



SAFE WORKPLACES: RETURN2WORK

Solidarity Fund Close-out Report

BENEFICIARY	FUNDING ALLOCATION	FUNDING DISBURSED
Transition to Transformation NPC <i>(Reg. no: 2013/062520/08)</i>	R 1 000 000.00	R 963 000.00

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OVERVIEW AND SOLIDARITY FUND HEALTHCARE MANDATE

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how individuals go about their daily lives. A significant area of concern was how to safe working environments could be created and maintained in the wake of the pandemic. Workplaces provide an environment for the spread of the virus, with the potential to drive an increase in infection rates.

While the South African government provided guidelines for workplace compliance during the pandemic, it was suggested that additional measures were needed to ensure keep workplace infection rates at a minimum. These measures would help to put in place safety mechanisms to protect both staff and customers as the economy reopened. Measures to ensure workplace compliance and behaviour change were paramount for the South African labour force to safely return to work. Getting South Africans back to work safely was, and remains, an important facet of the country's economic recovery.



Safe workplaces: the Return2Work (R2W) project

The Solidarity Fund, together with Transition to Transformation, supported the creation of the Return2Work (R2W) platform. This platform was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to aid the business sector in enabling a safe return to work. The Fund provided financial support to expand and deepen the reach of the platform. The aim was to be able to continuously update the content, best practices and resources on the portal as sector needs and government regulations changed.

The portal provides step-by-step guidance and resources to sectors and businesses on how to reopen and stay open safely during the pandemic. Information is carefully curated by experts from the National Department of Health (NDoH) to be practical and relevant. It has provided various guidelines and protocols to help South African businesses to reopen safely amid the various waves of the pandemic. These initially proposed services included:

- **Sector protocols, approval and visibility support**

As lockdown regulations were lessened under level 3, sectors were required to submit their COVID-19 protocols to the NDoH for input and endorsement. There was, however, a very limited capacity to provide these services to businesses and various working sectors.

Experts from the NDoH were contracted on an initial three-month retainer to bolster the process of inputting and endorsing businesses' COVID-19 protocols. This allowed businesses to access relevant expertise and information to improve protocols and keep their staff and customers safe.

A project-management service was also offered to receive and process business protocols, as well as manage service providers.

- **Community of practice and FAQs**

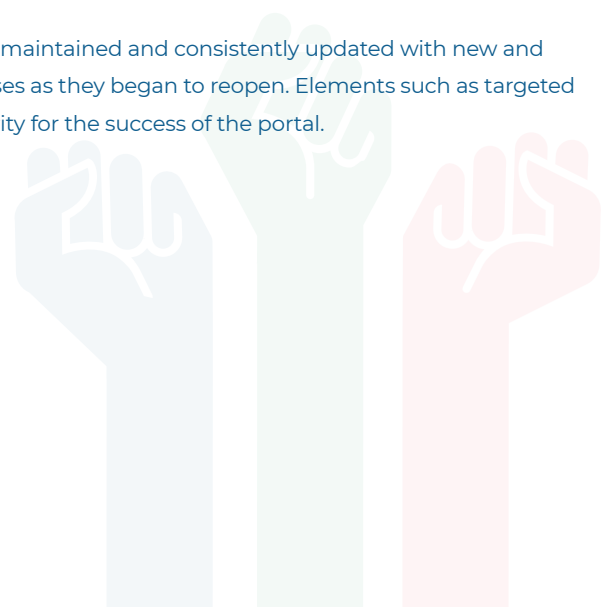
Promoting standardised and targeted information about COVID-safe practices can help to alleviate the stress of reopening a business. As such, the project aimed to develop a 'community of practice' – both between sectors and within them. This also served to inform everyone whenever standards and best practices were updated. Shared needs and insights were drawn on to inform the questions and answers the development of FAQs and other related content.

It was important to engage diverse sectors to identify specific challenges. As different sectors experienced different challenges, collaboration allowed for optimal sector-specific interventions to be identified and implemented.

The notion of resource sharing and collaboration was important in building a sense of community, and digital responses such as web chats and chatbots were explored to amplify access to relevant information.

- **Website management of the R2W Portal**

The portal, once designed and published, needed to be maintained and consistently updated with new and relevant information to best serve the needs of businesses as they began to reopen. Elements such as targeted content, design and the user interface itself were a priority for the success of the portal.



