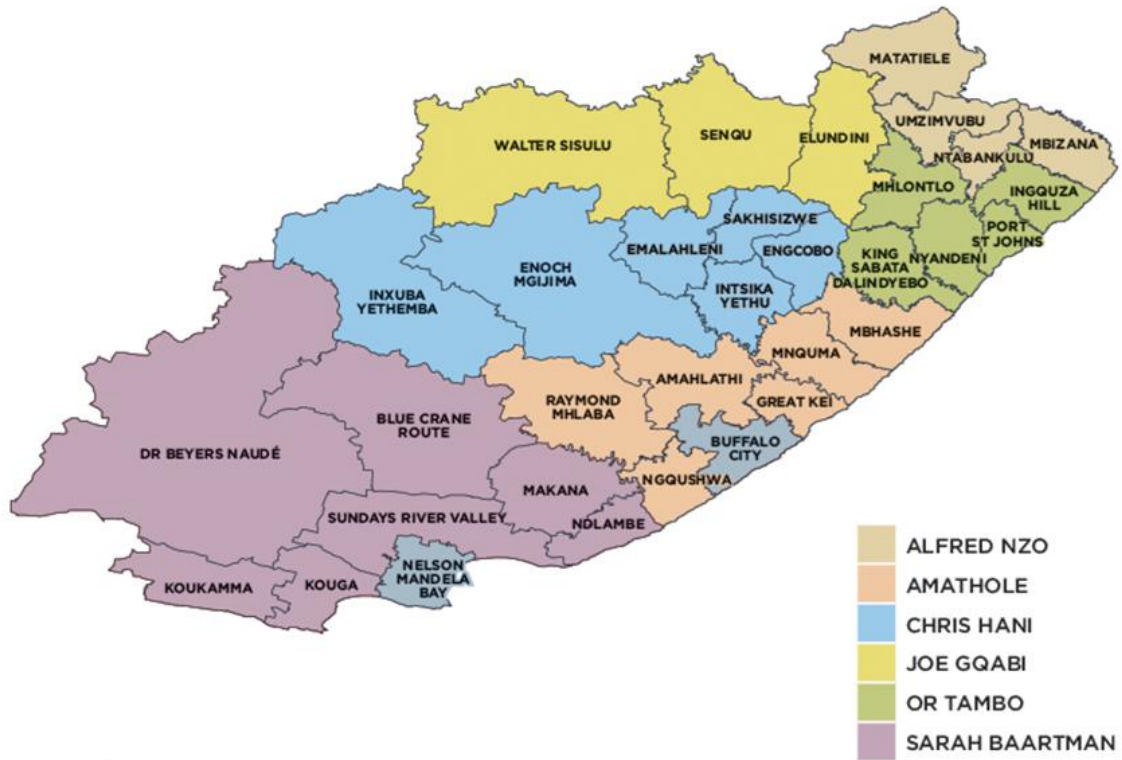


Figure 1: District and local municipalities in the Eastern Cape province

(Source: Municipalities, n.d)

2.2.2. Demographic profile of the province

The Eastern Cape Province is the fourth most populated province in South Africa. It has a total population of 7.2 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2023). This increased by about 10% from 6.5 million people in 2011. Table 1 shows the growth in population from 1996 to 2022, and this is represented across gender. Female account for the largest share of the population. Their share equated to about 52.6% in 2022. Most of the population is reside in OR Tambo district municipality with 1.5 million people followed by Nelson Mandela Bay with 1.1 million people. According to Statistics South Africa (2023a), more than 85% of the population in the province is Black, followed by Coloureds which account for 7.6% of the population. The other population groups, namely White and Indians constitute 5.6% and about 1% of the population respectively.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the Eastern Cape province, 1996 to 2022

Census year	Male	Female	Total
1996	2 840 235	3 307 009	6 147 244
2001	2 906 521	3 372 130	6 278 651

2011	3 089 701	3 472 353	6 562 053
2022	3 424 042	3 806 162	7 230 204

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2023a)

Figure 2 shows the population distribution by age and gender. As can be seen in the figure, the province has a young population with the highest distribution seen amongst the young cohorts (i.e., from 0 - 4 years to 35 - 39 years). The population median age is 27 years. A relatively higher number of males is seen in the age group 0 – 29 years, while more females are recorded in advanced ages.

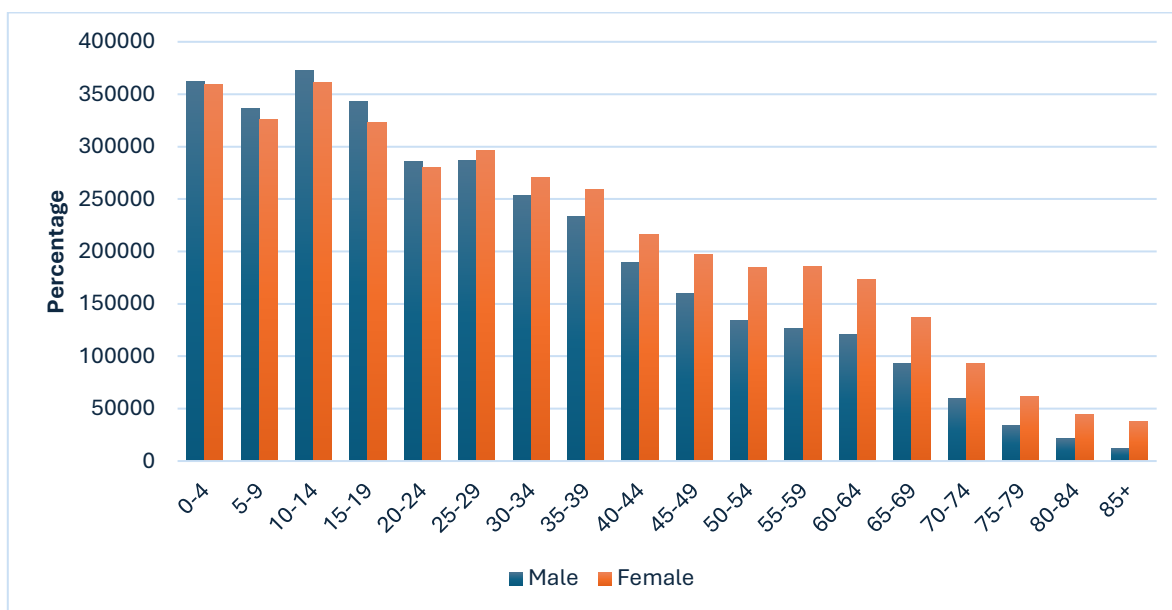


Figure 2: Population groups by gender and age

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2023a)

From the figure, it is seen that the percentage of males declines as age increases amongst the population. The total youth population (i.e., aged 15 to 34 years) was 2.3 million in 2022. This increased from 2.2 million in 2011. According to Statistics South Africa (2023a), an overall increase of 15% in the youth population is recorded between 1996 and 2022.

2.2.3. Education profile

The Eastern Cape province has been criticised for its poor education background amongst its population. However, according to Statistics South Africa (2023), an improvement in the education levels of population aged 20 years and above was recorded. The percentage of the total number of this population with no formal education declined. As reported by Statistics South Africa (2023), in 2011, the province had 10.5% youth aged 20 years and above with no formal schooling and this declined to 7.2% in 2022. Figure 3 shows the education levels in the province. Majority of the population aged 20 years and older (i.e., 37%) have some secondary education. About 27% of the population have

completed secondary education and have matric certificate (Statistics South Africa, 2023). From the figure, it is seen that only 10% has post school qualifications.

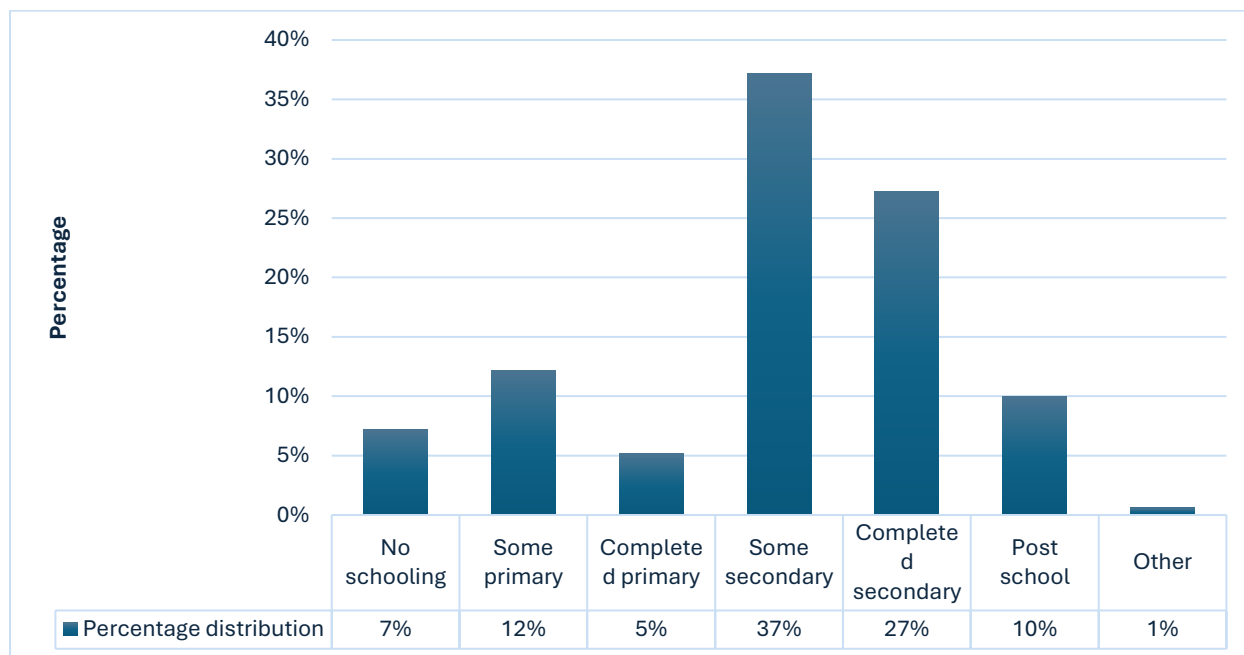


Figure 3: Education levels in the Eastern Cape province

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2023a)

2.2.4. Persons not in employment, education, or training (NEET)

Table 2 presents data on individuals in the province who are not engaged in employment, education, or training (NEET). This group represents a critical segment of the population that is not participating in formal economic and educational activities in the province. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2024), there are two categories of NEETs, namely, active NEETs and inactive NEETs. The former includes individuals who are NEET but are actively looking for employment and are available to work. Inactive NEETs are those who are not looking for employment. Inactive NEET encompasses discouraged work-seekers and those who are inactive because they are managing a home (homemaker), are sick, or are either too young, old or retired.

Table 2: Individuals not in employment, education or training in South Africa (in thousands)

Province	15-24 years	25-34 years	35-60 years	Total
Western Cape	323	401	855	1,579
Eastern Cape	496	804	1,036	2,336
Northern Cape	99	106	178	383
Free State	174	292	386	852

KwaZulu-Natal	742	1,128	1,437	3,307
North West	359	377	671	1,407
Gauteng	776	1,352	2,216	4,344
Mpumalanga	292	449	597	1,338
Limpopo	379	588	785	1,752
South Africa	3,638	5,497	8,160	17,295

(Source: Department of Higher Education and Training, 2024)

As shown in Table 2, there were approximately 496,000 individuals aged 15 to 24 years in the Eastern Cape who were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in 2024. This was the third-highest figure among all provinces, with Gauteng leading at 776,000, followed by KwaZulu-Natal at 742,000. In the 25 to 34 age group, the Eastern Cape recorded 804,000 NEET individuals, compared to 2,216,000 in Gauteng and 1,437,000 in KwaZulu-Natal. Overall, the total number of NEET individuals across all age groups in the Eastern Cape stood at 2,336,000.

2.2.5. *Economic landscape*

The economy of the Eastern Cape province is supported by several economic sectors. Table 3 provides a summary of these sectors and their contribution to the province's Gross Value Added (GVA) in the first quarter of 2024. The GVA is an economic metric that is used to measure the contribution of a sector to an economy (Office of National Statistics, 2021). The tertiary sector accounts for the largest share contributing 81.5% to the provincial economy. Personal services, Finance and Trade sector are the main contributors accounting 28.9%, 19.6% and 15.0% respectively to the GVA of the province. The secondary sector is the second-largest sector in the province comprising of Manufacturing, Construction and Electricity sub-sectors. Overall, the three sub-sectors contributed 16.5% to the provincial economy. The leading subsector is manufacturing which is followed by construction. The primary sector is the smallest economic sector in the province. Current contribution to the GVA of the province is 2.2% with agriculture leading at 2.0% and mining contributing 0.2% to the economy of the province.

Table 3: Eastern Cape GVA by economic sector, 2024Q1

Economic sectors	R million	% share
Primary sector	7 143	2.2
Agriculture	6 542	2.0
Mining	601	0.2
Secondary sector	54 138	16.4
Manufacturing	41 242	12.5
Electricity	4 639	1.4
Construction	8 256	2.5

Tertiary sector	269 683	81.5
Trade	49 687	15.0
Transport	21 780	6.6
Finance	64 707	19.6
Personal services	95 758	28.9
Government services	37 751	11.4

(Source: ECSECC, 2024)

The economic performance of the province translated into 7.9% contribution to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As reported by Statistics South Africa (2024), the Eastern Cape province ranked number four in terms of overall contribution to the national GDP. The three leading provinces were Gauteng (i.e., at 33.9%), KwaZulu-Natal (i.e., at 16.6%) and Western Cape (i.e., at 14.2%).

Of the total population, about 1.3 million people were employed in the first quarter of 2024. Figure 4 depicts employment in the province, and this is presented by economic sector. The tertiary sector was the largest employer in the province accounting for 77% in 2024Q1. This was a slight increase from 75% in 2023Q4. It is followed by the secondary sector accounting for 14% in 2024Q1. This declined from 17% in 2023Q4. The primary sector contributed the least to total employment in the province with its contribution recorded at 8%. As seen in the figure, the top three employers were government services (i.e., at 27.6%), trade (i.e., at 21.7%) and finance (i.e., 15.5%). Within the secondary sector, the construction and manufacturing subsectors contributed the highest to total employment. Agriculture was the main employer in the primary sector in both quarters. The mining sector was the smallest employer in the province and employed 3 280 people in 2024Q1.

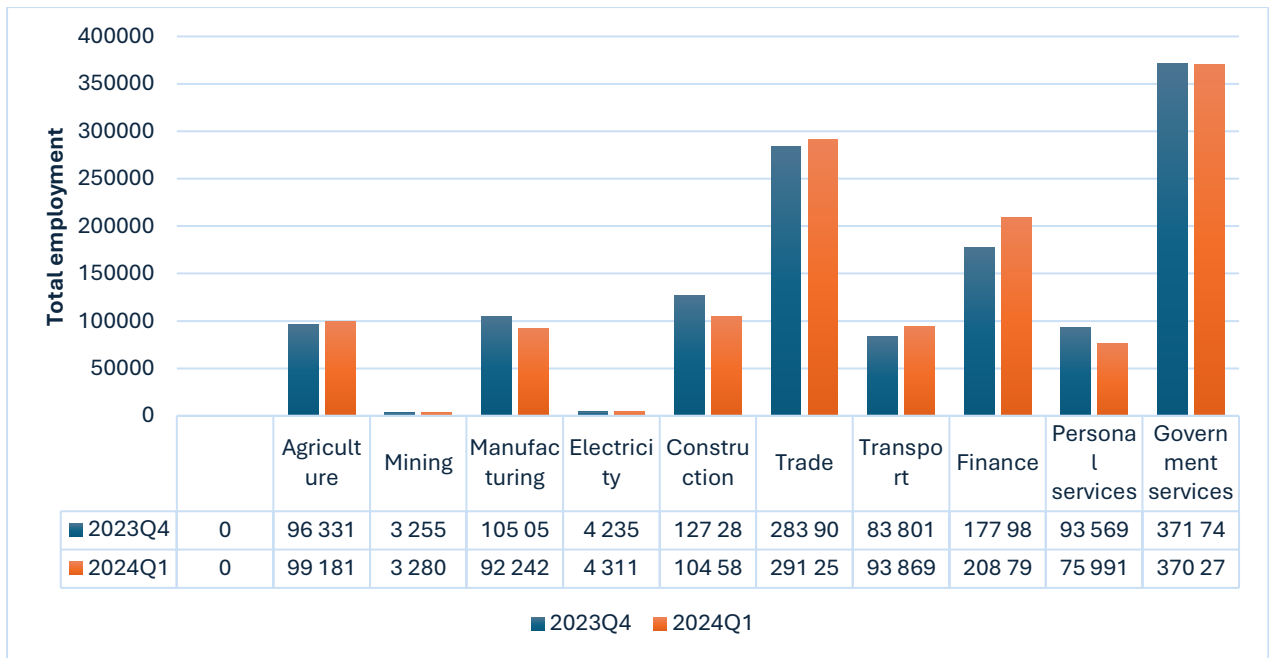


Figure 4: Total employment by economic sector

(Source: ECSECC, 2024)

Figure 5 shows employment in the mining sector in the province. Employment in MMS has been fluctuating as seen on the figure. A steady increase can be observed between 2021 and 2023. A slight increase in the number of people working in the sector is recorded between 2023 and 2024Q1.

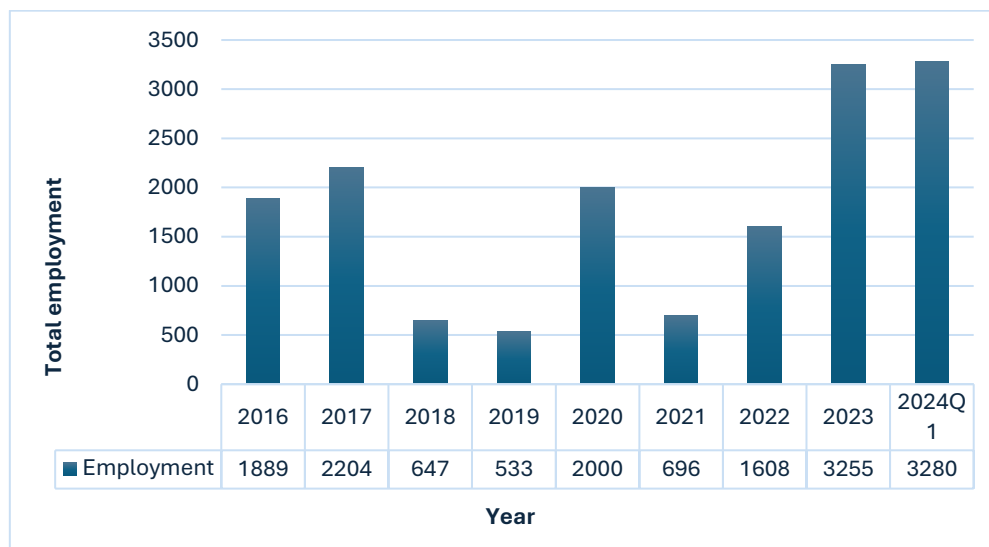


Figure 5: Contribution of the MMS to employment in the Eastern Cape province

(Source: MQA, 2021; Statistics South Africa, 2022; ECSECC, 2024)

Tables 4 shows labour force characteristics covering working age population (i.e., population group aged 15 to 64 years), and the number of people that are employed, unemployed and not economically active in the province. The table also provides unemployment rate and labour force participation rate. The latter encompasses the percentage of the working-age population that is employed or actively seeking employment. Of the total population, working-age population accounted for 62.5% in both 2023Q4 and 2024Q1. Of these, 28.9% of the population was employed in both study periods.

As seen in the table, there was a slight increase in the number of the working-age population, and this was accompanied by a drop in total employment in the province. The percentage of the population that is characterised as not economically active also increased during this period. Discouraged work seekers are described as “individuals who are unemployed and willing to work but have not actively pursued employment due to factors such as a lack of job opportunities in their vicinity, inability to secure positions matching their skills, or a sense of despair about the prospect of finding any form of employment” (Statistics South Africa, 2023). This category of working-age population is classed under those that not economically active. According to Statistics South Africa (2023), there are two cohorts within “inactive group” – discouraged work seekers and the “other cohort” which comprise of students, homemakers, individuals who are unwell or have disabilities, and those who are either too young or too old to engage in work. As captured on the table, discouraged work seekers in the province increased by 38% from 162,000 in 2023Q4 to 224,000 in 2024Q1.

Table 4: Key characteristics of the Eastern Cape’s working-age population

Characteristics	Official definition of unemployment	
	2023Q4	2024Q1
Population (15 -64 years)	4,525,000	4,539,000
Employed	1,348,000	1,344,000
Unemployed	973,000	988,000
Not economically active	2,205,000	2,207,000
Discouraged work seekers	162,000	224,000
Rates%		
Unemployment rate	42%	49%
Labour force participation rate	51%	51%

(Source: Statistics South Africa, 2024)

The official unemployment in the province was 42% in 2023Q1; this compares to 49% in 2024Q1. Two measures of unemployment are used in the country, namely, official and expanded definitions. The former is calculated as the “percentage of the economically active population which is unemployed”. This measure is restricted to those that are available to work and are actively looking for employment opportunities.

It excludes discouraged work seeker (Statistics South Africa, 1998). The expanded unemployment rate is a broad measure that takes into account those that have stopped looking for employment.

The labour force participation rate (LFPR) is another measure used to characterise labour force, and it represents the percentage of the working-age population that is employed or actively seeking employment. A high LFPR indicates that a large proportion of the working-age population is either employed or actively looking for work. Conversely, a low LFPR suggests that a significant portion of the working-age population is not participating in the labour market. The LFPR of the Eastern Cape is recorded at 51%. This compares to country's LFPR of 60% (Statistics South Africa, 2024). With the country's population concentrated in the young cohort, youth unemployment was 53.2% in 2023Q4 (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2023).