- **Education and training**

As with any new portal, training and educational opportunities are paramount to a successful roll-out. As such, the objective was to develop training material to inform COVID-safe protocols for work.

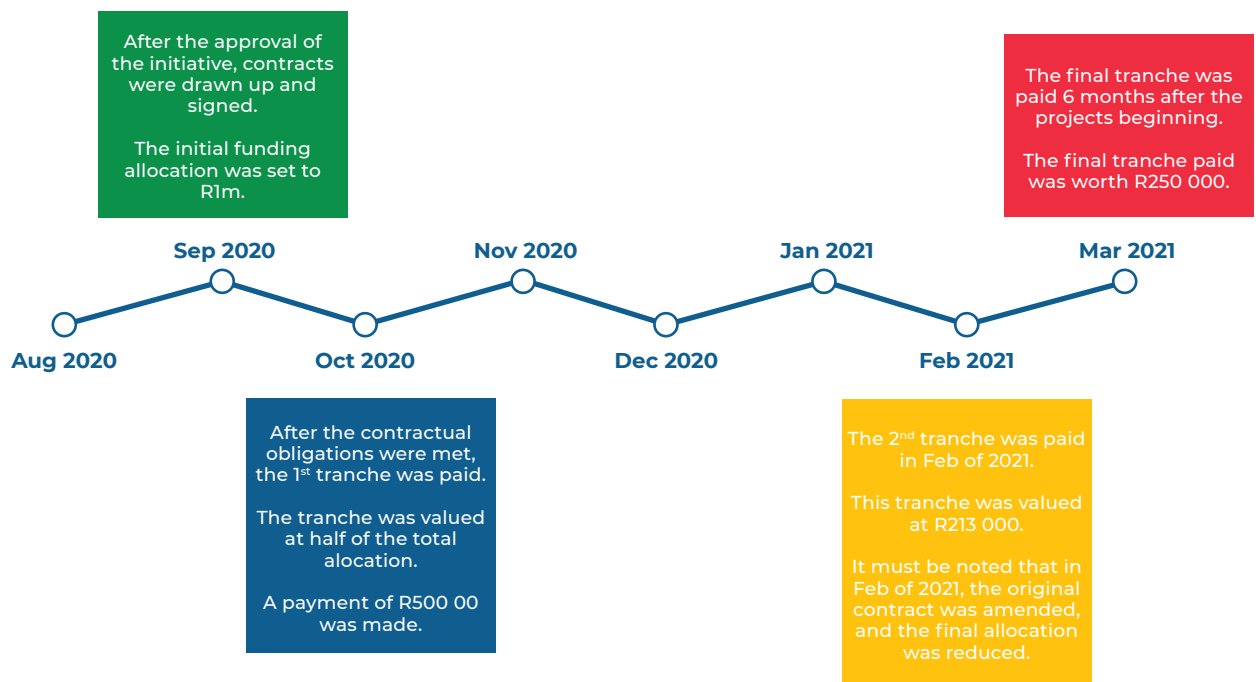
Content was created and targeted at various levels within companies and businesses. This included resources and channels aimed at workers, providing access to content pertaining to health, employment conditions and employment relations. Content was also targeted towards senior management structures.

In terms of training, it was suggested that the best sources of information were already located within these sectors. Establishing channels of communication between and within various sectors, through webinars and other portal content, helped to facilitate information and resource-sharing. This, in turn, led to sector-specific protocols.

Funding timeline

It was agreed that the Solidarity Fund would provide the funding over three payment tranches throughout 2020 and 2021. The timeline below shows when tranches were paid, as well as the value of each tranche.

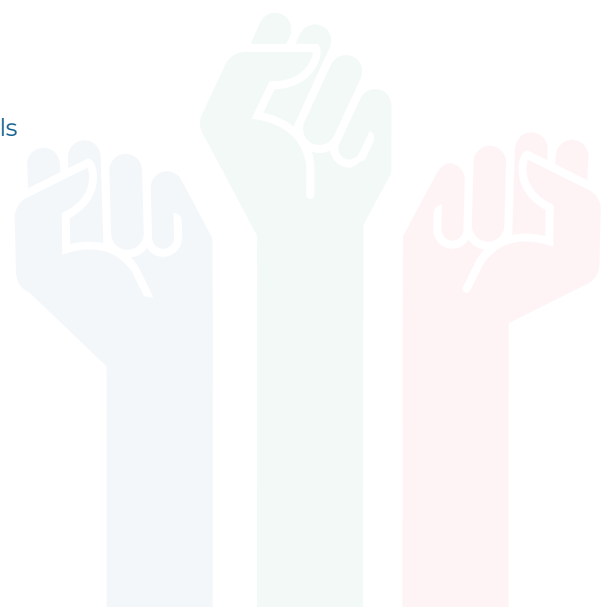
Figure 1: Payment timeline



(* Note: All totals are inclusive of VAT.)