The unemployment rate differs according to demographics specifically, age, gender and education levels. In terms of education levels, high unemployment rate is expected amongst those with lower education attainment. As reported by (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council (2023), a 54.3% unemployment rate was recorded amongst the population group with primary schooling. The unemployment rate for those with tertiary education reached 22% in 2023Q4 (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2023). In terms of gender, females are most vulnerable to poverty and unemployment. In 2023Q4, unemployment rate amongst females and males was 53.2% and 31.9% respectively (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2023).

2.3. State of the mining and minerals sector in the province

As noted, the mining sector in the Eastern Cape contributes the least to the economy of the province. While this is the case, there is potential to increase mining activities in the province and translate this into positive socio-economic contribution. The province houses several mineral deposits some of which are currently being exploited. The minerals found across the province include dimension stone, clay, building sand, limestone, mineral sands, coal and uranium. There are also occurrences of nickel, copper and lithium. The following discussion provide information on the minerals found in the province.

Dimension stone – this term is used to describe naturally occurring rock that may be cut, shaped or selected for use in blocks, slabs, sheets or other construction units of specific shapes or sizes (Department of Mineral Resources, 2006). Dimension stone are used in cladding, curbing, paving and in memorials, for example as tombstones. They are mainly used for their architectural and engineering properties (Department of Mineral Resources, 2006). There are different types of dimension stone including granite, sandstones, slate, travertine, marble and others. The Eastern Cape has significant deposits of sandstone which are found in several geological formations including Molteno, Elliot and Clarens Formations. These deposits are found in several locations including Queenstown, Aliwal North, Burgersdorp and Herschel. There are sandstone quarries in the province where small scale mining methods are used extract the stone, which are then cut into different products.

Clay – clays are naturally occurring, fine-grained, soil material with plastic properties containing clay minerals with (Department of Mineral Resources, 2008). There are different types of clays owing to the differences in origin, particle size distribution, mineralogical association and chemical constitution. The dominant clay minerals found in the Eastern Cape is brick clay and kaolin. Brick clay has properties that supports its use in brick making (i.e., it can be shaped or moulded when mixed with water and has sufficient wet and air-dried strength to maintain their shape after forming) (Department of Mineral Resources, 2008). Kaolin is a soft, white, plastic clay, comprising several minerals. Kaolin is an essential ingredient in the manufacturing of ceramics and is also used as filler in paper, plastics, paint, rubber, soap and adhesives. In the Eastern Cape, the clay deposit occurs in Somerset East, Grahamstown and Mthatha. Clay mining is taking place in the province where bricks are manufactured and sold to the community.

Sand – Different types of sands are found in various parts of the province. These include building sand, silica sand and foundry sand. Building sand is pit sand that is used in construction. Silica sand is also called quartz sand - s composed primarily of silicon dioxide (SiO₂) in the form of quartz. Silica sand finds use in many applications including glass manufacturing, ceramics and construction. Foundry sand is a specialized silica sand used to make moulds for metal castings. Sand deposits are found across the province in Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, and Jeffreys Bay. Sand mining takes place both legally and illegally within the province. These operations are small scale mining operations.

Limestone - Limestone is a calcareous material or rock with limestone content of at least 70%. Limestone forms part of carbonate minerals which are primarily used for cement manufacturing, steel refining and agricultural purposes. Other uses are in construction (cement, mortar, building stone), manufacturing (glass, papermaking, water purification, adhesives and others). Limestone deposits are located in several areas including Paterson and Alexandria, Bathurst, Ciskei, Mdantsane and Cradock. Most of these deposits are currently not being exploited because they are small and not economically viable. There are several abandoned quarries in the province.

Mineral sands - Mineral sands are deposits of sand that contain high concentrations of heavy minerals, and these may include key minerals such as these heavy minerals are economically important and titanium, zirconium, and rare-earth elements (REE). According to the Department of Mineral Resources (2008), there is a great potential for heavy mineral sands development in the Pondoland coast in the province.

Coal – Most of the coal in South Africa is used for electricity generation. The Karoo basin which contains the largest coal deposits in the country extends to Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Free State and the Eastern Cape Province. The coalfield in the Eastern Cape extends from north of the province in Dukathole running southwards until Sterkstroom and extending to the east until Maclear. Four coal seams can be found within the Molteno Formation. The Council for Geosciences has conducted prospecting work to establish the viability of the mineral deposits. In their assessment, the estimated value of the coal was R122 billion (Council for Geosciences, 2020).

Uranium – This is radioactive, silvery-white metal that is key source of nuclear power generation. Prospecting of uranium has been identified in areas between Kendrew and Jansenville in the province.

Nickel – Nickel finds use in many applications including the manufacture of industrial and consumer products such as stainless steel, magnets, and alloys (Department of Mineral Resources, 2009). Nickel deposits are found in Flagstaff located within the OR Tambo District Municipality in the province.

Copper – It is a soft, malleable and ductile metal with very high thermal and electrical conductivity. Copper has many uses in jewellery making, electrical and electronics, and construction. It also has industrial applications that include use in equipment and transportation. Copper deposits in the province are found along the coast in Hamburg area, between Kei Mouth and Mazeppa Bay, in Coffee Bay, Port St. Johns

Lithium – This is a soft, silvery-white alkali metal. It is used in used in the manufacture of lubricants, alloys, glass and ceramics. Its use in the manufacture of batteries is promoted globally as part of the Just Energy Transition. Deposits of lithium are found in Dukathole, which is located on the northern part of the Eastern Cape.

Most of the mining activities in the Eastern Cape are conducted using open pit mining methods. The key minerals being mined include sand, stone and aggregate, clay (i.e., brick clay and kaolin), and dimension stone. From the Department of Mineral Resources List of Operating Mines, mining is taking place in the following areas – Uitenhage, East London, Port Elizabeth, Aliwal North, Alexandria, Albany, Humansdorp, Queenstown, Mthatha, Graaff-Reinet, Bathurst, Lusikisiki, Idutywa, Molteno, Komga and other areas.

Mining takes place legally and illegally within the province. There has been growing reports on illegal sand mining particularly on the Wild coast where these activities pose threats to the environment (MO et al, 2024). According to Maphanga et al (2023), the proliferation of illegal sand mining is driven by the growing demand for building material and the need for sources of income particularly in communities where there are limited economic opportunities. As the case with other illegal mining activities, there are call to government to formalise the sector. This is motivated from both ends covering the need to address the adverse impacts of illegal mining on the environment and communities. More so, small scale mining as taking place in the Eastern Cape has the potential to create economic opportunities for communities.

In addition to illegal mining, the province faces multiple interconnected challenges that present bottlenecks to the development of the mining sector. These include infrastructure challenges, and these include poor transportation particularly in rural areas (Eastern Cape Socio-Economic Review Outlook, 2019). Community relations characterised by disputes with local communities on land right and ownership have also affected mining projects. Another category of challenges encompasses the environmental impacts of mining particularly where mineral deposits are found close to sensitive areas and/or sites with high biodiversity. The shortage of skills is also a persistent challenge, and this is linked to the poor education background of the majority of the population. To this end, the Eastern Cape has prioritised skills development in recognition of its important to support socioeconomic development in the province.

2.4. Skills analysis in the province

The labour force in the Eastern Cape has varied skills. As the case across the country, there are skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour in the province. Skilled labour refers to work that requires specialized knowledge, training, and expertise. Skilled workers have typically completed formal education, vocational training, and would have extensive on-the-job experience. Semi-skilled labour includes those that would have completed vocational training, apprenticeships, or acquired skills through extensive experience. Unskilled labour covers those that do not have formal education and training. They typically perform work that is manual, repetitive and can be learnt quickly (Trade and Industrial Policy Strategies, 2008). Figure 6 provides a trend analysis of skills levels amongst those that are employed in the province.

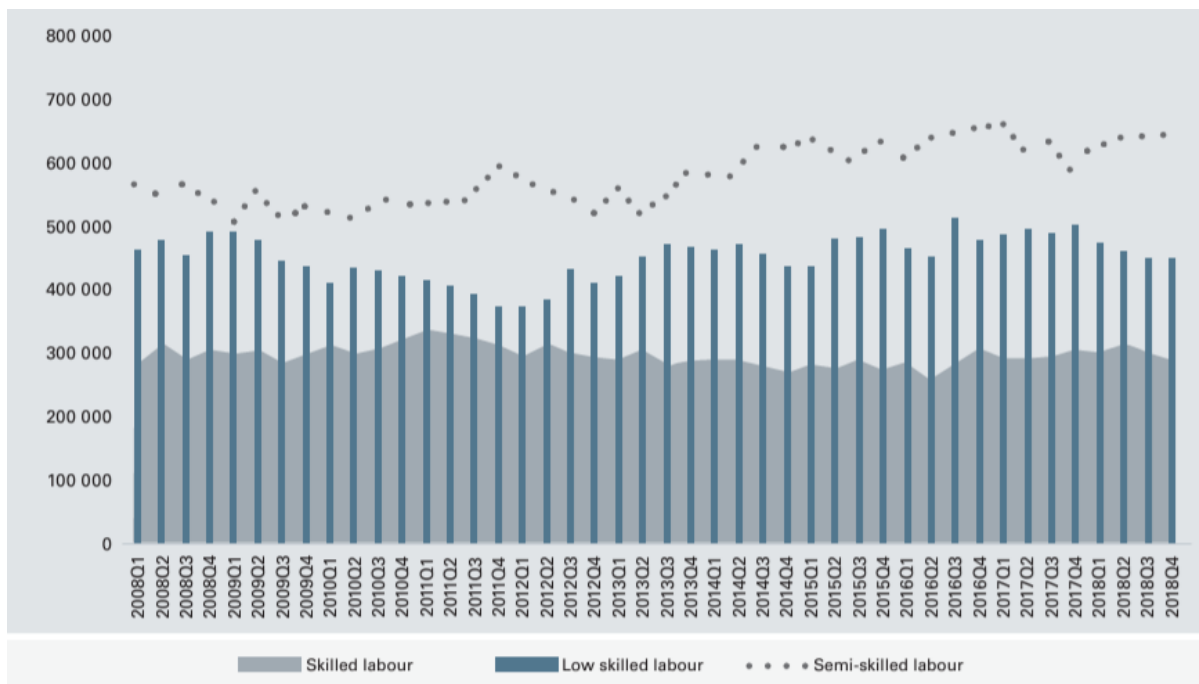


Figure 6: Skills level amongst employed population in the Eastern Cape

(Source: Kavese and Mbali, 2019)

As seen on the figure, the majority of those that are employed are semi-skilled. They are followed by those falling under the category of unskilled and then those that are skilled. About 46% are semi-skilled, 34% are unskilled and 20% of the employed population are skilled workers. While fluctuations in the skills levels across the three cohorts can be observed, the trends have been relatively flat particularly amongst the skilled and low skilled labour (i.e., unskilled). A slight increase amongst those that are semi-skilled can be picked up from the figure. According to ECSECC (2018), the large percentage of semi-skilled and unskilled labour found in the province can be attributed to decline experienced by both the agricultural and mining sectors in the province. The Eastern Cape is a major labour sending area, particularly for the MMS in the country. There has been a decrease in labour migration from the Eastern Cape to mining areas in South Africa and this is as a result of declining performance of the MMS which has translated to a drop in employment across several mineral sectors. There is

therefore a need for reskilling and upskilling programmes to ensure that working-age population is able to enter the labour force through other economic sectors within the province.

Figure 7 shows post-school qualifications that were amongst working-age population in the province. These are qualifications completed by those that are employed, unemployed as well as discouraged work-seekers.

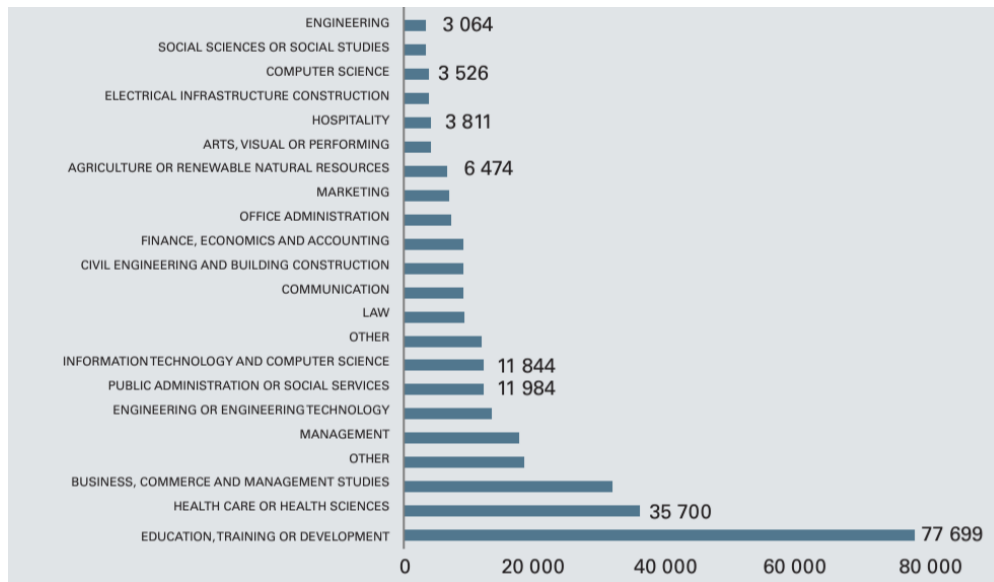


Figure 7: Labour force and completed qualifications

(Source: Kavese and Mbali, 2019)

As seen in the figure, the majority of post-school qualifications are in education, training or development. This is followed by health care or health sciences. Two categories of engineering are noted on the figure, namely, “Engineering” and “Engineering or Engineering Technology”. For the latter, there is above 11 000 people that have related qualifications and under the former, there are about 3 000 people.

Figures 8 and 9 depict labour force participation rate for Engineering and Engineering and Engineering Technology. As have been noted, labour force participation rate (LFPR) is the percentage of the working-age population that is employed or actively seeking employment. From figure 8, it is deduced that about 62% of those that are economically active with engineering qualification are employed. Only 38% of this group is unemployed with some falling under the category of discouraged work-seekers. The LFPR for people in Engineering or Engineering Technology is high at 82%. From this picture, it can be inferred that there are employment opportunities for those that complete engineering and related qualifications. Attention should be given to those that are struggling to find employment and they should be prioritised by skills development and training programmes to enhance their competencies and employability in the various economic sectors.

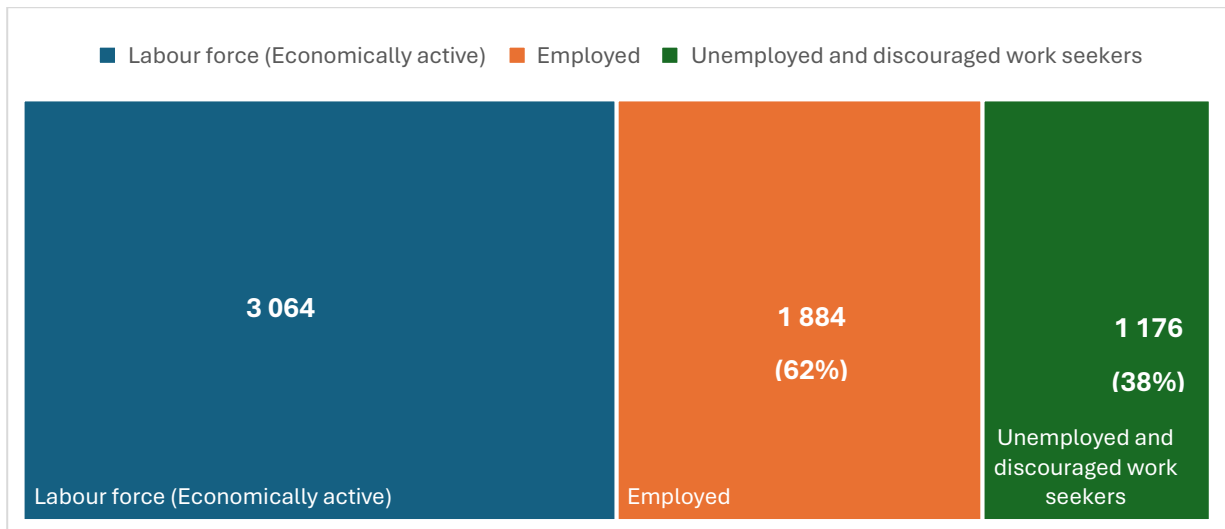


Figure 8: Labour force participation rate for Engineering

(Source: Kavese and Mbali, 2019)

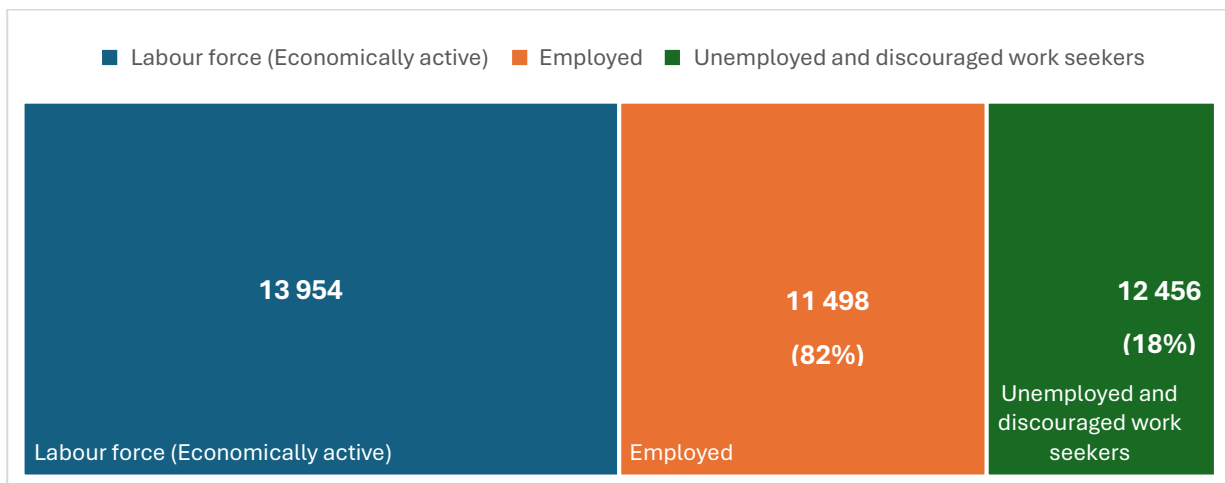


Figure 9: Labour force participation rate for Engineering and Engineering Technology

(Source: Kavese and Mbali, 2019)

According to ECSECC (2019), employer surveys have highlighted gaps in critical thinking, problem-solving, and workplace readiness among graduates that are entering the labour force. In its sector skills report, Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA) identified a set of skills gaps in the province and these the use of productivity tools, occupational health and safety, communication and interpersonal skills, and writing skills. These skills are needed in most economic sectors. Table 5 provides a description of these skills gaps.

Table 5: Skills gap in the Eastern Cape

Skills gaps (critical/top up skills)	Description of the skills gap
Productivity tools	This includes proficiency in programmes such as Microsoft Excel, Powerpoint, Word and project management.
Occupational health and safety	This encompasses knowledge of safety, health and environmental management.
Communication and interpersonal skills	These include active listening, emotional intelligence, speaking skills, communication, presentation skills, social perceptiveness and sign language.
Writing skills	These include technical report writing/editing skills, business writing skills.

(Source: LGSETA, 2020)

2.5. Emerging Economic Opportunities and Skills Preparedness

The Eastern Cape is in a period of structural economic change shaped by both national development strategies and global industrial transitions. As new sectors emerge alongside the evolution of traditional ones, the province faces the dual responsibility of addressing existing skills gaps while preparing its workforce for opportunities that are only beginning to take shape (ECSECC, 2024). These emerging opportunities encompass renewable energy, New Energy Vehicle (NEV) manufacturing, green hydrogen, agro-processing, advanced manufacturing, small-scale mining and the ocean economy. Each sector requires an increasingly agile, technically trained and digitally capable workforce.

Renewable energy is one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the province. Utility-scale wind and solar projects are creating sustained demand for new cohorts of high-voltage electricians, wind turbine technicians, solar PV installers, and battery-storage specialists (ILO, 2025). The technical complexity of these roles reflects the evolution of the sector beyond basic electrical work, requiring advanced diagnostics, digital instrumentation skills and strong safety competencies. Preparing for this growth will require targeted expansion of renewable-energy-specific curricula within TVET colleges and partnerships with industry to ensure relevance and practical alignment.

The transition of the automotive sector toward New Energy Vehicles (NEVs) represents another major emerging opportunity. A New Energy Vehicle refers to a vehicle powered wholly or partly by alternative energy sources rather than traditional internal combustion engines. NEVs include battery electric vehicles (BEVs), hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs), plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), and fuel-cell electric vehicles (FCEVs). These vehicles rely on high-voltage electrical systems, advanced electronics, and digital diagnostics, and form a core component of the automotive industry's transition to cleaner mobility technologies. As global markets pivot from internal combustion engines to hybrid and electric vehicles, the Eastern Cape's long-established automotive manufacturing base will need workers skilled in mechatronics,

advanced diagnostics, electronics repair and high-voltage systems maintenance (DTIC, 2023). Without forward-looking training interventions, the province risks displacement of its traditional automotive workforce, making early upskilling essential to retaining competitiveness and securing future investment.

Green hydrogen, though still at a developmental stage in the province, offers significant long-term potential. Anticipated growth in hydrogen production will require chemical process technicians, instrumentation technicians, multi-skilled plant operators and fuel-cell specialists (Presidency of South Africa, 2023). These occupations demand integration of chemical, mechanical and electrical knowledge, underscoring the need for early curriculum redesign and strategic investment in specialised training facilities.

Agro-processing also continues to emerge as a key pathway for rural industrialisation and inclusive development. Agro-processing refers to the transformation of raw agricultural products into higher-value intermediate or finished goods through activities such as milling, drying, fermenting, preserving and packaging. This requires a workforce skilled not only in plant and animal production and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP – standards for safe, sustainable and efficient farming), but also in the business and management dimensions of agriculture. Agri-business, understood as the commercial system linking agricultural production to inputs, markets, processing, logistics and distribution, therefore becomes central to developing competitive and sustainable value chains. Strengthening these competencies will be essential for increasing productivity, expanding export potential and supporting rural economic diversification (PEDS, 2024).

In manufacturing, construction and small-scale mining, emerging technologies and new resource discoveries are broadening occupational demand. Scarce but high-demand occupations such as toolmakers, welders, millwrights, CNC operators and heavy equipment mechanics will be increasingly necessary to support both green industrialisation and infrastructure expansion (ECSECC, 2024). At the same time, opportunities for small-scale mining, particularly in lithium, kaolin, limestone and copper, will require skills in geological surveying, small-scale extraction techniques, GIS and environmental management to support sustainable exploitation (DMRE, 2008; DMRE, 2009).

The ocean economy is an additional emerging sector identified by the province as a strategic area for growth and investment. Coastal and marine-related activities offer opportunities in maritime logistics, mineral resource development and specialised maritime skills. The Eastern Cape Development Corporation incorporates maritime industry training into its skills development programmes, highlighting growing demand for seafarer skills, marine engineering, port logistics and coastal management. Significant mineral opportunities along the coastline, including potential heavy mineral sand development in the Pondoland region and copper deposits near Hamburg, Kei Mouth and Coffee Bay, further elevate the strategic importance of this sector. The province's deep-water ports and the Coega SEZ strengthen this opportunity by linking maritime activity to industrial development, hydrogen export potential and NEV manufacturing. Connectivity between rail upgrades and port infrastructure forms a critical component of the Just Energy Transition, reinforcing the need for logistics, port management and maritime operations skills.

Across all emerging sectors, foundational digital and cognitive skills remain essential. Employers consistently identify weaknesses in digital literacy, communication, problem-solving and technical writing as barriers to adaptability and employability (ILO, 2025). Competence in productivity tools such as Excel, Word, PowerPoint and basic project management software has become a baseline expectation rather than an added advantage. Occupational health and safety skills are required universally across construction, energy, mining, manufacturing and maritime operations.

Table 6 below summarises these emerging opportunities and the associated occupational and skills requirements. Collectively, the evidence indicates that the province must adopt a proactive and anticipatory approach to skills planning. Strengthening TVET capacity, embedding new technologies into training programmes and expanding workplace-based learning will be essential to ensure that the provincial workforce is equipped not only for current labour market demands but also for the rapidly evolving economic opportunities on the horizon.

Table 6: Eastern Cape Emerging Opportunities and Requisite Skills

Emerging Economic Opportunity	Requisite Skills & Key Occupations
Renewable Energy (Wind, Solar, Battery Storage)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-voltage electricians • Electrical technicians • Wind turbine technicians • Solar PV installers and riggers • Battery assembly technicians • Mechanical/electrical engineering • OHS and ICT diagnostics
NEVs & Automotive Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automotive mechanics (NEV-skilled) • Mechatronics technicians • Industrial technicians • Fitters, welders, toolmakers • EV charging and transmission technicians
Green Hydrogen Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chemical process technicians • Plant operators • Instrumentation technicians • Fuel-cell technicians • Mechatronics and integration technicians

<p>Critical Minerals & Battery Value Chain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Battery assembly technicians • Chemical/refinery operators • Lab technicians • Electrical instrumentation technicians
<p>Agro-processing & Agriculture</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) • Plant and animal production • Agri-business • Processing and agricultural machinery operation
<p>Manufacturing & Advanced Toolmaking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toolmakers, welders, CNC operators • Mechanical and engineering designers • Millwrights • Heavy-equipment mechanics
<p>Construction & Infrastructure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bricklayers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians • Construction plant operators • OHS and project management
<p>Small-scale Mining & Minerals</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small-scale mining techniques • GIS, surveying and geological basics • Safety and environmental management
<p>Ocean Economy (Maritime, Coastal Mining, Ports & Logistics)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime engineering and marine technicians • Seafarer and navigation skills • Port logistics and supply chain operators • Coastal mining technicians (mineral sands, copper) • Marine safety, compliance and environmental management • Dredging, diving and coastal surveying skills
<p>Digital Literacy & Entrepreneurship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MS Office Suite • Basic ICT and diagnostics • Business administration • Entrepreneurship and start-up skills

<p>Cross-sectoral Workplace Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking and problem-solving • Communication skills • Technical/business writing • Occupational health and safety
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2.6. Education and training landscape

The Eastern Cape has several Universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Community Education and Training (CET) colleges that provide different skills development and training programmes delivered at various levels. The province is a home to several major universities, including Nelson Mandela University (NMU) in Port Elizabeth, Rhodes University in Grahamstown, University of Fort Hare with campuses in Alice, East London and Bhisho, and Walter Sisulu University (WSU) with campuses in Mthatha, Butterworth, East London and Queenstown. These universities offer a wide range of programmes including medicine, engineering and built environment, commerce, education, law, humanities, and sciences. Entry requirements differ across programmes and institutions. For universities, grade 12 is a requirement.

The province also hosts numerous TVETs and CETs colleges, including Port Elizabeth TVET College, East Cape Midlands TVET College, Buffalo City TVET College, Lovedale TVET College, King Sabata Dalindyebo TVET College, King Hantsha TVET College, Ingwe TVET College and Ikhala TVET College. These institutions typically require a minimum of Grade 9 for National Certificate (Vocational) programmes or a matric certificate for National N Diploma courses. TVETs focus on practical skills training and offer programmes in areas such as engineering studies, business studies, hospitality, tourism, agriculture, and information technology. Community Education and Training (CET) colleges provide adult education and skills development programmes with minimal entry requirements, often requiring only basic literacy and numeracy skills. Table 6 lists some of the institutions and highlight programme offerings that are related to mining. These programmes equip students with practical, industry-relevant competencies that are needed in the mining sector and other economic sectors.

Capacity building in the province is also supported by various SETAs have implemented numerous skills development and training programmes targeting youth, women and broader communities in the province. These training programmes are aligned to the needs to different economic sectors and are done in collaboration with TVETs, CETs and other key stakeholders in the province. The MQA has established relationship with the Eastern Cape CET College, King Sabata Dalindyebo TVET College, Lovedale TVET College and King Hantsha TVET College (MQA, 2023). The other SETAs that have presence in the province include different SETAs include Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority (MerSETA), Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority (LGSETA), Agricultural Sector Education Training Authority (AGRISETA), Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority (ETDP SETA), Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) and others.

Table 7: Post-school education and training institutions and mining related programmes

Academic Institutions	Names	Programme offerings (i.e., related to mining)
Universities	University of Fort Hare	Bachelor of Science in Geography
		Bachelor of Science in GIS & Remote Sensing
		Bachelor of Science in Geology
	Nelson Mandela University	Higher Certificate in Renewable Energy Engineering
	Rhodes University	Bachelor of Science in Geology
		Bachelor of Science in Chemistry
	Walter Sisulu University	Diploma in Electrical Engineering Diploma in Mechanical Engineering
Technical and Vocational Colleges	King Sabata Dalindyebo TVET College	Mechanical Engineering N4 - N6
		Engineering and Related Design
		Water and Wastewater Treatment
	Ingwe TVET College	Engineering and Related Design
	Buffalo City TVET College	NCV: Mechatronics
		Electrical Infrastructure Construction
		Engineering and Related Design
		Fitting and Turning
		Electrical
		Water and water waste Treatment
		Water Reticulation services
	East Cape Midlands TVET College	Engineering and Occupational Training
	Lovedale TVET College	NC(V): Engineering and Related Design (L2-L4)
		NC(V)Electrical Infrastructure Construction (L2-L4)
		Electrical (N1-N3)
		Welding (N1-N3)
	Port Elizabeth TVET College	Engineering studies (N1-N6)
Short courses (i.e., Welding, Electrical, Hydraulics, Pneumatics)		

2.7. Skills development policies and initiatives

This section discusses policies, laws and strategies that support skills development and training. These are presented at three levels taking into account national frameworks, sectoral legislation and strategies and provincial development strategies.

2.7.1. National policy and strategy frameworks

The **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa** sets out the foundation for the country's socioeconomic development by placing its citizens at the centre. The Constitution aims to address the past injustices and in doing so, support the country in building a society that is based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human. Specifically, the Bill of Rights enshrines fundamental rights and freedoms for all citizens and ensure that they are enjoyed by various groups within the country. The Bill of Rights promotes equality, human dignity, life, freedom and security, privacy, freedom of expression and others. Section 29 of the Constitution highlights the everyone's right "(a) to a basic education including basic education, and (b) to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible" (South African government, 1996:12). This fundamental right has been realised through various legislative frameworks, one of which is the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998).

The overarching goal of the **Skills Development Act** is to "provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African work force" (South African government, 1998). The Act was enacted to address the skills gaps and enhance the overall skill level of the country's workforce closing the gap between skills supply and demand. Through the Skills Development Act, the National Skills Authority and National Skills Fund were established. More so, sector education and training authorities (SETAs) were formed. There are twenty-one (21) SETAs in the country, and they are mandated to drive skills development in the different economic sectors. The Mining Qualification Authority (MQA) supports skills development in the mining and mineral sector and its mission is to "ensure that the mining and minerals sector has sufficient competent people who will improve health and safety, employment equity and increase productivity standards".

Skills development in the country is also embedded in the country's socioeconomic development frameworks. This is because of the direct relationship between skills development and training and the triple challenges affecting the country (i.e., poverty, inequality and unemployment). The government established the **National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS)** whose aim is to support the realisation of the National Development Plan – Vision 2030. The National Skills Development Strategy III aims to address skills gaps and shortages and promote skills development in the workforce. It also aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the skills development system (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). The NSDS III is tied to transformational imperatives in the country considering disparities that are seen across race, class, gender, location, age and HIV/AIDS status. In this regard, the NSDS promotes prioritisation of Blacks South Africans, women, youth, rural areas over urban areas, and people living with disabilities.

2.7.2. Sector policies and strategies

The **Mineral and Petroleum Resource Development Act (No. 28 of 2002)** is the primary legislation governing the mining and minerals sector in the country. Its overarching goal is to ensure equitable access and sustainable development of the country's mineral and petroleum resources (Government gazette, 2002). This is in recognition of the history of mining in the country that is characterised by discriminatory practices and the exploitation of mineral resources without consideration of social and environmental objectives that are key to the country's development agenda. To this end, the MPRDA has been instrumental in ensuring that South Africa's mining sector benefits all its citizens, particularly historically disadvantaged communities. Sector 100 of the Act called government to develop a broad-based socioeconomic empowerment charter (i.e., mining charter) that will facilitate the transformation of the mining sector.

Aligned to the objectives of the MPRDA, the **Mining Charter III** aims to facilitate sustainable transformation, growth and development of the mining sector (Government gazette, 2018). This objective is supported by several areas of intervention covering ownership, procurement, supplier and enterprise development, human resource development (HRD), employment equity (EE), mine community development, and housing and living conditions. Within human resource development, the charter talks to the need to (1) produce skilled, trained and diverse workforce to meet the needs of the mining sector, (2) develop skills that enhance productivity of workforce increasing the employability of disadvantaged South Africans, and (3) develop entrepreneurial skills to improve livelihood and create opportunities outside of mining (Government gazette, 2018). To support these, mining companies are required to invest a minimum 5% of leviab amount (excluding the statutory skills development levy) on essential skills development activities such as development of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills, adult basic education and training, artisan training, learnerships, bursaries and other skills training initiatives for people in the community which include portable skills training (Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 2017). The MMS has made considerable progress in terms of overall transformation of the sector. In the 2014, an assessment of the mining charter was carried out and amongst the key findings were that the majority of mining communities continue to live in poverty and the participation of Historically Disadvantaged South Africans (HDSAs) remain low. There is therefore a need to move beyond compliance that is necessitated by the need to safeguard the social licence to operate and implement projects that will leave long-lasting impact on communities.

The Mining Charter is implemented through **Social and Labour Plans** which SLPs outline the strategies that mining companies intend to use for community development, including their approaches to skills training. This framework aims to extend socio-economic benefits not only to workers but also to the host communities and labour sending areas (Benya, 2017). According to Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALSA) (2017), the rationale behind SLPs is to ensure that mining companies offer opportunities for workers and communities to benefit from local mineral resources. The implementation period of projects contained in SLPs is five years and mining companies are required to submit annual reports to the Department of Mineral Resources. The SLP projects needs to contribute towards mine community development, human resource development, employment equity, housing and living conditions, and address the impacts of downscaling and retrenchments (Department of Mineral Resources, 2010).

The HRD programmes, specifically, need to accommodate both employees and communities equipping them with the skills that are relevant to mining as well as skills that can be used in other sectors of the economy (Centre for Applied Legal Studies, 2017). In 2016, the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) conducted investigative hearings aimed at understanding the socioeconomic challenges affecting mining-affected communities in South Africa. Amongst the concerns raised was limited compliance on regulatory obligations by mining companies. The delivery of SLP projects was highlighted as one of the issues with the level of compliance recorded at about 30% (SAHRC, 2016).

Another concern that has been directed to SLPs as a tool that is key in supporting local economic development is the misalignment with local strategies, specifically Integrated Development Plans (IDPs). The IDPs are a key component of South Africa's strategy for promoting economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development (de Wet et al., 2020). They integrate economic, social, environmental, and fiscal strategies to allocate resources efficiently, ensuring alignment with community and stakeholder needs over a five-year period, with annual reviews for adaptation. The main objectives of IDPs include fostering economic growth, improving quality of life, promoting environmental sustainability, and managing fiscal resources effectively.

There exists a critical gap between SLPs and IDPs where projects implemented by the mine would be outside the priority projects identified in IDPs. This lack of alignment hinders effective implementation and leaves gaps, particularly in providing training and creating economic opportunities for communities. Furthermore, it is found that the projects implemented by local municipalities tend to restrict focus to other economic sectors, making it difficult to align training programmes with the demands of the mining sector (Lahiff, 2013). There is therefore a need for mining companies to collaborate with local governments to ensure alignment between SLPs and IDPs and other key strategies supporting both regional and local economic development (van der Watt and Marais, 2021). Engagement with communities is also essential to ensure that programmes respond to the needs of the community.

2.7.3. Provincial strategies

The alignment between national and provincial development strategies is important to ensure policy coherence and to optimise implementation of development programmes. It is also important in terms of facilitating stakeholder coordination and support. While this link is important, provincial and local strategies needs to be tailored to suit the provincial context taking into account the socio-economic landscapes and factor endowments that are often unique to particular localities. Factor endowments are resources that regions can use to support economic activity, such as land, minerals, capital, and labour (Ancheta et al, 2023).

The Eastern Cape province has several strategies supporting its socioeconomic development that is aligned with the broader national development priorities. The **Provincial Development Plan (PDP)** outlines the province strategy to attain its development goals by 2030. Through the PDP, the province has identified five priority areas that respond to the challenges that they are facing, and these include (1) growing inclusive and equitable economy, (2) an educated, empowered and innovative population, (3) a healthy population, (4) vibrant and equitable enabled communities, and (5) capable and accountable institutions (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014). In order to grow

the economy, the province has identified several high-impact economic sectors, and these include mining. As indicated in the strategy, there is a need to leverage benefits from Karoo shale-gas, including feedstock for provincial petrochemicals, and grow the Eastern Cape as an energy hub (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014). Education and knowledge empowerment is at the centre of the province strategy and amongst the key areas of intervention is quality post-schooling with expanded access. The PDP has highlighted the importance of a curriculum that is in tune with the challenges facing province (Eastern Cape Planning Commission, 2014).

The implementation of the PDP is supported by **Provincial Economic Growth and Development Strategy (PEDS)**. Its mission is to serve as “a provincial catalyst for sustainable and inclusive economic development that promotes sound environmental management” (Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2023:493). The PEDS has six objectives, and these include the need to (1) improve the absorption capability of the provincial economy, (2) stabilise vulnerable and declining sectors, (3) protect and safeguard productive capacity of existing industries, (4) diversify the economy, (5) expand productive capacity, and (6) transform ownership of capital and assets. In considering the opportunities within the project, the PEDS identified new skills that are need support industrialisation in the province and these are in various areas including petrochemicals, green technology manufacturing, agro-processing and auto-manufacturing. The fourth industrial revolution also requires new types of skills which can be established through collaboration with the private sector. The strategy has also identified an increase in the demand on skills development programmes targeting small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs) and cooperatives (Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2023).

2.7.4. Skills development initiatives

The Eastern Cape Province has implemented various skills development and training initiatives to address unemployment and enhance workforce capabilities. The province, through its Office of the Premier and Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), has established partnerships with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges to provide practical skills training in sectors such as automotive, agriculture, and maritime industries (Eastern Cape Development Corporation, 2023). The programmes include the Automotive Training Academy which provides specialised training for the automotive sector (South African Government News Agency, 2022). Additionally, the province has rolled out Community Education and Training (CET) centres that focus on basic vocational skills, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship development for youth and unemployed adults in rural and urban areas (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2023). Box 1 summarises key skills development and training initiatives in the province.

BOX 1: Skills Development Initiatives

- Eastern Cape Development Corporation (ECDC) skills development initiatives.
- Nelson Mandela University's (NMU) mining-related programmes
- University of Fort Hare's (UFH) agriculture and rural development programmes
- East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ) skills development programmes

- Eastern Cape Youth Development Agency (ECYDA) skills development programmes
- National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) skills development programmes
- Eastern Cape Women's Development Agency (ECWDA) skills development programmes

The Eastern Cape Provincial Skills Development Forum has also spearheaded initiatives focused on critical skills gaps identified in the Provincial Development Plan (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2023). This includes collaborations with various SETAs.

Some of the programmes implemented in the province are:

Skills Development Project for Youth - the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) in partnership with Amathole District Municipality (ADM) launched the skills development project in August 2024 aimed at equipping the youth within the municipality with skills to needed to increase their employability and entrepreneurship prospects. This project is aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), which both emphasise the need for skills development and job creation for the youth (CETA, 2024). The project is expected to train 170 learners in three learning programmes: unemployed learnership (100), apprenticeship (30) and unemployed artisan recognition of prior learning (ARPL) (40) (CETA, 2024). Upon completing the programme, learners will be placed across local municipalities falling under the Amathole District Municipality. The training will comprise of 30% theoretical and simulation training and 70% workplace learning in trades such as bricklaying, carpentry, plumbing, and electrical work. Participants will receive stipends, personal protective equipment (PPE), toolkits, and mentorship. The project will run for 12 months for learnerships, 36 months for apprenticeships, and up to 12 months for ARPL (CETA, 2024).

Ray Mhlaba Skills Training Centre - The Centre's primary objective is to positively impact the lives of community members through the empowerment of unemployed youth aged 18-25 years. Through this initiative, youth will be provided with vocational skills equipping them with the knowledge and skills that will better place them to obtain formal employment or become entrepreneurs (EP Childcare, n.d.). The centre offers various SETA accredited programmes covering hospitality (i.e., professional cookery, food and beverage) bakery, butchery, woodwork, beauty (i.e., hairdressing, nail technician), and early childhood development. As part of the initiative, there is a personal development programme called Vukuzenzele which is aimed at providing life skills such as time management and communication.

Vocational Skills Training by Amy Foundation – The objective of this foundation is to combat youth unemployment by providing vocational skills training to young people in the age category, 18 to 35 years. The foundation was established in 2014, and its skills development offerings cover hospitality, beauty and wellness, arts and crafts, and technical skills. Since 2014, the programme has placed over 800 alumni into employment or self-employment. The foundation is also working on integrating vocational training into high school curricula to motivate students towards career paths (Amy Foundation, n.d.).

Al Fidaa Foundation Skill Development Centre – This centre was established by Al Fidaa Foundation. The centre provides free accredited sewing training aimed at empowering individuals to achieve financial independence. Its targeted beneficiaries include are primarily women who are mothers and breadwinners. The centre offers sewing courses that span over a period of 12 weeks, along with computer and business courses. This initiative focuses on group learning to foster motivation among participants while aiming to bridge the gap between job searching and acquiring relevant qualifications (Al-Fidaa Foundation, 2024).

Skills Development Project – This is a collaboration between Department of Labour’s Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), and the Ntinga O.R. Tambo Development Agency. This is a R500 million initiative that was established to support 2,000 ex-mineworkers and unemployed youth. The focus of the programme is on training in various areas such as hospitality, carpentry, plumbing, agriculture (nut farming), computer repairs, and software development. The overarching goal of the programme is to equip participants with skills needed to create jobs and drive local economic growth (Government of South Africa, 2019).

Eastern Cape Premier and SETA Youth Development Programme – This programme was established through a partnership between the Office of the Premier in the province and various Sector Education and Training Authorities. The objective of the programme is to identify skills interventions for unemployed youth in the province and expose them in the various project opportunities (Business Link, 2021). There are multiple interventions, and these include providing training to people living with disabilities and youth in rural areas in the province, internships targeting unemployed graduates, and skills development and training programmes targeting ex-mine workers.

Coega Development Corporation’s Skills Programmes - The Coega Development Foundation (CDF) is a subsidiary of the Coega Development Corporation, was established to lead socio-economic development initiatives within the province, with a particular focus on human capital development and social welfare. The foundation offers several accredited skills courses in welding, plumbing, general maintenance, and domestic water repair. These are six-month courses and are designed to provide community members with both technical and entrepreneurial skills needed to support economic development in the region (Herald Live, 2022).

Wind Energy Skills Development Programme – This programme is led by Coega Development Corporation (CDC) and Wind energy companies operating in the region. The programme is designed to address the rising demand for specialized skills in the wind energy sector. This initiative aims to provide local communities with training and practical experience in renewable energy, in particular wind energy which has received significant investment due to the province’s optimal wind conditions for wind farms. The project is part of a broader effort to harness renewable energy potential while supporting the socio-economic development of the province (Engineering News, 2022). The objectives of the programme are (1) to build a skilled workforce capable of supporting the wind energy sector, including roles in wind turbine installation, maintenance, and operation, (2) to enhance the employability of youth and unemployed individuals in the province by providing them with marketable skills in the renewable energy sector, and (3) to support the development of the local economy through sustainable energy practices and employment creation. This programme is targeting unemployed youth, those who are seeking new skills to participate in the renewable energy sector, and communities located near wind energy projects. The skills covered by the programme include:

- Wind turbine operation: Training participants on how to operate wind turbines efficiently and safely.
- Wind turbine maintenance: Skills development for the maintenance and repair of turbines, which is a critical aspect of the long-term operation of wind farms.
- Renewable energy systems: Broader training in renewable energy technologies, including wind energy systems, to prepare individuals for a variety of roles within the sector.
- Engineering and technical skills: Providing foundational knowledge in engineering principles related to wind energy technology, including mechanical and electrical systems.
- Health and safety: Training focused on safety protocols related to working with large-scale wind energy systems, ensuring the workforce is well-equipped to work in the often-hazardous environments associated with energy production.