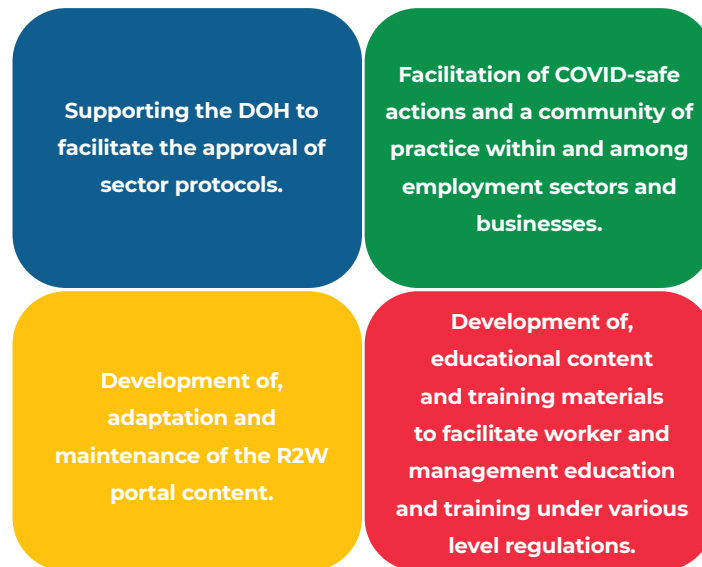
The funding was allocated towards:

- Developing content for approval of sector protocols
- Developing content for the R2W portal
- Facilitating communities of practice
- Developing training materials
- Facilitating webinars



The project commenced in September 2020 and was completed in March 2021. There were four key areas of delivery:

Figure 2: Key areas of delivery



The R2W Portal

The R2W website and portal went live in April 2020. Its purpose is to: 'Offer businesses, employers and employees clear and simple step by step guidance on re-opening and staying open, incorporating the key legal requirements and tools to minimise infection and maximise compliance.'¹

This portal was made easily accessible to business owners and workers, and the content could be downloaded and edited for various business purposes. Businesses had direct access to updated and relevant information from their sectors, as well as general government guidelines mandating COVID-safe practices at work.

The information included details on the requirements for a business to reopen, risk management guidance, assessment tools and templates, as well as directions to financial assistance for businesses that were seriously affected by the pandemic.

The portal also included two 'roadmaps'. The first was the 'R2W Roadmap,' which allows business owners to systematically move through a five-step process that determines a business's readiness to reopen and align itself with government and industry guidelines and protocols. The second was the 'Stay Open Roadmap', which provided continued support to businesses once they had successfully reopened. This second roadmap followed the same template as the first, but providing business owners with a three-step checklist to help maintain safe and healthy spaces.

¹R2W website (<https://www.return2work.co.za/welcome/>).

Various government and departmental guidelines were published and updated on the website as they became available. Guidelines from the NDoH and the Department of Employment and Labour were provided to guide business owners on safe practices for reopening, and employees for rejoining the workforce.

Available resources

All of the resources below can be found on the R2W portal website, at <https://www.return2work.co.za/>.

Sector resources

The initiative aimed to provide real-time, relevant information to various sectors. Resources were provided for the following industries in the formal and informal sectors:

Table 1: Formal and informal sector

FORMAL SECTOR	INFORMAL SECTOR
Business-process outsourcing	Internet cafés
Furniture	Retail workspaces
Hospitality	Home services
Plumbing	Hawkers
Real-estate activities	Fast food outlets
Real-estate owners	Auto repair and servicing
Tourism	Informal traders
In-bound tourism	Personal care services
Mining	
Building	
Retail motor industry	
South African digital industry	

Sector and industry authorities were engaged to provide insight into COVID-safe protocols, as well as to identify sector-specific challenges to implementation.