The Eastern Cape Strategic Skills Project - This initiative is coordinated by the Office of the Premier and is funded by the National Skills Fund. The programme aims to enhance skills among youth to contribute to economic growth in the province. The project's offerings include training in scarce skills, and work-based training and learning in trades like welding, automotive component manufacturing, and mechatronics. The project is supported by several other stakeholders including district municipalities, industrial development zones (IDZs), SETAs, FET colleges, and provincial departments (MERSETA, 2021).

Toolmaking Skills Development Programme – The Production Technologies Association of South Africa (PtSA) delivers a toolmaking apprenticeship programme in Gqeberha. Through the programme, candidates are equipped with skills in producing precision tools for sectors such as automotive, mining, and manufacturing. Candidates undergo training in advanced manufacturing and engineering, leading to an occupational certificate in toolmaking (Eastern Cape Industrial News, n.d.).

Science and Technology Park - The East London Industrial Development Zone (ELIDZ) Science and Technology Park has been instrumental in providing specialized technical training, while various youth development programmes offer soft skills training, work readiness programs, and entrepreneurship support to address the province's high youth unemployment rate (ELIDZ, 2024).

2.8. Conclusion

In line with the objectives of the study, the chapter provided insights on the socioeconomic landscape of the province and discussed the state of the MMS in the province. It also included an analysis of skills, the education and training landscape, and the skills development policies and initiatives that have been implemented in the province. The socioeconomic profiling of the population revealed that the province has been experiencing growth and includes a significant youth population, which presents both opportunities and challenges for future development. Female account for the largest share of the population. While education levels in the province have improved, it is still lagging behind other provinces when measured against those that have complete matric and those with post school education.

Like many other provinces, the Eastern Cape continues to grapple with high unemployment and poverty levels, despite having several economic sectors that present potential opportunities for growth and development. The key sectors include government services, private services, trade, finance, agriculture, manufacturing and construction. Mining is the smallest sector in the province both in terms of contribution to GVA and employment. However, there are mineral deposits that offer opportunities for small-scale mining.

In order for the province to maximise benefits from not only the MMS but other key sectors of the economy, the province must address its skills shortages. From the skills analysis, it was established that the working-age population is dominated by unskilled labour and there are several skills gaps particularly those required in emerging economic sectors petrochemicals, green technology manufacturing, agro-processing and auto-manufacturing.

Addressing skills shortages requires a multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders. There are numerous institutions in the province that offer a wide range of post-school programmes that can support skills development aligned with the needs of the MMS and other economic sectors. Additionally, many skills development programmes have been implemented in the province through collaboration between government, training institutions, SETAs, and other stakeholders. These interventions are backed by national and provincial policies and strategies that promote skills development as a key measure to address unemployment in the country.

3. APPROACH TO THE STUDY

3.1. Introduction

Research methodology is a systematic approach used to address research problems through the collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of data. The selection of an appropriate methodology is guided by the study's objectives, ensuring accurate data collection and analysis to address the research questions. This chapter outlines the methodology employed in the study, covering research design, data collection and analysis methods, research reliability and validity, ethical considerations, and study limitations.

3.2. Research design

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design in both data collection and analysis. This approach combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study (Creswell, 1999). According to Byrne et al (2007), by employing both qualitative and quantitative

methods, the approach takes advantage of the strengths of various methods ensuring a well-rounded understanding of the issues being investigated. Amongst the benefits of mixed methods approach is that it allows the researcher to explore diverse perspectives looking at the problem through multiple lenses. It also allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive insights on issues particularly those that may be hidden if either qualitative or quantitative methods were used. Skills development is a multifaceted issue, and therefore, requisite research studies require the use of multiple methods to capture the complexity and nuances of the subject, ensuring a thorough and well-rounded analysis. It is against these considerations that the mixed methods research design was found to be suitable for the study.

3.3. Data collection methods

The mixed-method research approach was implemented through the use of multiple methods, namely, literature review, surveys, community workshop and focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews. Secondary data was collected through *literature review* where relevant documents were reviewed. More so, the study made use of the MQA's Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) and Annual Training Reports (ATRs) data. Primary data was collected through surveys, community workshop and FGDs and interviews. A total of 330 *surveys* were completed. The surveys were administered to community members by fieldworkers who were recruited from the communities. This was done to leverage the fieldworkers' local knowledge and existing footprint within the community. Before data collection, the fieldworkers underwent training to ensure that they collect data within the required standards adhering to ethical requirements. The surveys were completed both online and on hard copies.

The surveys were complemented by *community workshop* which was hosted on the 18th of December 2024 in Newlands in the Eastern Cape province. The workshop convened 13 community members comprising of a diverse group of participants. The workshop was structured such that there was a facilitated discussion in an open session where community members were given the opportunity to share insights on the challenges they are facing, opportunities in the province, skills gaps and needs. This was followed by *focus group discussion* where homogenous groups were requested to discuss specific issues pertaining to skills development.

Interviews were conducted with representatives from mining companies and TVET colleges. Although the initial target was to complete 30 interviews across mining companies, TVET, and colleges, only 4 interviews were successfully conducted. Despite the low response rate, the interviews that were completed yielded valuable insights that complemented the data collected in the study. Overall, the data collection methods used in the study proved to be effective in terms of providing comprehensive insights in the skills development needs of communities in the Eastern Cape province.

3.4. Data analysis methods

The quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to establish frequencies and percentages, providing insights into the distribution and trends within the data. The qualitative data was analysed content analysis where key themes were extracted as guided by the key

questions that were posed. This data analysis method involves identifying, analysing, and capturing themes within data (Energy Research & Social Science, 2023). It is a flexible and useful research tool which enables the researcher to draw meaningful insights from qualitative data in a structured manner.

3.5. Research reliability and validity

Research reliability and validity are important measures in research that ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the research and findings being presented. There are various methods that can be used to establish validity and reliability of quantitative and qualitative research. In this study, reliability and validity will be established through the use of the triangulation method. There are different triangulation methods – data triangulation (i.e., the use of multiple data), investigator triangulation (i.e., involves multiple researchers collecting and analysing the data), theory triangulation (i.e., application of multiple theories to test the findings) and methodological triangulation (i.e., the use of different approaches to collect and analyse data) (UNAIDS, n.d; Heale and Forbes, 2013). This research study used multiple sources of data (i.e., secondary and primary data) as well as different investigators to collect, analyse and cross check the data.

3.6. Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in line with the University's research requirements. During the research, ethical requirements were followed during data collection as well as reporting.

3.7. Study limitations and challenges

Several challenges were experienced during data collection and these included:

- Some community members were reluctant to participate in the survey, citing a lack of interest in training programmes. This was emanating from concerns over the outcomes of most training projects, which they felt often failed to lead to tangible improvements in their community. To this effect, some community members wanted timelines in terms of the implementation of the recommendations that emanate from the study. This was addressed by explaining the role of the universities in conducting research and ensuring that the findings are communicated to relevant stakeholders for action.
- In terms of surveys, some community members were not comfortable with complete them online, and so, hard copies were made available to the fieldworkers to use.
- In the workshop, some community members were not comfortable sharing their insights in English and so they were allowed to communicate in their language that they were comfortable with. In this instance, fieldworkers had to assist the project team with translation.
- Of the 46 emails sent, only 4 participants took part in the study. Several respondents indicated that they had already participated in similar research and were unwilling to engage again.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology adopted for the study. A mixed-methods approach was used, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. Data was gathered through literature reviews, structured surveys, community workshops, focus group discussions and interviews. A total of 330 community members participated in the survey, and additional insights were obtained from key stakeholders, including mining companies and TVET colleges. The study adhered to ethical research standards, with informed consent obtained from all participants prior to data collection. The next chapter presents the findings and discusses the key insights that emerged from the data.

4. RESULTS AND KEY FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings, organised into three key sections. The first section outlines the community profile, with a focus on socioeconomic status. Understanding the socioeconomic conditions of community members across the province is essential for designing skills development initiatives that are informed by the specific needs and challenges of the communities in the province. The second section examines the skills needs of community members, highlighting the types of programmes needed to enhance their capabilities and enable

broader participation in the province’s economy. The third section turns the attention to the existing skills gaps and demands within the mining industry, emphasising the areas where further training and development are necessary to meet current and future workforce needs.

4.2. Community profiling

4.2.1. Geographic locations

This analysis is based on 330 completed surveys conducted within the province. As previously noted, the Eastern Cape comprises eight district municipalities. Data collection was carried out in three of these: Amathole, Buffalo City, and Nelson Mandela Bay. Collectively, these three municipalities are home to approximately 3 million people, representing 42% of the province’s total population. Figure 10 shows the participation levels in three municipalities.

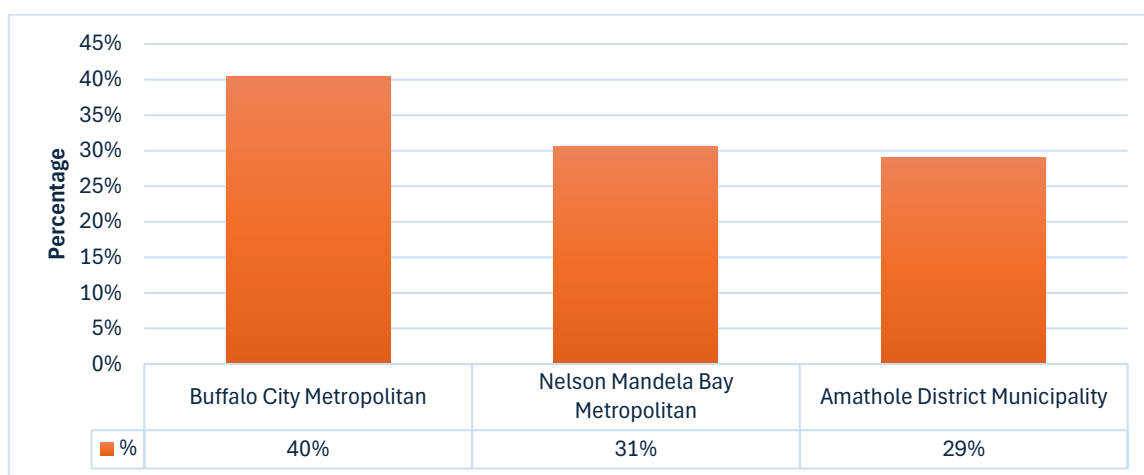


Figure 10: Geographic locations of where data collection took place

The highest level of participation was in Buffalo City Metropolitan, followed by Nelson Mandela Metropolitan and then Amathole District Municipality. As highlighted in the methodology, the participation levels are as a result of accessibility, which was determined by the fieldworkers’ reach and presence in the communities.

4.2.2. Demographics

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the demographic profile of the communities that participated in the study. Understanding these demographics is essential, as the skills development needs of communities are closely linked to their broader socioeconomic characteristics. Factors such as gender, age distribution, employment status, and others influence the specific needs of different population groups. Therefore, an understanding of the demographic is crucial for designing and implementing responsive training programmes.

Gender and racial profile

Figure 11 shows total participation by gender across the three district municipalities. Of the total participants, 46% were female and male accounted for 53%. The remaining participants were those that classify their gender as non-binary. The gender profile is relatively the same in Buffalo City and Nelson Mandela with the female participants accounting 40% of the total participants. In the case of Amathole, female participants constituted 60%.

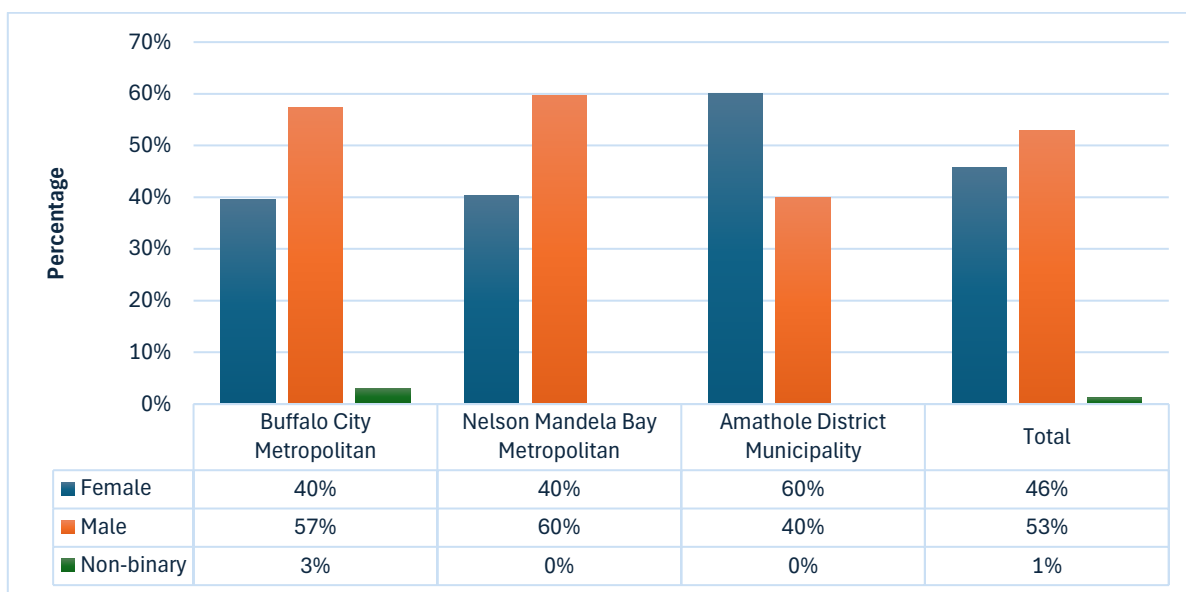


Figure 11: Gender distribution by municipality

Overall, there was sufficient gender representation, which was crucial in this study to ensure that community perspectives on skills development needs are inclusive. Of the community members that participated in the study, 95% are Black and the remaining 5% were Coloureds. This participation is reflective of the racial profile of the province where Blacks account for the majority of the population (i.e., more than 85% of the total population).

Age distribution

Figure 12 illustrates the age distribution. Participation is across all age groups. Notably, participation levels are relatively consistent among the 18 to 25 years, 26 to 35 years, and 36 to 45 years. Overall, youth (i.e., defined as individuals aged 18 to 35) accounted for the largest proportion of participants across all three municipalities, with their share ranging from 46% to 48%. This large participation from the youth is expected because the province has a young population with a median age of 27 years. This broad age representation is important, as it ensures that the insights drawn from the study reflect the perspectives and needs of the different age cohorts.

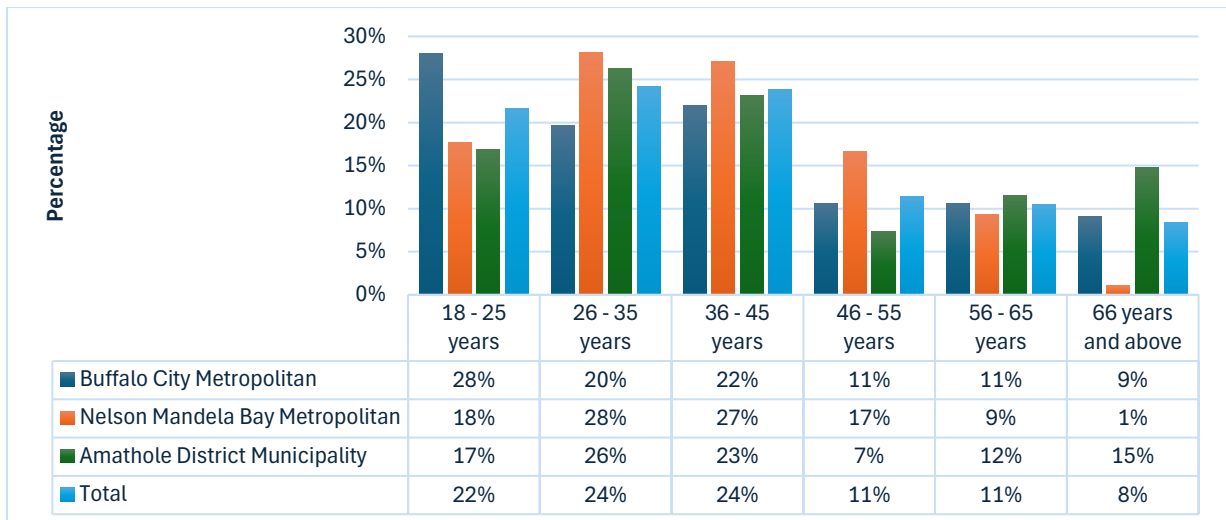


Figure 12: Age distribution of survey participants

Education levels

Figure 13 illustrates the educational attainment of community members. The combined data reveals a gradual increase in the proportion of participants across various education levels. Approximately 33% of participants have completed matric, followed by 22% with Grade 11, and 11% with Grade 10 or equivalent phases. Among the municipalities, Nelson Mandela Bay recorded the highest proportion of participants with matric at 42%, followed by Buffalo City at 33%, and Amathole at 24%. Notably, around 5% of participants reported having no formal schooling, a trend observed across all three municipalities. Additionally, only a small percentage of participants in each municipality reported holding post-school qualifications.

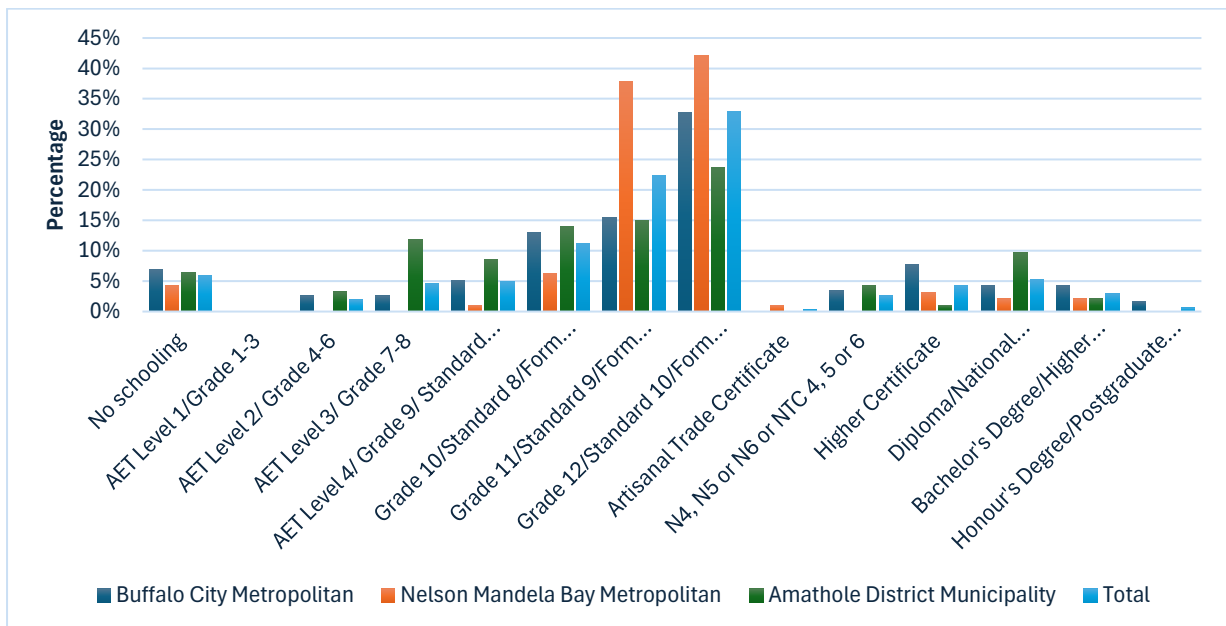


Figure 13: Education levels

Disability status

As part of building the demographic profile of communities in the province, participants were asked if they were living with any disability. Overall, 11% of participants reported having a disability. Disaggregated by municipality, 14% of participants in Amathole and 13% in Buffalo City identified as living with a disability. In contrast, only 4% of respondents from Nelson Mandela Bay reported the same. Most of the community members are living with a mobility impairment. The other community members have hearing impairment and developmental disability. According to the Kavese and Mbali (2020), about 10.7% of the population in the province is living with a disability. There are more females than males who are disabled. This is reflected in the study with 60% of community members living with disability being female.