Business resources

The website provides access to guidelines and templates designed to assist business owners and staff to reopen their businesses, and remain open. Some key resources developed included:

- **Implementation tools**

These tools were developed to aid businesses in implementing government and sectoral guidelines. They included the likes of a practice note, a risk-assessment and -management tool, a COVID-ready workplace planning template, and information relating to COVID-19 economic relief measures.

- **R2W and Stay Open Roadmaps**

These two roadmaps provided a simple, step-by-step approach to reopening businesses, as well as safe practices for returning workers. Thorough checklists were made available to maximise business compliance with government guidelines.

- **Additional resources**

These included information on COVID-19 and vaccinations, general workplace-readiness guidelines, information on personal hygiene, COVID-safe cleaning instructions, information on personal protective equipment (PPE), guidelines around transportation and links to other useful websites and resources.

Government guidelines, tools and notices

Government notices from a variety of departments are provided on the website. The portal conveniently sorts the various sectors, enabling the user to access the notices that affect them and their businesses. Users are able to access and download these notices straight from the portal.

Training resources

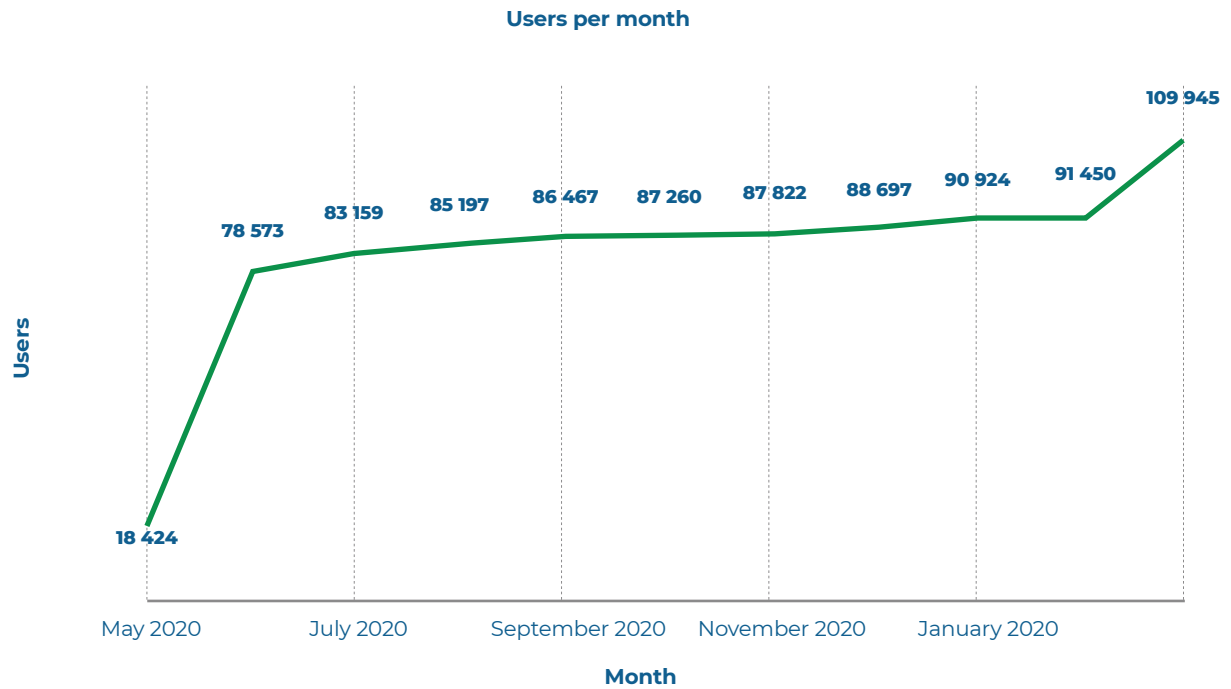
Training resources were provided in both video and PDF formats. These resources aimed to provide clarity to business owners and workers on how to stay safe in a range of working environments; from office spaces to farms and workshops. These tools were also provided in multiple languages to increase their impact and reach.

Reach

As of March 2021, the website portal had 110 000 users, with a total of 225 000 page views and growing. The figure below shows the increase in users each month from May 2020 to March 2021.