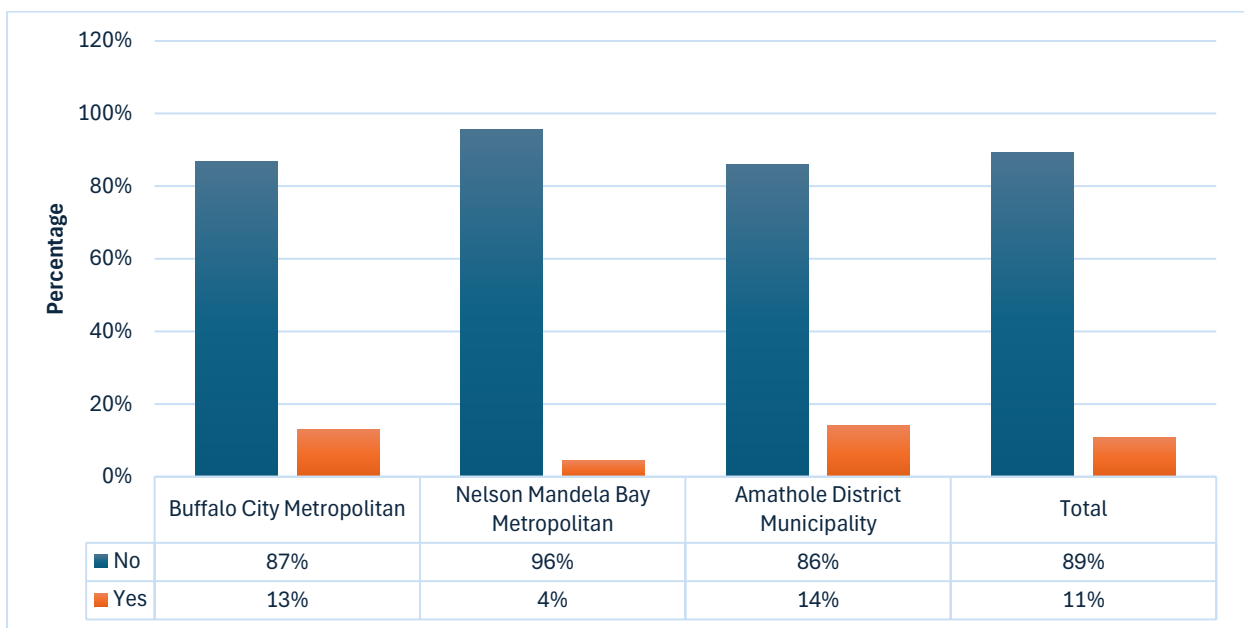


Figure 14: Study participants living with a disability

4.2.3. Employment status

Figure 15 shows the employment status of participants across the three municipalities. Notably, most (i.e., 64%) of the community members were not working while only 36% were employed. The employment levels are relatively the same across the three municipalities with the highest percentage of those who were unemployed in Amathole, followed by Nelson Mandela Bay and Buffalo City.

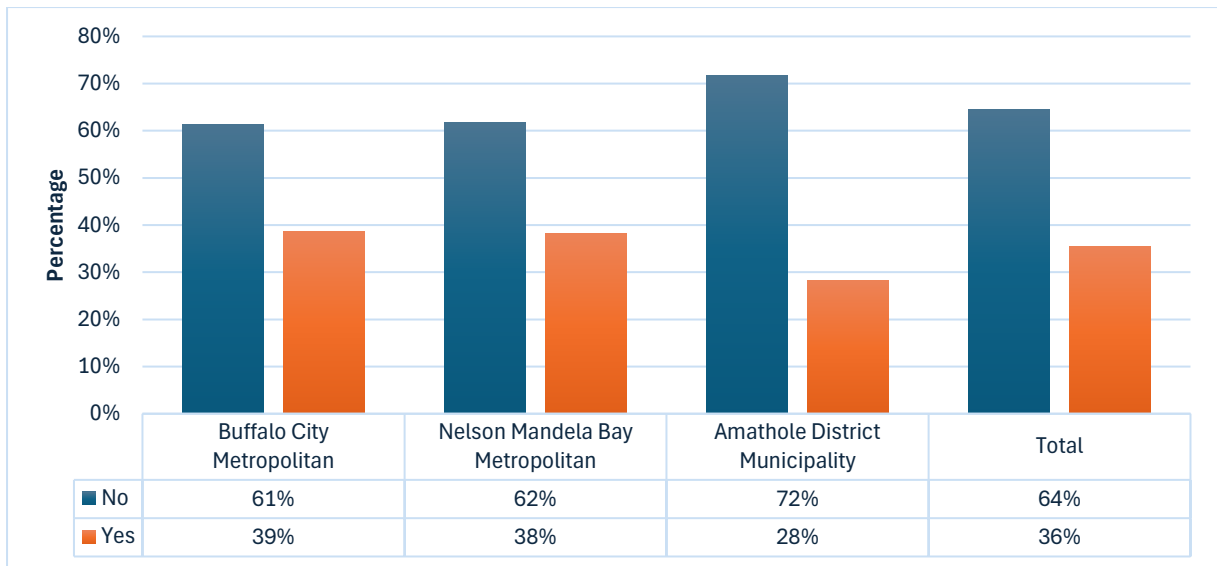


Figure 15: Employment status by district municipality

The issue of unemployment in the province was raised during the workshop. The participants expressed frustration with social consequences of unemployment which include increased crime and young girls resorting to sex work. The levels of crime in the community have been linked to the prevalence of drug abuse among young people. One community member raised that:

“People are angry and commit crime because there are no jobs; young girls sex workers because there are no jobs” (Community workshop, December 2024).

The lack of economic opportunities also contributes to the social ills in the community. One community member expressed that:

“We want to work and do business as well. The reality is that we are capable of working and we do not want to depend on social grants” (Community workshop, December 2024)

These sentiments were supported by most community members and there was consensus amongst them that they possess the capacity to work and contribute to the economy but are hindered by limited skills opportunities in their communities.

Employment by gender

Figure 18 illustrates employment status by gender. It is evident that females are the most affected by unemployment, comprising 71% of the community members who are not working.

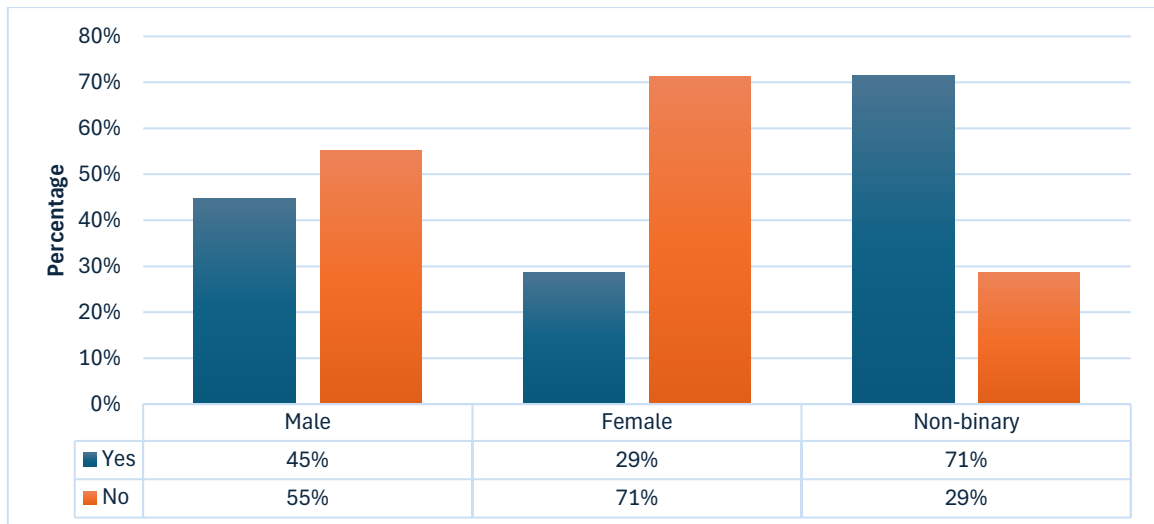


Figure 16: Employment status by gender

Employment by age

Figure 19 illustrates employment status by age group. According to the data, unemployment is most prevalent among participants aged 18 to 25 years, with 88% in this group not currently employed. This is followed by the 26 to 35, 56 to 65, and 36 to 45 age groups, each of which also shows unemployment rates exceeding 50%. These figures highlight the widespread nature of unemployment across age cohorts, with the youth being particularly affected.

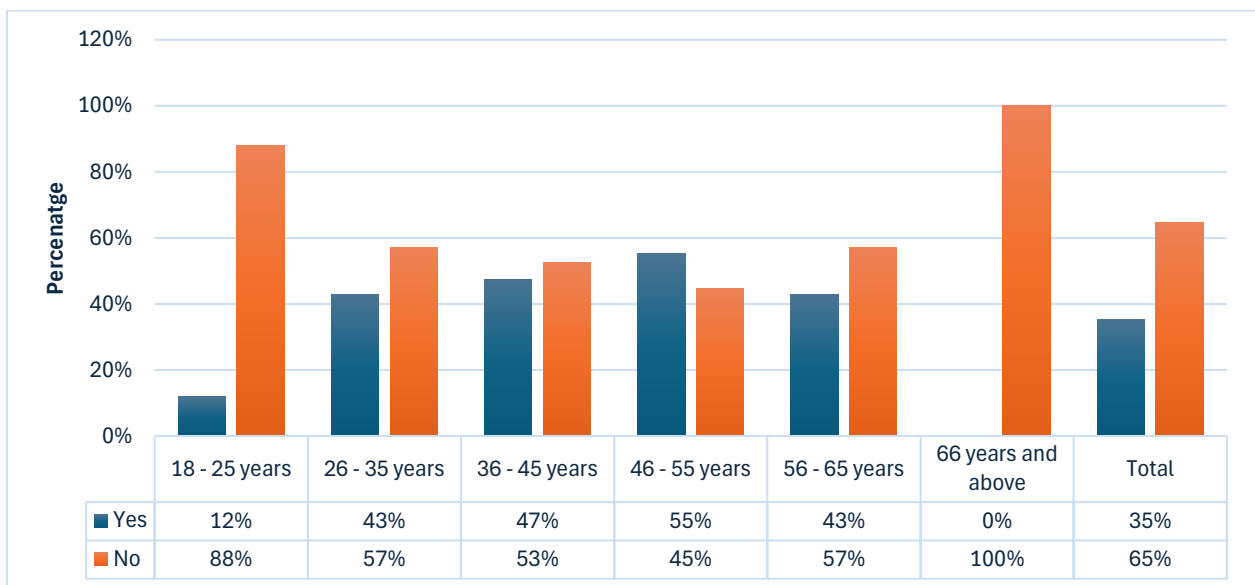


Figure 17: Employment status by age

Employment type

Figure 18 shows the type of employment for those that are working. Most of the community members that are working are employed full time (i.e., 36%), followed by those who are on contract employment (27%). This is the case in all municipalities except in Amathole district municipality where most of those who are working are on contract employment. It is seen in the figure that there is a considerable percentage of the participants in both Amathole and Buffalo City who are self-employed.

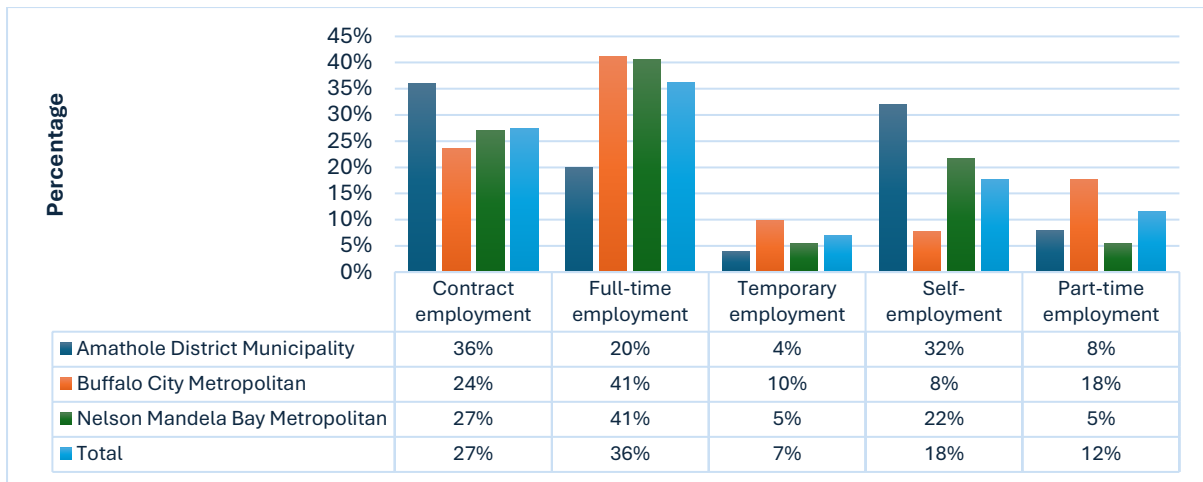


Figure 18: Type of employment amongst those working

Employment by economic sector

Figure 19 illustrates employment by economic sectors. Most of the participants are working in the mining sector, followed by the construction as well as finance, real estate and business services. Notably, employment differs across the three municipalities. Most participants in Buffalo City are working in the mining sector, with considerable percentages in the construction and agricultural sectors. In Nelson Mandela Bay, the top three sectors are construction, mining and manufacturing. In Amathole, most participants are working in finance, real estate and business, construction and agriculture.

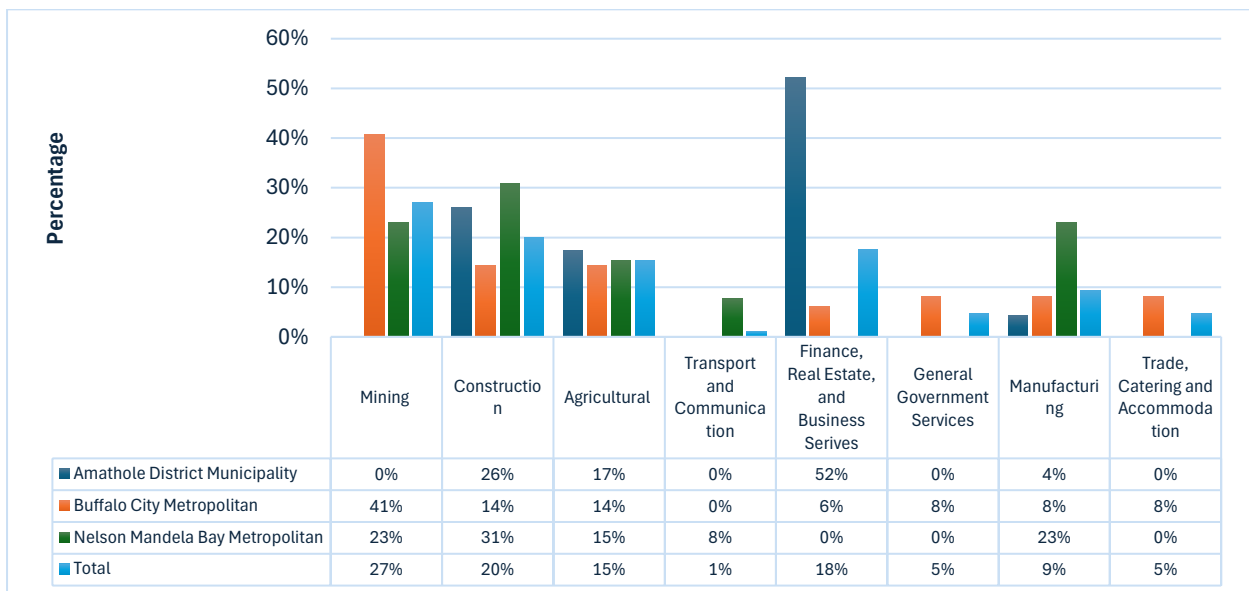


Figure 19: Employment by economic sectors

Of those working in the mining sector, about 55% are employed as miners, 40% as general workers and the remainder (5%) as shift bosses.

This profile reflects the education levels amongst community members where only a small percentage has post-matric qualifications.

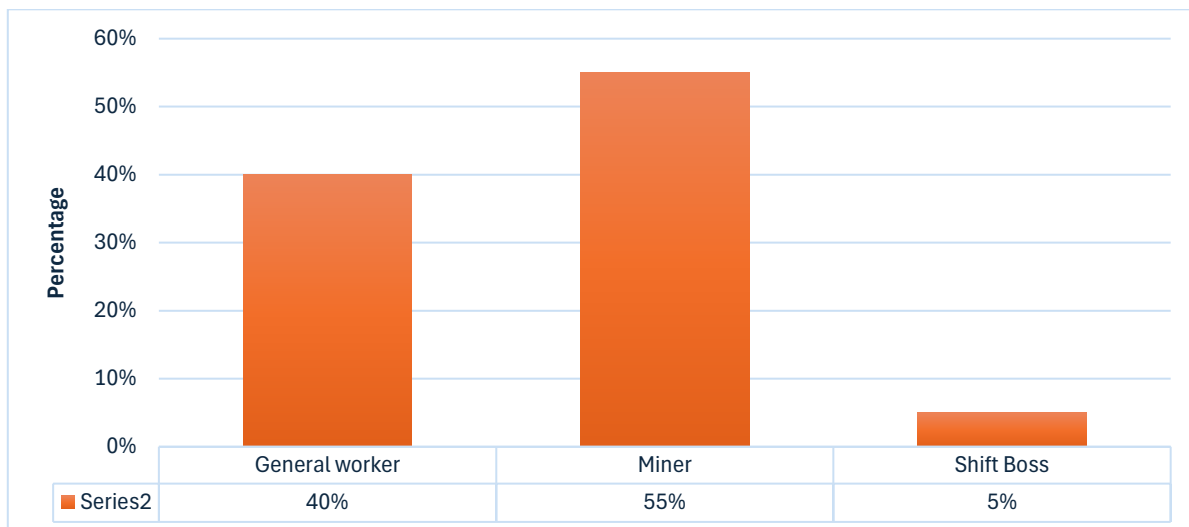


Figure 20: Occupations of community members employed in the mining sector

Given the low percentage of participants employed in the mining sector, participants were asked whether they found it difficult to secure employment in this industry. As illustrated in the figure, the majority across all district municipalities indicated that finding work in the mining sector is challenging. Only 1% of participants expressed a differing view.

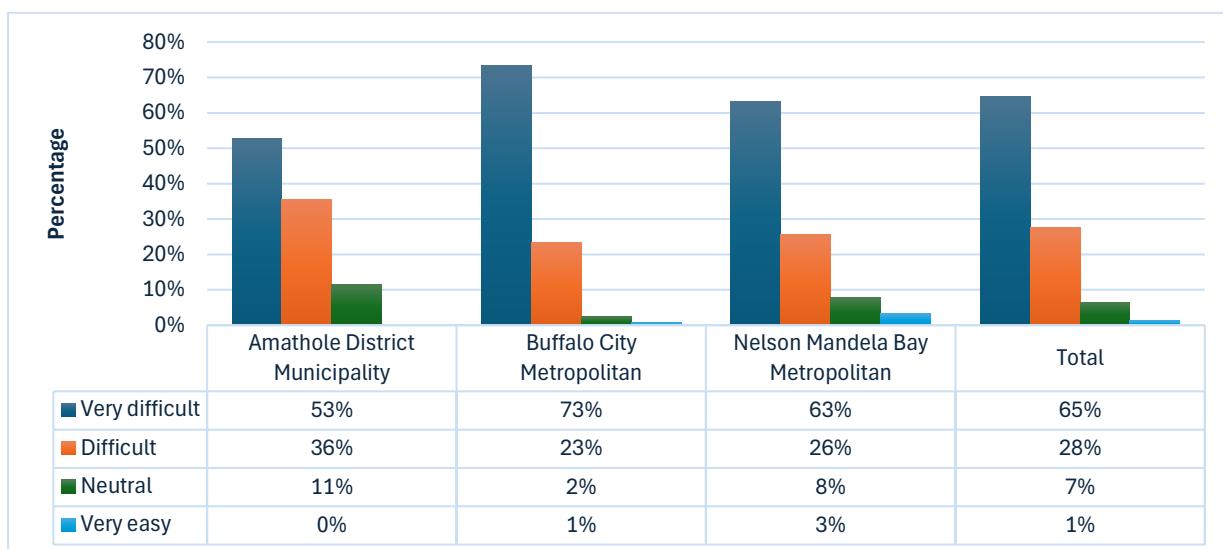


Figure 21: Difficulty finding employment in the mining sector

4.3. Establishing skills needs of the community members

4.3.1. Skills needed by community members

This section discusses the skills needed by communities to participate in the mainstream economy within the province. Community members were asked about the skills that they needed to improve their employability in the mining sector. As illustrated in figure 22, the most cited skills include technical mining skills (i.e., 19%), health and safety (i.e., 19%), and engineering skills (i.e., 18%). These three skill areas consistently ranked among the highest across all municipalities, except in Nelson Mandela Bay, where environmental management emerged amongst the top three skills.

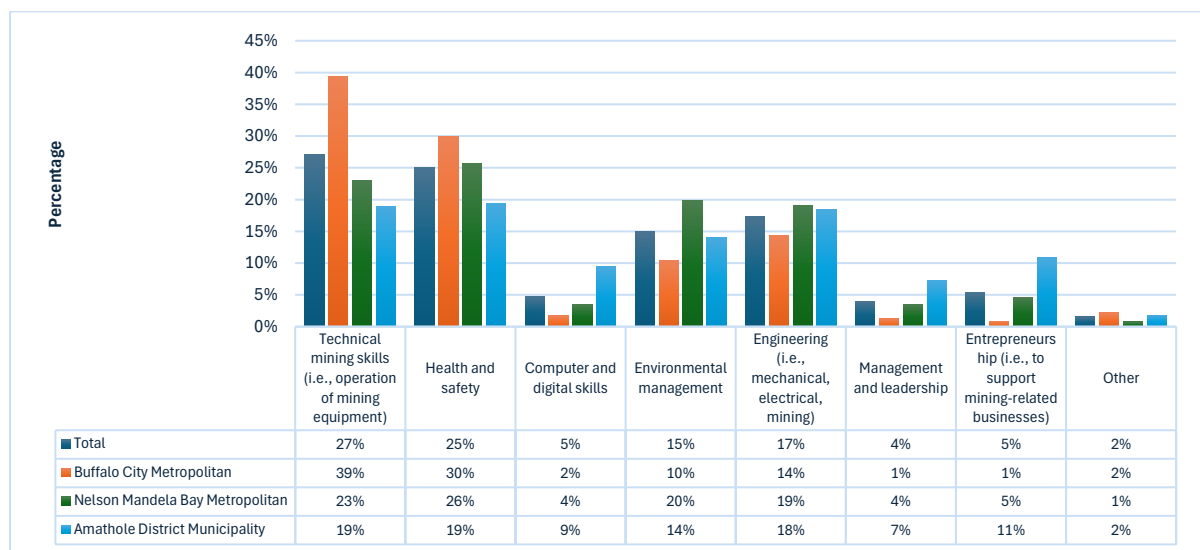


Figure 22: Most skills needed by community members

During the workshop, community members noted several skills that were crucial in the province. These include technical mining skills as some of them are interested in the extraction of crusher stones. With farming opportunities in the province, community members highlighted the need for farming skills that go beyond planting traditional crops like potatoes, cabbages, and tomatoes. They emphasised the importance of acquiring modern farming skills to explore new agricultural products that are in demand.

Women, in particular, discussed the skills they need to establish their own small businesses. Their interests are in sewing school uniforms and traditional attire, catering as well as laundry services. The need for business skills and financial literacy were also raised in the discussions as these are important in ensuring the sustainability of small businesses. Specifically, community members emphasised the need for skills in writing business plans.

Several of the community members belong to non-profit organisations (NPOs). In sharing their work, it was noted that community-based organisations need skills to support their work within communities. One community member raised that NPOs need proposal writing training to effectively secure funding and support for their initiatives (Female Community Leader). In support of this, another community member

who is part of the Community Police Forum (CPF) spoke about the role played by the CPF in protecting communities and responding to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). To perform this work effectively, they need specific skills which they are currently lacking. This is what the community member shared:

“Our work is to protect the community although we do not have formal training and yet, we need to file cases. We have introduced GBV Focal Persons –and women now trust CPF more than police. CPF personnel need to be trained on GBV rapid response and reporting. We were once trained by prosecutors on the law and human rights including issues of GBV during searches. CPF personnel need PSIRA training and certification” (Community workshop, December 2024).

Another community member who is a health care worker highlighted the need for skills that will support their work. She indicated that:

“[they need] certifications for community healthcare workers and training in home-based care. We need skills training on community health care work and for administering home-based work. We are already doing the work but need certificates and the course costs between R4, 500 and R50,000” (Community workshop, December 2024).

As mentioned, drug abuse is a concern in the community. A community member highlighted the need for counselling and communication skills. Youth in particular expressed interest in art, music and sports and would like to see programmes that that nurture their talents and provide opportunities for in these areas.

4.3.2. Priority areas for skills development

In establishing the skills needed by the community, they were asked about the key focus areas for skills development and training programmes to ensure that their needs are addressed. As captured in figure 23, most community members identified training programmes that will prepare youth for mining careers as a priority in the province. The other two priority areas include programmes that will support local businesses and those that will offer skills that will enable participation in other economic sectors outside of mining. These priority areas are the same across all three municipalities.

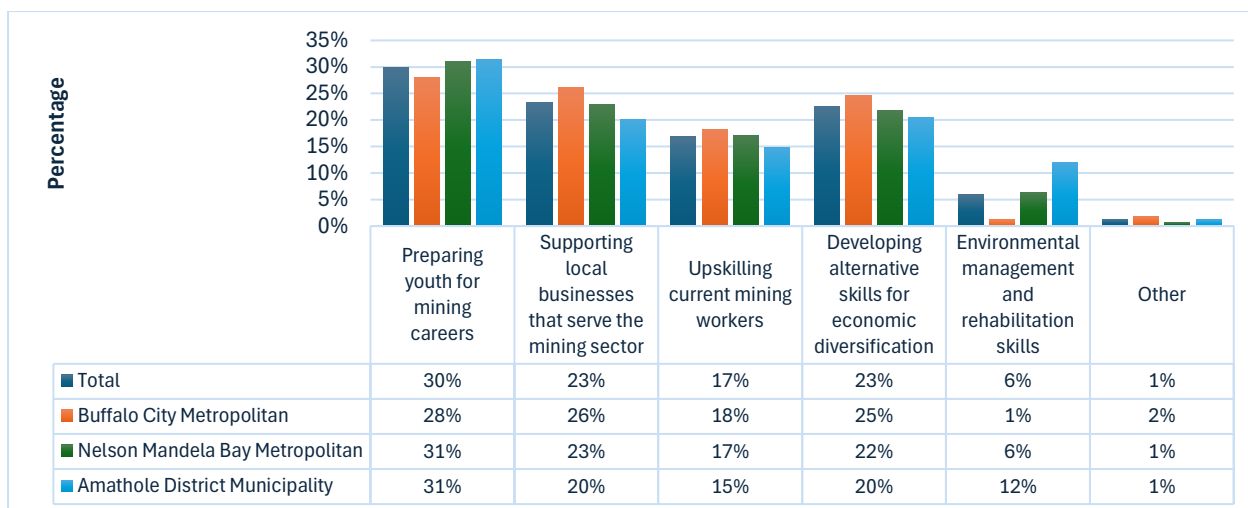


Figure 23: Proposed focus areas for skills development in the province

With a considerable percentage of the community members indicating the need for youth-tailored programmes, they were asked to identify specific skills that need to be prioritised to support youth development in the province. This is shown on figure 24 and as can be seen, there is a need for training programmes that provide technical skills and certifications (i.e., 34%), followed by innovation and entrepreneurship (i.e., 25%) and mentorship and leadership (i.e., 24%). Again, the top areas of priority are the same across the three district municipalities.

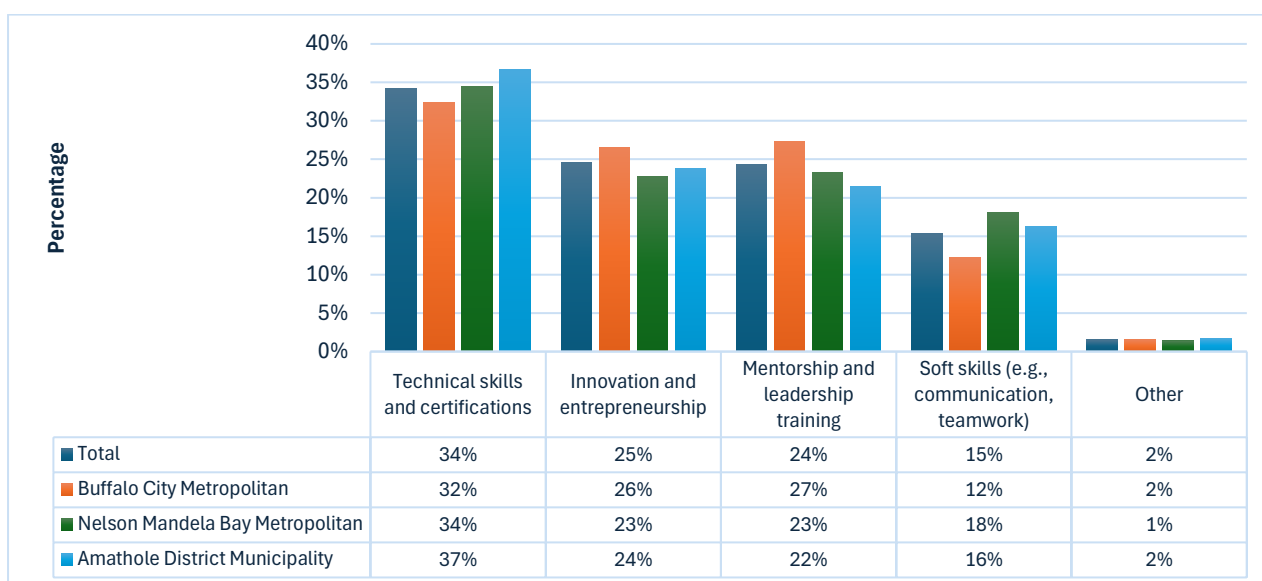


Figure 24: Skills needed to support youth development

Several proposals were made during the workshop on the training programmes that needed to be prioritised in the community. The need for bursaries and scholarships to support young people who have successfully completed matric. One community member shared a poignant story about her son, who matriculated in 2023 and aspired to study Chemical Engineering. Despite securing a government scholarship to study in Romania, the arrangement fell through, leaving them stranded without the means to support his education. This is what she shared:

“I bought all the necessary material needs and also, applied for passports and visas from my pocket. Unfortunately, the arrangement did not go according to plan. He is now stranded as there is no money to send him to college or university” (Community workshop, December 2025).

This story underscored the broader challenges faced by youth in accessing higher education opportunities. Most find themselves moving to cities to seek employment, a trend that is deeply entrenched in the province. The community members highlighted the need for training programmes that provide the skills necessary to support the establishment and sustainability of small businesses. The skills offerings of these programmes should include business planning, financial literacy and other relevant skills that are aligned to the needs of various businesses in the community (i.e., catering, laundry, etc.).

Given the opportunities in farming in the province, there is need for a training programme that offer farming skills. It was mentioned in the workshop that several training programmes have been implemented in the province to support farming ventures. One programme was the Zungisa Educational Project which aimed to support both existing and emerging farmers who are involved in agro-ecology projects. It was shared that this programme was supported by the Department of Rural Development. There is therefore existing work that have been done, and this presents opportunities for stakeholder collaboration to increase the impact of skills development initiatives in the province.

Another proposed area of focus includes training programmes designed to support the work of non-profit and community-based organisations. These are organisations that are involved in diverse projects aimed at addressing challenges facing communities. Skills development is crucial in enabling them to increase the impact of their initiatives.

4.3.3. Cross-sector skills

As highlighted, the need for training programmes that offer skills outside of mining emerged as a priority area in the survey. Figure 25 shows cross-sector skills that were identified by community members. As seen on the figure, health and safety (i.e., 23%) is ranked high as the skill that is applicable across different economic sectors. It is followed by skills related to equipment operation and maintenance (i.e., 19%) as well as leadership and supervision (i.e., 16%).

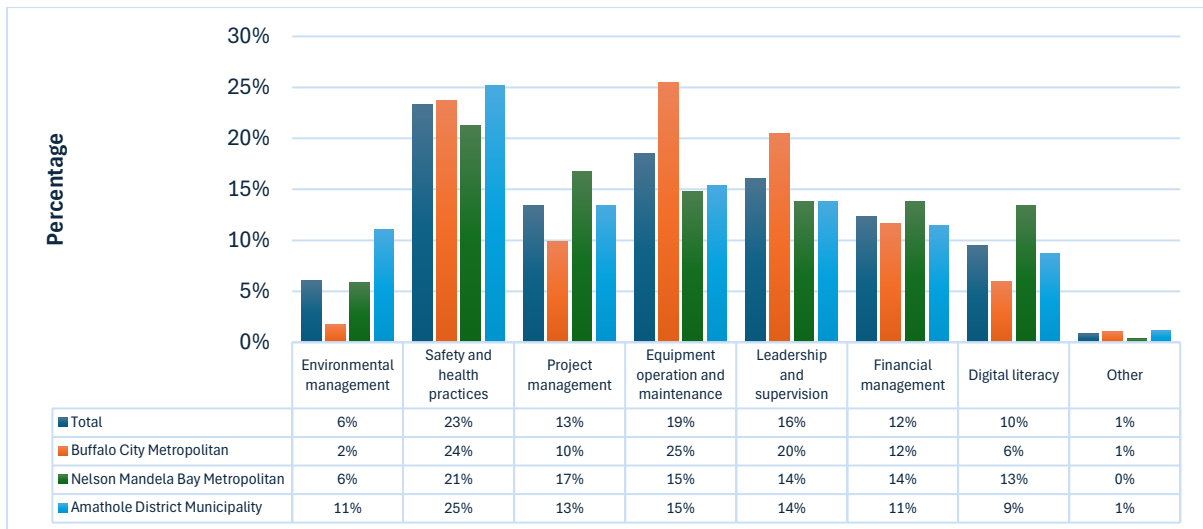


Figure 25: Cross-sector skills identified by communities

The top three skills in Buffalo City and Amathole are equipment operation and maintenance, health and safety, and leadership and supervision. In the case of Nelson Mandela Bay, health and safety were ranked high, followed by project management and equipment operation and maintenance. These skills are deemed important to enhance the employability of communities in key economic sectors in the province.

As noted in literature, the economy of the Eastern Cape is supported by several economic sector including government services, trade, finance, agriculture, manufacturing, construction and others. At the back of this understanding, community members were asked which economic sector offer economic opportunities in the province. As depicted in figure 26, agriculture (i.e., 29%), construction (i.e., 17%) and manufacturing (i.e., 15%) were marked as being the key sectors in the provinces. In the case of Buffalo City, the tourism sector is amongst the top three with agriculture and construction. The renewable energy sector emerges amongst the top three sectors in Amathole district municipality.

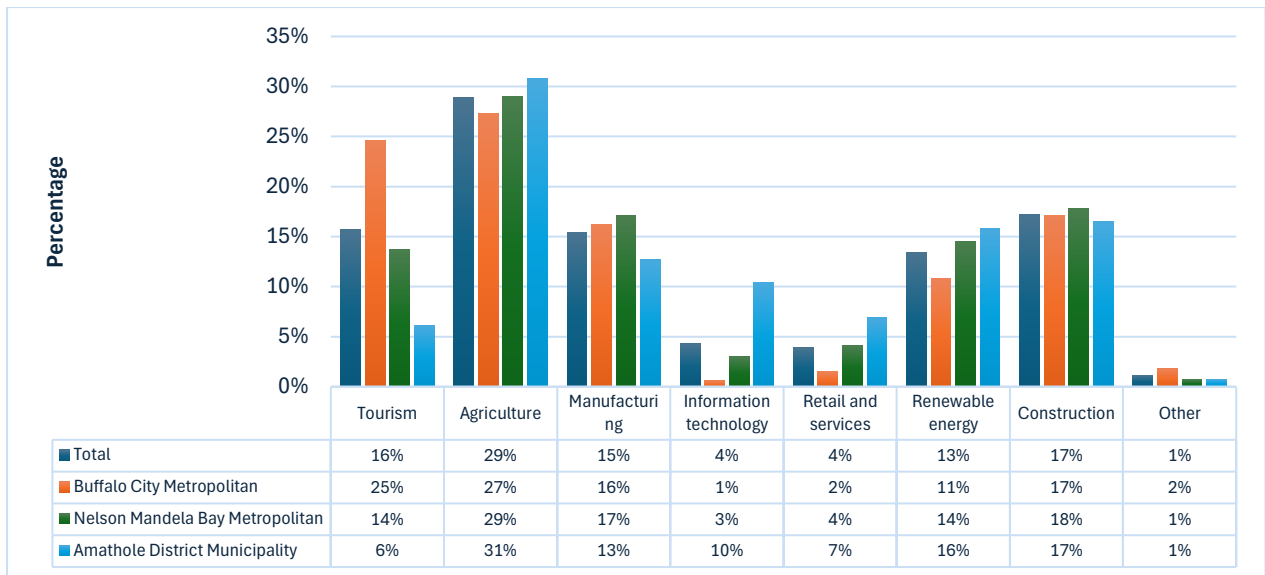


Figure 26: Key economic sectors as identified by community members

During the workshop, the participants highlighted several opportunities in the province. The participants reiterated that the province is endowed with natural resources, which offer numerous opportunities. Specific references were made to crusher stones (i.e., stone and aggregate) which can be mined and sold in the community. They shared that there is oil and gas in several parts of the province. The potential for farming within the province is significant, as most areas have arable land suitable for various types of agriculture. The community members spoke about increasing demand for agricultural produce such as purple cabbages, broccoli, herbs and others. Most community members have land and the conditions in the province are conducive for farming. To tap into these opportunities, it was noted that communities will require both financial support and skills.

4.3.4. Skills development and training programmes

With an understanding of the community members' skill needs, the next set of questions aimed to assess the effectiveness of training programmes implemented by mining companies in the province. To initiate the discussion, community members were asked if they were aware of any training programmes. The majority (i.e., 78%) were not aware of any training programme implemented by mining companies. This is the case across all three municipalities. In the case of Amathole district municipality, a fairly large percentage (i.e., 41%) of community members compared to other municipalities indicated that they were aware of training programmes. Those that were aware of the programmes were asked about the level of alignment between the programmes that have been delivered and the skills needs of communities.

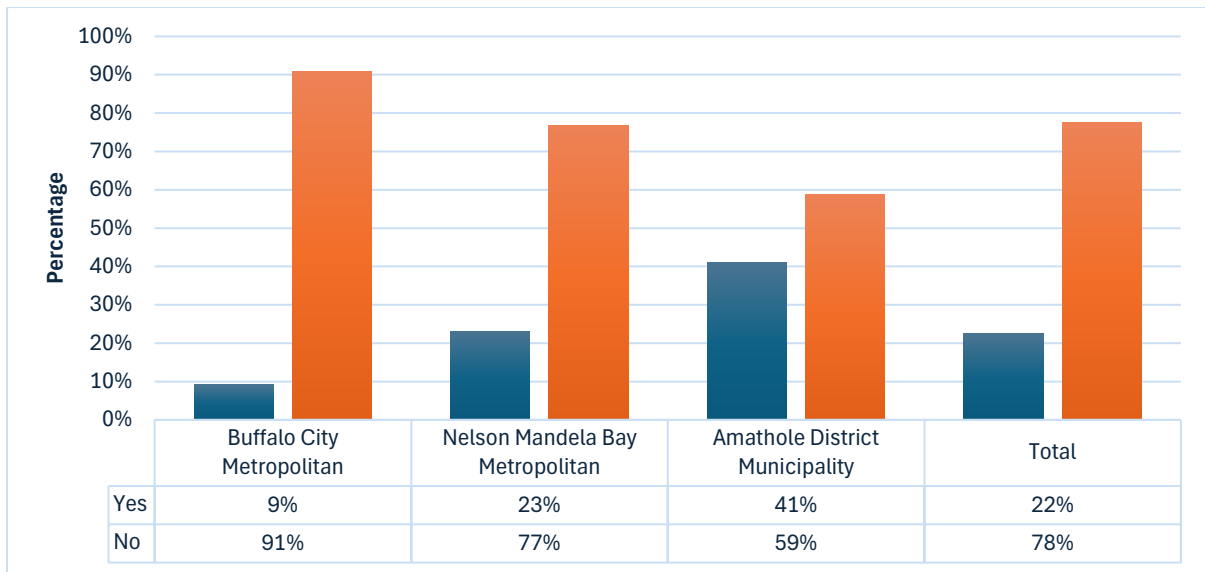


Figure 27: Awareness of MMS-related training programmes

As seen in figure 28, the views of community members are mixed. Only 10% of the participants agreed that the training programmes addresses their needs. This compares to sizeable percentages in Nelson Mandela Bay and Amathole were 30% and 33% respectively shared the same sentiments. Overall, 23% agreed and 34% disagreed.

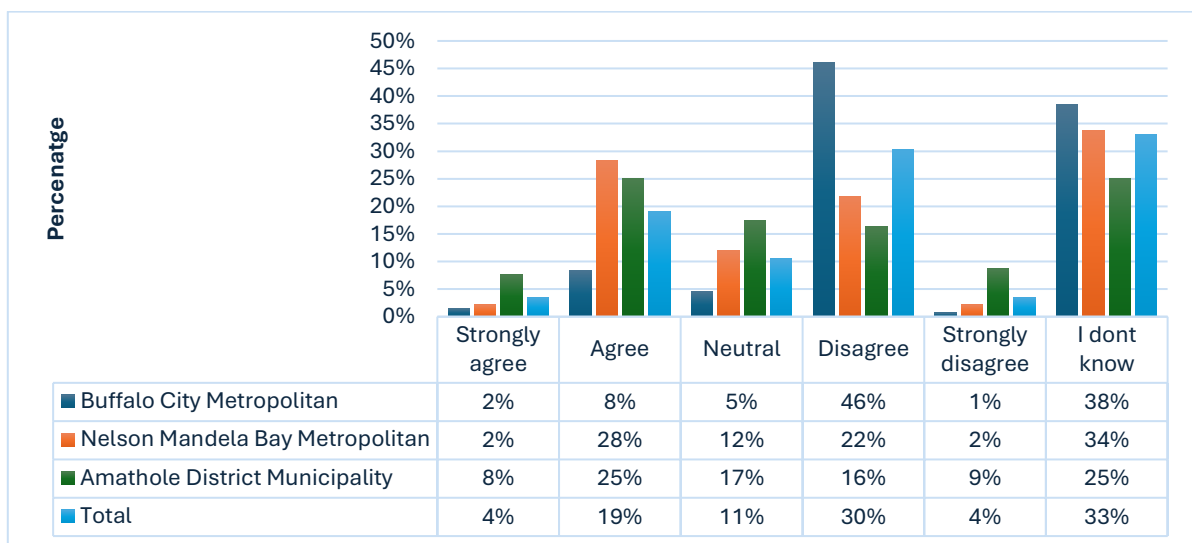


Figure 28: Alignment between training programmes and community skills needs

The participants were also asked about the accessibility of the training programmes and the majority (i.e., 51%) highlighted that they are very difficult to access (i.e., see figure 29). Only 8% of community members expressed that training programmes somewhat access while 3% indicated that they are easy to access. These sentiments were echoed in all three municipalities with most participants raising the difficulties in accessing training programmes.

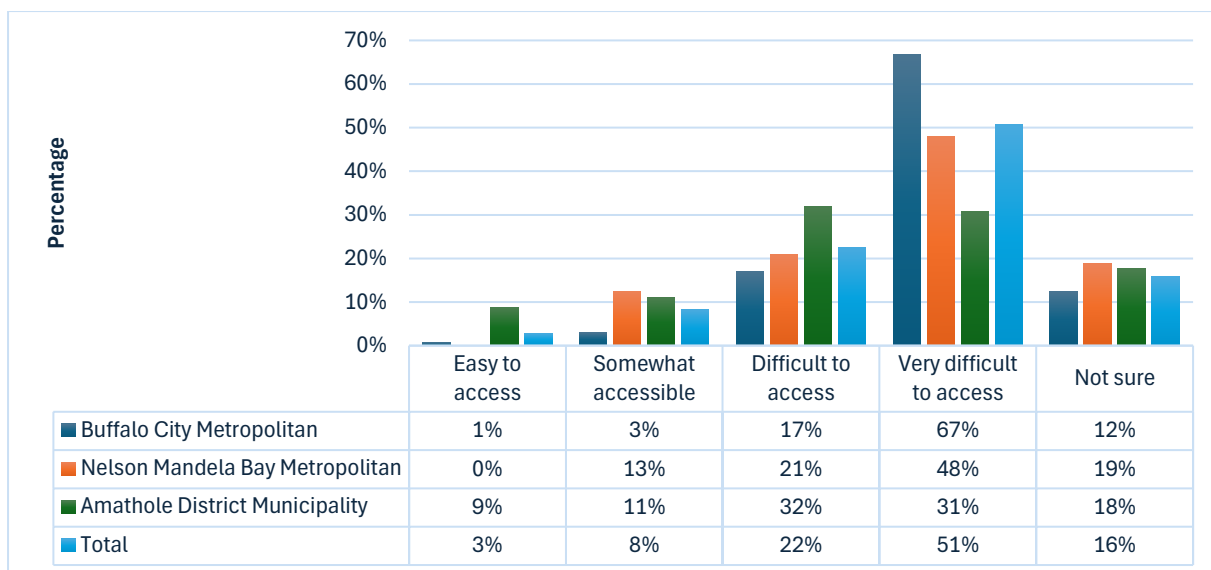


Figure 29: Levels of difficulty in accessing training programmes

The accessibility of training programmes is influenced by multiple factors, and these are captured in figure 30. As seen on the figure, the lack of information about training opportunities was identified as a major barrier. It is followed by high cost of training as well as distance to the training centres. These barriers emerged as the top three in all three municipalities. During the workshop, community members also highlighted age restrictions as a concern, noting that most programmes are targeted at individuals aged 18 to 35 years. As a result, there are limited training opportunities for those outside the youth demographic.