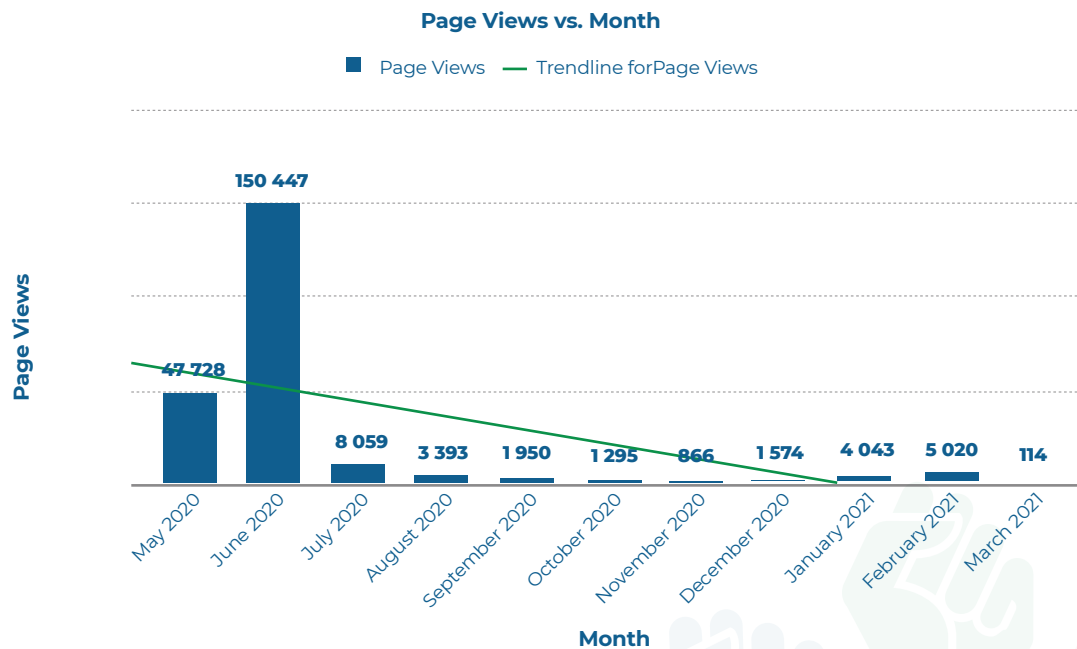


Figure 3: User increase per month (May 2020–March 2021)



Engagement decreased as the months progressed, and picked up slightly when the second wave hit South Africa. This is further illustrated in the figure below, which presents the page views per month.

Figure 4: Page views per month



It seems evident that usage trends mirror those of the pandemic, as more businesses are shown to engage with the site whenever regulations change. When alert levels remain consistent, business owners and their staff did not need to rely too heavily on the portal and its content. While engagement fluctuated, the availability of information on the site remained consistent. In this way, the site continues to aid new businesses and new members of the workforce in navigating new working environments.

Partnerships

This project saw the creation of various partnerships within a host of industries and sectors.

The major players in the establishment of the initiative included The Solidarity Fund, B4SA, GENESIS Analytics, Public Private Growth Initiative, Harambee and the SA Stay Home initiative.

Once the project had kicked off, additional partners came on board to provide sector-specific support. Many sectors and industries were represented in these partnerships. This allowed the initiative to successfully reach its goals, while also identifying key challenges facing specific sectors, and subsequently formulating sector-specific solutions.

The table below reflects the current partners to the R2W initiative:

Table 2: R2W partners

FINANCE AND COMMERCE	BUSINESS AND EMPLOYMENT	PLUMBING AND CONSTRUCTION	MANUFACTURING
ABSA	National Business Initiative (NBI)	Institute of Plumbing South Africa (IOPSA)	Proudly South African
Nedbank	Business Process Enabling South Africa (BPESA)	Constructional Engineering Association of South Africa (CEA)	Manufacturing Circle
Bidvest	Confederation of Associations in the Private Employment Sector (CAPES)	Master Builders South Africa	Paper Manufacturing Association of South Africa (PAMSA)
Durban Chamber of Industry and Commerce	SA Board for People Practices	Master Builders Association	South African Furniture Initiative
South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SACCI)	South African Professional Network Association		
The Association for Savings and Investments South Africa (ASISA)	Amava Talent		
ASISA Foundation	SBi		
FinFind	Department of Employment and Labour		
Telesure Investment Holdings			