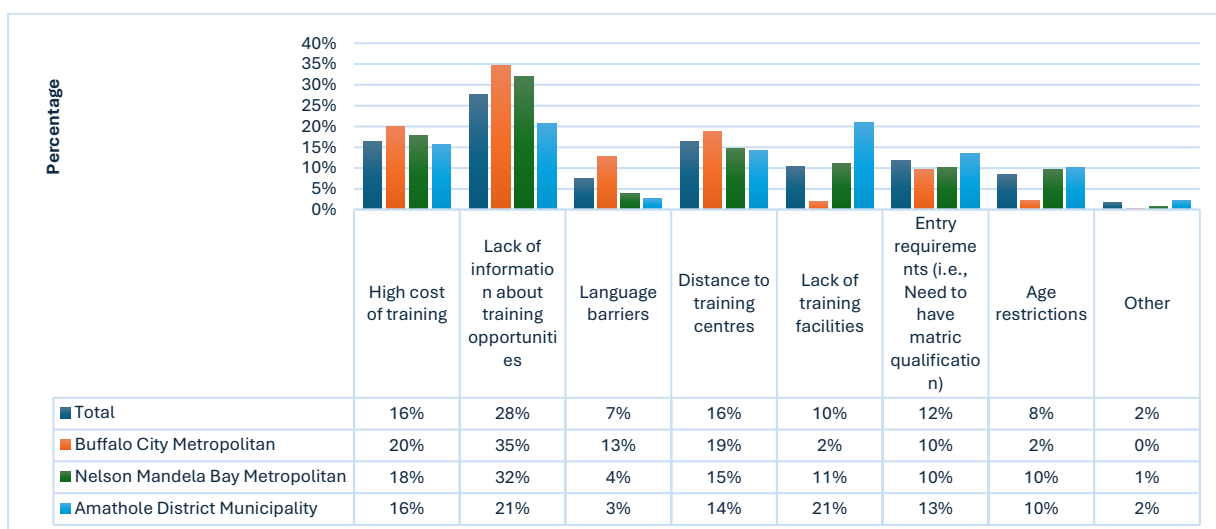


Figure 30: Barriers of entry when accessing training programmes

Several areas of improvement were recommended by community members (i.e., see figure 31). Among these, the most frequently suggested was the need for better communication about available programmes (i.e., 17%), followed by the need to support entrepreneurship and

small businesses (i.e., 15%) and improve facilities for training (i.e., 15%). The other key areas noted by community members are the need for practical, job-ready skills (i.e., 14%) and more funding for skills development programmes (i.e., 14%).

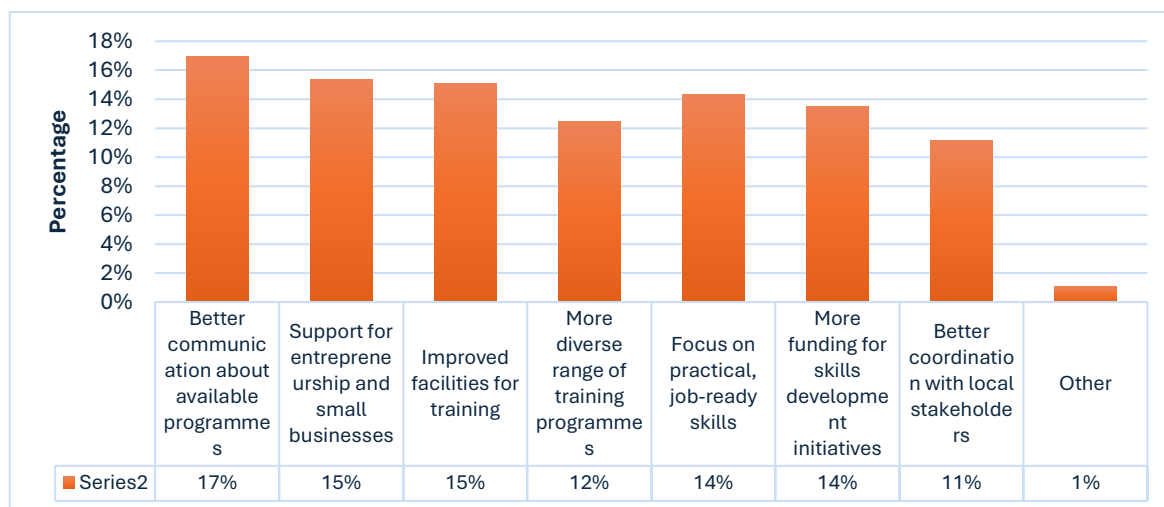


Figure 31: Suggested areas of improvement

In addition to the provision of skills, community members have highlighted the need for the MMS to support skills development and training in the province through various avenues, and these include scholarships for education and training, building training centres and linking training to job opportunities. The need for apprenticeships and internships was also cited by a considerable percentage of community members in both Nelson Mandela Bay and Amathole.

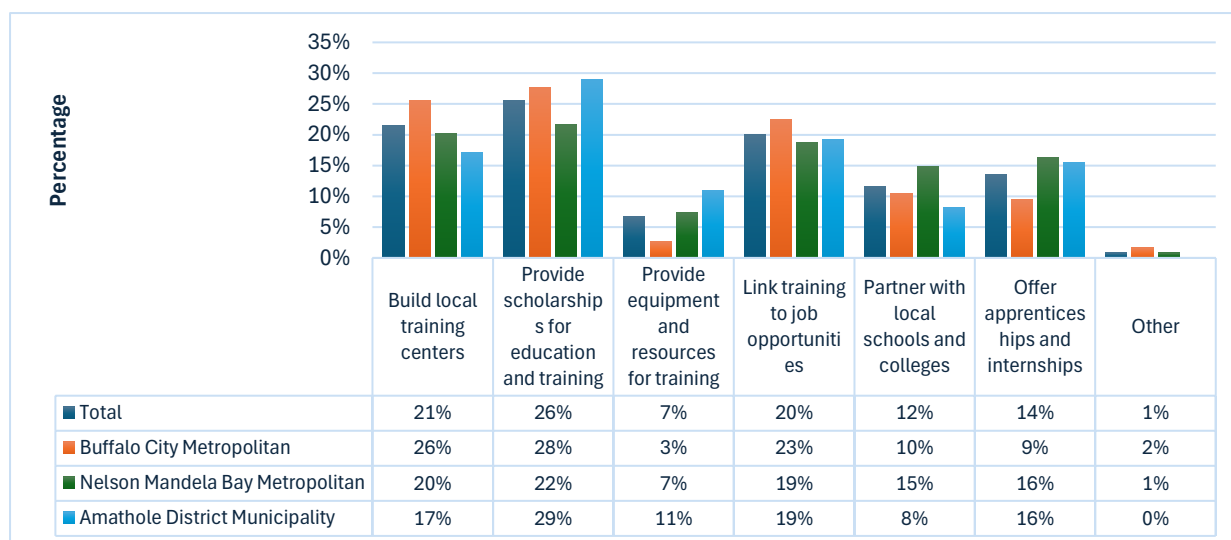


Figure 32: Additional avenues to support skills development

The role of the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) in supporting skills development within mining communities is crucial. To gain insight into community perspectives on this, several questions were posed to participants regarding their awareness of MQA initiatives, the effectiveness of its programmes, and areas where its support could be strengthened. These responses provide valuable feedback on how the MQA can better align its efforts with the needs and expectations of local communities. As the first question, participants were asked if they were familiar with MQA. As shown in figure 33, only 38% of participants were familiar with the MQA, while 9% were somewhat familiar. The majority of participants were not familiar with the MQA. In terms of district municipalities, only 14% of participants in the Buffalo City were familiar with the MQA. The highest familiarity was observed in Nelson Mandela Bay (i.e., 65%), followed by Amathole (44%).

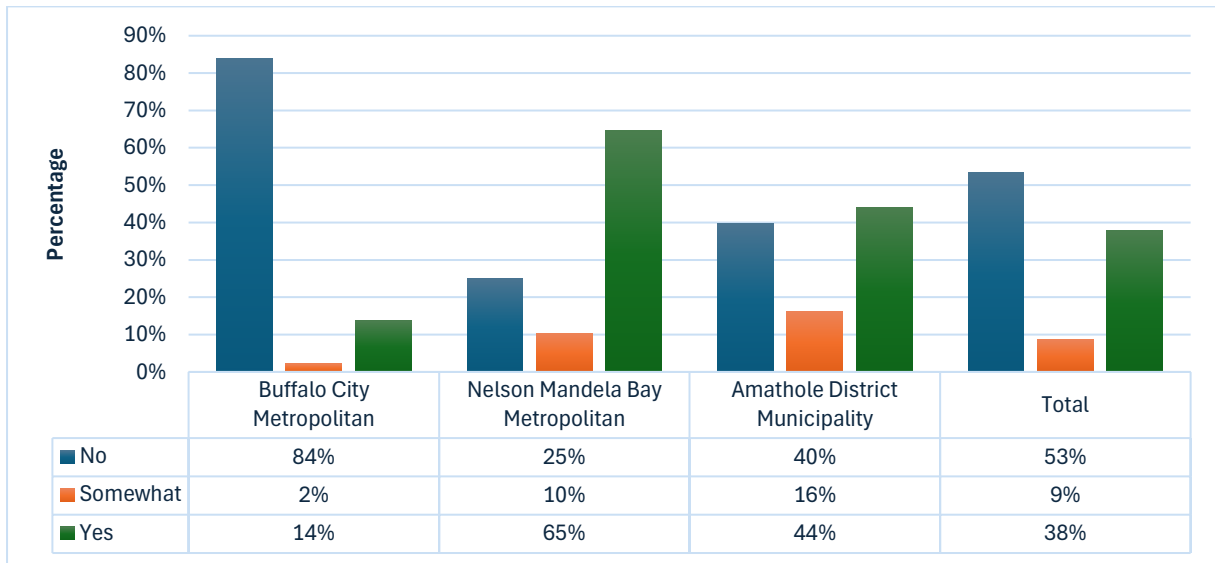


Figure 33: Familiarity of community members with MQA

Community members were asked to suggest areas of improvement for the MQA to increase its footprint and impact, and as illustrated in figure 34, need for a variety of training programmes to cater for the needs of the community members as well as better communication about available training opportunities to ensure that all community members are informed and able to participate in training programmes. Other areas of improvement include the need for stipends during training and alignment between training and job market needs. Notably, these priorities were ranked highest across all three municipalities.

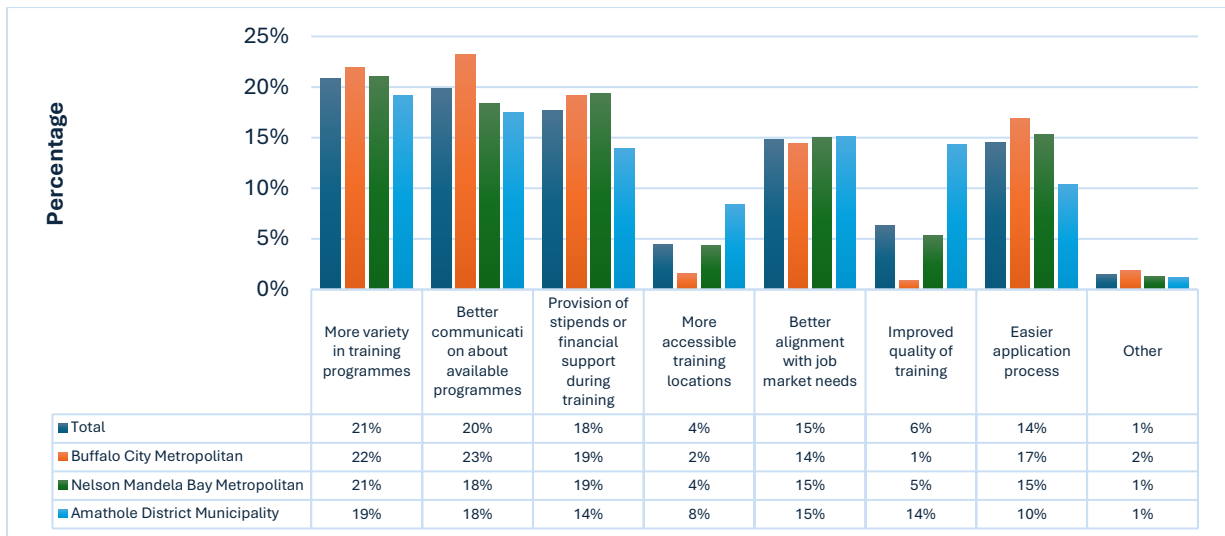


Figure 34: Suggested areas of improvement for MQA

Several recommendations were also made by communities during the workshop for consideration by the MQA:

- It is important for the MQA to establish relationships with stakeholders who have an existing presence in local skills development projects and initiatives. It was also noted that the MQA needs to increase its visibility and presence in the community, as some community members were not aware of the MQA. This can be achieved by facilitating access to training programmes and providing funding for NPOs and small businesses.

4.4. Identifying the skills gaps in the MMS

This section presents an analysis of the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) and Annual Training Reports (ATRs) data, focusing on hard-to-fill vacancies, top-up skills, and community training programs. Hard-to-fill vacancies are defined as "occupations that an employer was unable to fill within 12 months or took longer than 12 months to find a suitably qualified and experienced candidate" (DHET, 2019, cited in MQA, 2023). In contrast, top-up skills refer to skills gaps that typically require short training interventions (DHET, 2019, cited in MQA, 2023).

Both hard-to-fill vacancies and top-up skills highlight skills gaps and serve as proxies to understand the skills demand in the mining sector. Additionally, the training programmes implemented by mining companies indicate priority areas for training, thereby reflecting the demand for specific skills. By analysing these programmes, the areas where training is needed can be identified to meet the industry's requirements and align them with the skills needs of the community.

4.4.1. Hard-to-fill vacancies

Table 9 outlines the occupations identified by mining companies in the Eastern Cape province as hard-to-fill vacancies. The highlighted occupations were reported by at least two mining companies, indicating a consistent challenge in sourcing qualified candidates for these positions. The top three occupations most frequently cited as difficult to fill are: Mine Manager/Mine Deputy/Quarry Manager, Chief Mine Planner/Mine Design Planning Manager, and Mine Overseer (Planning)/Superintendent. These roles are critical in the operational and planning functions of mining operations.

Table 8: Hard-to-fill vacancies in the MMS in Eastern Cape province

Specialisation/Occupation	OFO Code	Reasons for difficulties in recruitment
Works / Workshop Manager (Manufacturing)	2021-132102	Slow recruitment processes
Mine Manager, Mine Deputy, Quarry Manager	2021-132201	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications, equity consideration
Chief Mine Planner or Mine Design and Planning Manager	2021-132202	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Facilities Manager	2021-143901	Lack of relevant experience, unsuitable job location, lack of relevant qualifications
Mechanical Engineer (Mines)	2021-214401	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Electrical Engineer (Mines)	2021-215101	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Cost Accountant	2021-241102	Lack of relevant experience
Mine Planning Technician	2021-311701	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Mine Overseer (Planning) or Mine Superintendent	2021-312101	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Miner	2021-312102	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications

Mine Air Quality Officer	2021-325705	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Mine Health and Safety Inspector	2021-325707	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Magazine Master	2021-325708	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Human Resources Clerk	2021-441601	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Mine Rescue Service Worker	2021-541902	Lack of relevant experience, lack of relevant qualifications
Diesel Mechanic	2021-653306	Lack of relevant qualifications
Electrician	2021-671101	Lack of relevant qualifications

Several factors have been identified as contributing to the challenges in recruitment within the mining sector. These include a lack of relevant experience, insufficient qualifications, slow recruitment processes, and equity considerations. Figure 36 maps these challenges to illustrate the extent to which each factor contributes to the difficulty in filling critical positions. Among these, the lack of relevant qualifications emerges as the most significant barrier, followed closely by the lack of relevant experience.

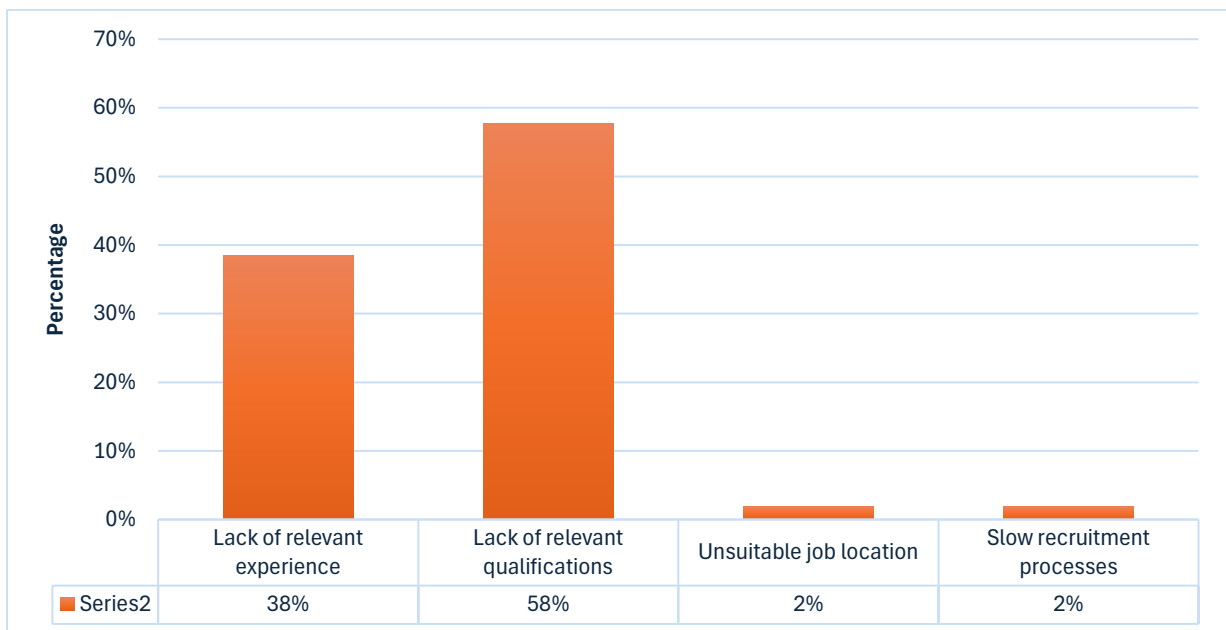


Figure 35: Reasons for hard-to-fill vacancies

4.4.2. Top-up skills

Table 8 presents the occupations in which skills gaps have been identified by mining companies in the Eastern Cape. The highlighted occupations were reported by at least two companies, indicating recurring challenges across the sector. Notably, occupational health and safety consistently emerge as the most prominent skills gap across the majority of these roles. More so, skills relating to planning and organising appear across several occupations.

Table 9: Top-up skills

Specialisation/Occupation	OFO Code	Generic Skillset
Manufacturing Operations Manager	2021-132102	Communication
Mine Manager	2021-132201	Occupational health & safety skills
Hr Officer	2021-242303	Legal, governance and risk
Ventilation Assistant	2021-311701	Occupational health & safety skills
Shift Foreman/ Boss (Mining)/Quarry Foreman	2021-312101	Communication
Coal Miner	2021-312102	Project management
Electrical Foreman	2021-312103	Organising
Mine Safety Officer	2021-325705	Occupational health & safety skills
Stores Clerk / Officer or Stores Controller	2021-432101	Office administration, computer literacy
Lamp Attendant	2021-432105	Organising
Administration Officer	2021-441903	Office administration
Boilermaker	2021-651302	Technical (job-specific)
Electrical Fitter	2021-671101	Occupational health & safety skills
Coal Cutter and related	2021-711101	Occupational health & safety skills
Conveyor Belt Operator (Mining)	2021-711201	Occupational health & safety skills
Cable Yard Operator	2021-718906	Organising
Weighbridge Operator	2021-718907	Computer literacy
Roof Bolter Operator	2021-733208	Occupational health & safety skills
Loader Operator	2021-734206	Occupational health & safety skills
Dump Truck Driver/ Operator	2021-734214	Occupational health & safety skills
Builder's Worker	2021-831301	Occupational health & safety skills
Boilermaker Assistant	2021-832901	Planning and organising

4.4.3. Community skills development and training programmes

According to the WSP-ATR data, a total of 15 training programmes were planned for implementation in 2024. However, only three programmes were recorded as having been delivered, one Certificate programme and two National Diploma in Chemical Engineering and Teacher Education and Professional Development. As captured in the table, the planned initiatives encompassed a broad range of interventions, including Adult Education and Training (AET), internships, learnerships, certificate programmes, national diplomas, short courses, and other skills development activities. All programmes were specifically designed to benefit unemployed youth within the province. In total, 192 individuals were targeted for training, including 19 persons with disabilities. However, only seven individuals benefitted from the training that was delivered.

Table 10: Planned training programmes

Programme planned	Training planned	Training done	No. of beneficiaries (planned)	No. of beneficiaries (trained)
Adult Education and Training	1	0	40	0
Bursary	1	0	5	0
Certificate	2	1	15	5
Internship	1	0	5	0
Learnership	1	0	25	0
MQA Qualification	1	0	25	0
National Diploma	2	2	2	2
Post Graduate Diploma	1	0	5	0
Short Course	2	0	40	0
Skills Programme	1	0	20	0
Trade	1	0	5	0
Work Placement	1	0	5	0
Total	15	3	192	7

In light of the WSP-ATR data, which shows a significant gap between planned and implemented training programmes, there is a need to investigate the underlying reasons why companies failed to deliver on their commitments. This insight raises important questions about the barriers to implementation, whether they are operational, or financial considering the size of mining operations in the Eastern Cape.

4.4.4. Key insights from key informant interviews

The following insights were gathered from the interviews with representatives of mining companies and TVET colleges:

- Insights from the interviews revealed that the most in-demand skills and occupations among mining companies in the province include machine operators, general workers, and artisans. A key concern raised was the difficulty companies face in sourcing accredited training service providers capable of delivering artisan training programmes (i.e., specifically, diesel mechanics and plant fitters)
- The absence of trade test centres within the province poses a barrier to the assessment and certification of learners, further constraining the development of a skilled workforce in the mining sector.
- The challenges of sourcing qualified human resources professionals from within local communities were also highlighted. The roles that are difficult to fill include HR Director, HR Officer, and HR Administrator/Timekeeper.
- The main challenge affecting skills development in the province is the availability of accredited training providers that cater for the mining sector. Currently, there are no training providers that offer mining qualifications in the Eastern Cape. Addressing this is important in order to increase the pool of community members that can access and benefit from the opportunities generated by mining operations.
- Representatives from TVET colleges were asked to identify courses that are currently in high demand at their institutions. They highlighted programmes offering practical skills in areas such as electrical work, roofing, and carpentry. These courses are designed to accommodate a diverse range of learners, including employed individuals seeking upskilling, women, people living with disabilities, and those preparing for trade tests.
- Interviews highlighted several sectors within the province that offer promising economic opportunities, including the automotive industry, non-profit organisations, government departments, and training
- One of the challenges affecting the effectiveness of training programmes is the limited interest among community members in certain specialised fields. For example, there is a notably low uptake of training opportunities in jewellery manufacturing and goldsmithing.
- Skills development can be improved by offering skills that is relatable to the market, for example technological skills as well as training young people in technology related industries and designing and offering courses that give skills that would create jobs.
- There is a need for funding to support skills development in the province. Financial support from key stakeholders, including the mining sector, SETAs, and training institutions is important. Such funding would enable students to receive stipends during their training, making participation in skills programmes more accessible.

- There is a need for training programmes that would translate into employment opportunities. For example, equipping individuals with practical skills in the manufacturing sector can improve their chances of securing work.
- Stakeholder collaboration is important in supporting skills development initiatives in the province. Training providers have established partnerships with local schools, and this ensures early exposure to vocational skills. Some institutions have formed international collaborations, including exchange programmes, to facilitate skills transfer and benchmark training offerings.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the community profile, highlighting key socioeconomic indicators such as demographics including gender, race, age, and education levels. It also provided insights into the skills needs within the province from the perspective of local communities, identifying priority areas for skills development and cross-sector training programmes aimed at enabling participation in both the MMS and other sectors of the economy. The chapter also identified existing skills gaps, with a particular focus on hard-to-fill vacancies, the need for top-up skills, and community-based training initiatives led by mining companies. Stakeholder insights were also presented, offering a broad understanding of the current skills development landscape in the Eastern Cape province.

5. OVERALL FINDINGS AND KEY INSIGHTS

The key findings from the study are outlined below, and these are presented to respond to the objectives of the study.

Objective 1 and 2: Analysing the effectiveness of current legislation, policies, and strategies driving skills development in the province as well as assessing the alignment of provincial frameworks with national strategies

The legislative frameworks, policies and strategies driving skills development nationally and within the province were outlined in the literature review (*i.e.*, see sections 2.6.1. to 2.6.3). Specifically, at the national level, there is a Constitution of South Africa, Skills Development Act as well as the National Skills Development Strategy that guides the implementation of skills development initiatives in the country.

In the mining sector, the MPRDA serves as the primary legislative framework. One of its core objectives is to promote the participation of historically disadvantaged South Africans in the mining industry. This objective is operationalised through sector-specific transformation tools such as the Mining Charter and the Social and Labour Plan (SLP). The SLP, in particular, places strong emphasis on human resource development, extending its impact beyond the workforce to include mining communities and labour-sending areas.

At the provincial level, strategies such as the Provincial Development Plan and the Provincial Economic Growth and Development Plan place skills development at the centre of socio-economic transformation. These plans are aimed at ensuring that skills initiatives are responsive to local economic needs and contribute to inclusive growth.

Overall, there is alignment between national frameworks, sectoral legislation and strategies and provincial development strategies. Skills development is recognised as a cross-cutting imperative that is central to achieving both the national and provincial objectives. Evidence of the implementation of these frameworks is reflected in various skills development initiatives that have benefited local communities in the

province. While this is the case, there are challenges on both the supply and demand sides that affects skills development initiatives and these challenges needs to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness and impact of current and future initiatives.

Objective 3: Analysing the population demographics of the province (e.g., age distribution, gender, and racial representation, educational attainment levels and skillsets of working-age population).

Insights into the socioeconomic profile of the province are detailed in the literature (*i.e., see Section 2.2*). The study revealed strong parallels between the broader demographic and economic characteristics of the Eastern Cape and those of the community members who participated in the research. The key findings were that the population is dominated by female and so, there is a need to prioritise programmes that target women. In terms of age, the province has a young population calling for youth-tailored programmes.

The levels of education amongst the population remains a concern in the province and so there is need for multiple programmes targeting those that are illiterate, those that have grade 10 and 11 as highest levels of education, and those that have completed matric who are in need of financial support to pursue tertiary education. The study also revealed that there is considerable percentage of the population that lives with disabilities and so, there is a need for skills development opportunities that will cater for people living with mobility impairment, hearing impairment and developmental disability.

The issue of unemployment remains a concern in the province, and this came out in the study with community members highlighting the social consequences that emerge from lack of income to support families. This situation underscores the urgent need for targeted employment initiatives and skills development programmes to equip community members with the necessary skills and opportunities to enter the workforce and improve their economic prospects.

Objective 4: Establishing a detailed profile of the MMS in the province, including main commodities extracted and processed, size and composition of the existing workforce, types of companies operating in the sector

An overview of the landscape of the mining sector in the province is provided in literature (*i.e., see section 2.2*). While the MMS contributes the least to the economy of the province, it offers opportunities to communities. The province is home to several mineral deposits that remain untapped. There is potential for developing small scale mining projects that are led by community members. More so, as a labour sending area, there is a need continued provision of MMS-related skills to ensure that community members are able to secure employment in the MMS in other provinces. In particular, there is a need to look reskilling and upskilling programmes to ensure that those that were

employed in the MMS and are within the working-age group are able to re-enter the MMS or move into other sectors of the economy within the province.

Objective 5: Analysing the economic performance of the MMS compared to other sectors in the provincial economy including assessing its contribution to GDP, job creation and revenue generation

The economic opportunities in the province were outlined in the discussion that provided an overview of the socioeconomic landscape of the province (*i.e.*, see section 2.2). The provincial economy is supported by several sectors, with the tertiary sector—particularly personal services, finance, and trade—making the largest contribution to both GDP and employment. This is followed by the secondary sector, while the primary sector contributes the least. Within the primary sector, mining plays a minimal role to the provincial GDP and employment. Based on these insights, there is need to prioritise skills development in the tertiary sector where the greatest employment opportunities exist.

Objective 6 and 7: Identifying the existing mining-related occupational shortages and skills gaps within the province and reasons thereof as well as identifying the skills mismatches between the skills required by mining companies and the skills available in the community.

A broad analysis of the skills landscape in the province is presented in the *literature* (*i.e.*, see Section 2.3). The key findings indicate that the majority of the working-age population are either semi-skilled or unskilled, with only a small proportion holding post-school qualifications. Among those with higher education, most have qualifications in education and health sciences, while there is a notable shortage of graduates in engineering and related technical fields. This highlights the need for skill development support that prioritises technical and vocational education and training to increase the number of graduates in engineering, mining and other technical qualifications.

Occupations identified as being in high demand include machine operators, artisans, and human resources professionals. Additionally, several hard-to-fill vacancies were highlighted, such as Mine Manager, Mine Deputy, Quarry Manager, Chief Mine Planner, Mine Design Planning Manager, and Mine Overseer or Superintendent (Planning). Skills gaps have also been identified in numerous skills including critical thinking, problem solving, communication, occupational health and safety.

One of the critical challenges affecting the availability of mining professionals in the province is the lack of accredited training service providers offering mining-specific education and skills development. As a result, the absence of relevant qualifications and practical experience continues to hinder recruitment efforts within the sector.

Objective 8 and 9: Assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of existing skills development programmes in addressing provincial needs as well as analysing the capacity offerings of technical colleges, universities, and industry-specific training providers in addressing the skills development in the province

The Eastern Cape has several education and training institutions that supports skills development. These include universities, TVET and CET colleges. Collectively, these institutions offer a range of programmes designed to meet the needs of the provincial economy. In particular, TVET and CET colleges provide training in key areas such as engineering, business studies, hospitality, tourism, agriculture, and information technology.

Skills development efforts in the province are further supported by various SETAs including MQA, MerSETA, LGSETA, AGRISSETA, ETDP SETA, and CETA, among others. These SETAs have implemented numerous programmes in the provinces.

Objective 10 and 11: Identifying the common skills development needs of community members living near mining operations, beyond mining-specific jobs as well as analysing the demand for skills in related sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and service industries

Community members identified the several skills as being crucial to enable participation in both the MMS and other economic sectors in the province, namely health and safety, engineering skills, environmental management and technical mining skills. The other set of skills that were identified are those skills that will enable participation in other sectors of the economy. These include skills necessary for participation in the agricultural sector, the establishment of small businesses, and the support of community-based organisations. These set of skills include project management, financial management, leadership and supervision, digital literacy skills, business skills, entrepreneurial skills and others.

Objective 12: Assessing the need for entrepreneurial and business development skills for local economic empowerment.

The study highlighted interest in entrepreneurship among community members in the province, who expressed a need for training programmes that support small businesses. Communities noted several business opportunities in the province and noted the need for business and entrepreneurship skills.

Objective 13: Gathering insights on the community and companies' experiences in accessing skills development offerings from the MQA

The perspectives of community members on skills development and training programmes were solicited (i.e., see section 4.3.4). The study revealed that most participants were unaware of existing training initiatives implemented in the province. Moreover, many reported challenges in accessing these programmes. The primary barriers identified included a lack of accessible information about available training opportunities, the high cost of participation, and the long distances to training centres. In response, community members proposed several recommendations to improve access and effectiveness. These included enhancing communication and outreach about training opportunities, developing programmes that support small business development, and investing in the improvement and expansion of local training facilities to make them more accessible and responsive to community needs.

Objective 14 and 15: Exploring the potential synergies between skills development needs of the MMS for upskilling and reskilling existing workforce for diversification into other sectors as well as identifying potential partners and stakeholders relevant to addressing skills development needs in the province.

Skills development initiatives in the Eastern Cape have been supported by a range of stakeholders, including the MQA. However, the study revealed that a considerable portion of community members are unfamiliar with the MQA and its role in local training efforts, highlighting the need for the organisation to enhance its visibility and outreach within communities. Participants also expressed the need for a diverse range of training programmes tailored to the varying needs of different community groups. Key recommendations also included the provision of stipends to support participation in training, the alignment of training with job opportunities, and the tailored programmes that support small business development. It was also suggested that the MQA should establish partnerships with stakeholders already involved in local skills development initiatives in the province to strengthen coordination and ensure that training efforts are accessible

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusion

The study was initiated to gain insights into MMS-related skills development needs in the Eastern Cape province. This was prompted by concerns over the high unemployment and poverty levels in mining communities. While the Eastern Cape is not a major mining province, there are mining operations that contribute to the economy of the province. More so, the province is a major labour sending area that is expected to benefit from mining operations taking place in the country. This study aimed to identify skills gaps and needs that must be addressed to enhance the employability of community members placing them in a better position to leverage economic opportunities not only in the MMS but other key economic sectors in the province.

The study was conducted through a mixed-methods approach comprising of literature review, surveys, community workshop, focus group discussion and interviews. Through the use of these methods, insights were obtained on the specific needs and skills gaps as well as suggestions for effective skills development programmes.

The key findings from the study were that while community members are aware of the different skills development policies and laws, they hold the view that these are not working from them. This is in evidence of the socioeconomic landscape of the province which is characterised by high levels of unemployment and poverty. This is exacerbated by limited skills, which hinder the ability of the communities to leverage opportunities available in various economic sectors. The shortage of skills needed to enhance employability is a concern with a large percentage of the working-age population being semi-skilled and unskilled. There is therefore a need for training programmes that will offer technical engineering skills. More so, there is a need for cross-sector skills that support broader participation in the economy. This can be achieved through stakeholder collaboration to ensure that training initiatives are comprehensive, inclusive, and aligned to the local contexts where opportunities exist.

6.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the key findings of the study and are structured according to the SMART framework, ensuring they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound.

Recommendation 1: A study to assess youth development initiatives implemented in the Eastern Cape province

Skills development in the province is supported by various stakeholders. To address the skills challenges, several initiatives have been implemented, with a focus on young people due to the province’s youth-dominated population. High unemployment levels among the youth, exacerbated by poor educational backgrounds have underscored the implementation of skills development programmes. In light of these initiatives, it is necessary to map and assess the impact of these programmes on the employability of the youth and participation in the economy. To this effect, it is recommended that MQA initiate a study that evaluates the effectiveness of skills programmes that have been implemented in the province to identify gaps. It is proposed that the findings of the study be used to develop a strategy that will support the implementation of MQA’s unemployment youth programme.

Activity	MQA must develop a strategy to support the implementation of its unemployed youth programme
Timeline	This study can be earmarked for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 2: A study to enhance women’s economic participation through assessing their skills needs and programmes’ effectiveness in the Eastern Cape

To tackle unemployment and poverty in the Eastern Cape, it is essential to focus on women, as they make up the majority of the province's population. In the study, women ranked high the need for alternative skills for economic diversification. Several skills were highlighted as being crucial to support the participation of women in the economy. Against these insights, it is recommended that a study be initiated to provide detailed insights into the specific skills required, assess the effectiveness of MQA's programmes in providing these skills and ascertain the impact of current skills offerings.

Activity	MQA must develop a gender strategy to guide the implementation of its skills development and programmes
Timeline	This project can be earmarked for the 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 3: Career guidance campaigns targeting youth not in employment, education, and training (i.e., NEET)

The Eastern Cape province hosts several post-school education and training (PSET) institutions that offer programmes across various disciplines serving different economic sectors in the province. Despite this, there is a considerable percentage of the youth have only completed grades 10 and 11 and are seeking avenues to further their education and improve their employability. There is also a sizeable percentage of youth that have completed matric who are in need of opportunities to pursue tertiary education. It is recommended that MQA, in collaboration with local stakeholders, launch career guidance campaigns targeting youth who are not in employment, education, and training. These campaigns should be hosted within communities in venues that will be accessible to all, ensuring maximum participation and engagement from the youth.

Activity	MQA in collaboration with local stakeholders to host career guidance campaigns targeting youth not in employment, education and training
Timeline	The campaigns can be rolled out within a year, and this includes the preparation and discussions that will need to take place between MQA and the relevant stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: Community outreach programme to increase the visibility of MQA and its programmes in the Eastern Cape province

Despite the implementation of skills programmes by the MQA in the province, there is concern about the level of awareness and knowledge of its programmes. There is a need for MQA to increase its visibility and presence in communities within the province. It is recommended that MQA implement a community outreach programme where representatives visit local communities to provide information, conduct workshops, and engage directly with community members. This approach will help ensure that more people are informed about the available opportunities and how to access them. Directly connecting with community members will also build their confidence in MQA-supported research, as they witness it being translated into tangible activities that support community-based skills development.

Activity	The MQA must launch an outreach programme aimed at increasing its visibility amongst communities in the Eastern Cape province.
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Timeline	Information sessions can be arranged in areas/communities where research studies have been conducted. These can serve as feedback sessions where the key findings of the research studies are shared with communities as well as way forward in terms of interventions that will be implemented. Through these engagements, participants will feel acknowledged and valued and are likely to share the information with others in their communities thereby increasing awareness, trust, and community ownership of the initiatives.
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Recommendation 5: A study to investigate skills needs of community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape province

There is a growing footprint of community-based organisations that are involved in several projects aimed at addressing the challenges facing communities and also creating opportunities for them. The need for MQA to better coordinate with local stakeholders for increased impact of training initiatives was highlighted in the study. It is recommended that a regional stakeholder matrix be developed to map the current (“as-is”) landscape of stakeholders operating in the Eastern Cape. This should be complemented by an analysis of existing MQA-supported projects in the province, compared against the identified skills needs. Such an approach will help pinpoint gaps, align interventions, and identify opportunities to leverage existing community structures for greater reach and sustainability.

Activity	MQA must initiate a study that maps skills development programmes implemented by community-based organisations in the Eastern Cape province.
Timeline	The study can be part of the 2026/27 research agenda.

Recommendation 6: The MQA must establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders involved in entrepreneurial initiatives across the province

Recognising the challenges of securing traditional employment, there is a considerable percentage of community members who are self-employed. The study revealed the interest of community members in entrepreneurship and the need for skills that support small businesses was reiterated during the study. It is proposed that MQA must identify entrepreneurial initiatives that exist in the province and establish partnerships with the stakeholder driving these initiatives. For example, the MQA can partner with the Department of Small Business Development and/or its agencies (Small Enterprise Development and Finance Agency) with the goal of identifying synergies to increase the impact of existing programmes in the province.

Activity	The MQA must establish strategic partnerships with stakeholders involved in entrepreneurial initiatives across the province.
Timeline	This project can be considered for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 7: The MQA should initiate the implementation of training on occupational health and safety in mining operations in the province

Several skills gaps have been identified amongst those working in mining operations. Occupational health and safety have consistently emerged as the most prominent skills gap across the majority of occupations. Given the current state of health and safety in the MMS, there is a need to ensure that mine employees are adequately trained to manage workplace risks and uphold safety standards. Working with mining companies and accredited service providers, the MQA should initiate the implementation of occupational health and safety training programmes in mining operations across the province.

Activity	The MQA should initiate the implementation of training on occupational health and safety in mining operations in the province
Timeline	This project can be considered for 2026/27 financial year.

Recommendation 8: The MQA should convene a stakeholder engagement session with mining companies operating in the province

The analysis of the WSP-ATR data reveals a significant gap between the number of training programmes planned and those actually implemented by mining companies in the province. This discrepancy highlights a need to understand why companies are unable to fulfil their training commitments. It is recommended that the MQA convene stakeholder engagements with mining companies operating in the province to identify and unpack the underlying causes of non-implementation. These discussions should aim to provide clarity on the barriers to training delivery, whether logistical, financial, or related to capacity. During these engagements, support mechanisms that could enable companies to meet their training obligations should be explored.

Activity	The MQA should convene a stakeholder engagement session with mining companies operating in the province
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 9: The MQA should develop a capacity building programme for potential service providers to obtain accreditation on artisan skills training

A major challenge affecting skills development in the province is the lack of accredited training service providers offering artisan programmes in critical trades such as diesel mechanics and plant fitting. These occupations are in high demand, yet companies report difficulty in

recruiting qualified individuals. Data from hard-to-fill vacancies indicates that diesel mechanics and electricians are among the most challenging roles to fill, primarily due to a shortage of candidates with the required qualifications. It is recommended that MQA establish a capacity building programme for potential service providers which will assist them with meeting the accreditation requirements. By assisting potential service providers to obtain accreditation, the MQA can expand access to artisan training, address critical skills shortages, and strengthen the province’s capacity to meet industry workforce needs.

Activity	The MQA should develop a capacity building programme for potential service providers to obtain accreditation on artisan skills training. This can be done after engaging with them to assess existing training capacity and identify specific gaps particularly in high-demand trades such as diesel mechanics and plant fitting.
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 10: The MQA should initiate the establishment of a stakeholder forum dedicated to bringing stakeholders involved in skills development in the province together

There are several stakeholders that are involved in skills development in the province. In order to maximise impact, particularly in response to the skills needs of emerging key industries such as petrochemicals, renewable energy (i.e., wind turbines), green technology manufacturing, agro-processing and auto-manufacturing, there is a need for a coordinated platform that bring together stakeholders in the province. It is recommended that the MQA initiates the establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform focused on skills development. The overarching goal of this platform should be to bring together key stakeholders, including industry representatives, government departments, education and training institutions, labour organisations, and community groups; to facilitate data sharing and labour market intelligence, ensuring that training programmes are informed by industry trends and demands; and to promote collaborative programme design and delivery, including co-funded initiatives, shared infrastructure, and integrated learner support systems.

Activity	The MQA should initiate the establishment of a stakeholder forum dedicated to bringing stakeholders involved in skills development in the province together
Timeline	This project can be done in 2026.

Recommendation 11: The MQA should implement the Small Scale Mining Programme in the province

The Eastern Cape has a relatively small footprint in large-scale mining compared to other provinces in South Africa. However, the region is endowed with untapped mineral resources that present significant opportunities for the development of small-scale mining projects. Additionally, there are already community members engaged in small-scale mining activities, indicating both interest and potential for growth in this segment of the sector. The MQA should implement its Small-Scale Mining Support Programme in the Eastern Cape. This programme should aim to build technical capacity and skills among small-scale miners to ensure they can operate safely, efficiently, and in

compliance

with

environmental

regulations.

Activity	The MQA should implement its Small Scale Mining Programme in the province
Timeline	This project can be earmarked for 2026/27.

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