RETAIL	FOOD	HOSPITALITY	REAL ESTATE
Takealot	Mr Delivery	AirBnB	South African Property Owners Association (SAPOA)
Superbalist.com	South African Chefs Association	Federated Hospitality Association of South Africa (FEDHASA)	Real Estate Business Owners of South Africa (REBOSA)
Woolworths			
Professional Beauty			
MINING	AGRIBUSINESS AND FORESTRY	HEALTH	TECHNOLOGY
Aluminium Federation of South Africa (AFSA)	Agricultural Business Chamber (AgBiz)	Sani-Touch	Digital Council
Steel and Engineering Industries Federation of Southern Africa (SEIFSA)	Forestry South Africa	National Institute of Occupational Health	
Mineral Council of South Africa		South African Medical Technology Industry Association	
AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURING AND RETAIL	TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS	DEFENCE	LOGISTIC
National Association of Automobile Manufacturers of South Africa (NAAMSA)	The University of the Witwatersrand (WITS)	South African Aerospace, Maritime and Defence Industries Association (AMD)	Move in Sync
Retail Motor Industry Organisation	Gordon Institute of Business Science – The University of Pretoria		
TOURISM			
Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA)			
Tshwane Tourism Association			
SATSA			



Deliverable outcomes

Of the four key delivery areas, the following figure reflects the initial deliverable and its final outcome at the end of the project.

Figure 4: Deliverable summaries

01	Sector Protocols, Approval and Visibility Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Despite initial development, this deliverable was not required in terms of the law and was removed from scope of work.
02	Community of Practice and FAQs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This item was reduced under the amended contract.Significant sector and business collaboration on COVID-19 safety interventions were facilitated mid-2020.These flowed into more business specific interventions towards the end of 2020 and start of 2021.
03	Website Management of R2W Portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This item involved more revisions than originally contemplated.The website continues to be updated and is well used by business stakeholders on COVID-19 workplace related material. It forms a useful communication platform on workplace behavioural change.
04	Education and Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">This item was considerably expanded under the amended contract.Succinct, accessible, and targeted COVID-19 training resources have been developed for use by employers, businesses, unions, and worker interest groups. These valuable resources can be used free of charge.

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KEY CHALLENGES

As with any project of this nature, a few key challenges that were identified throughout the implementation.

Rapidly changing contexts

At the time the project was conceptualised, the needs were very different to those that have since become evident. The initial agreement was amended and reconceptualised to reflect the changing working agreement throughout the project.

These ever-changing contexts had an impact on updating of the website and its content. As this was a set deliverable for the project, this challenge was alleviated by hiring additional personnel to update content as and when changes occurred.

Obtaining and screening relevant information

The nature of the website and its contents often depended on information and communication between a variety of stakeholders, including official government entities, as well as sector and industry authorities.

As the pandemic and its consequences were felt by all, these avenues of communication were sometimes delayed.

To help keep information flowing freely, a content editor was brought on review materials. Business participants provided valuable input on the tools they had found to be the most useful within their sector. With this information, user relevance was prioritised. This resulted in frequent website design updates aimed at highlighting relevant materials to business owners and workers alike. This approach was agile and user-friendly.

User fatigue

There was a marked decline in workplace-related collaboration on COVID-19 behaviour change interventions. This is evident from the decline in numbers of new users and page views. This is believed to be due to businesses reopening and restarting while individuals are still adjusting to the 'new normal' – not only in their personal lives, but also at work.

This, however, does not reduce the need for ongoing inter-sectoral communication with workplace stakeholders, including business owners and their staff. Access to best practices, guidelines and safety responses is imperative to South Africa's economic recovery. A variety of different 'hooks' and triggers were used to keep the content useful and interesting. The availability of resources was constantly communicated through media releases and engagement with various sectors, while social media partners and other stakeholders aided in reminding potential users of the materials and tools available on the portal.

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CONCLUSION

The agreement was concluded in March of 2021. While the project is no longer an active envelope at the Solidarity Fund, the website will continue to be available and accessible to business owners and workers throughout South Africa.

As South Africans navigate these unprecedented times, business owners and workers can continue to rely on the portal to rapidly provide up-to-date information and guidance in complying with government and sectoral guidelines.

