

BEYOND THE COST

What does it really cost young people to look for work?

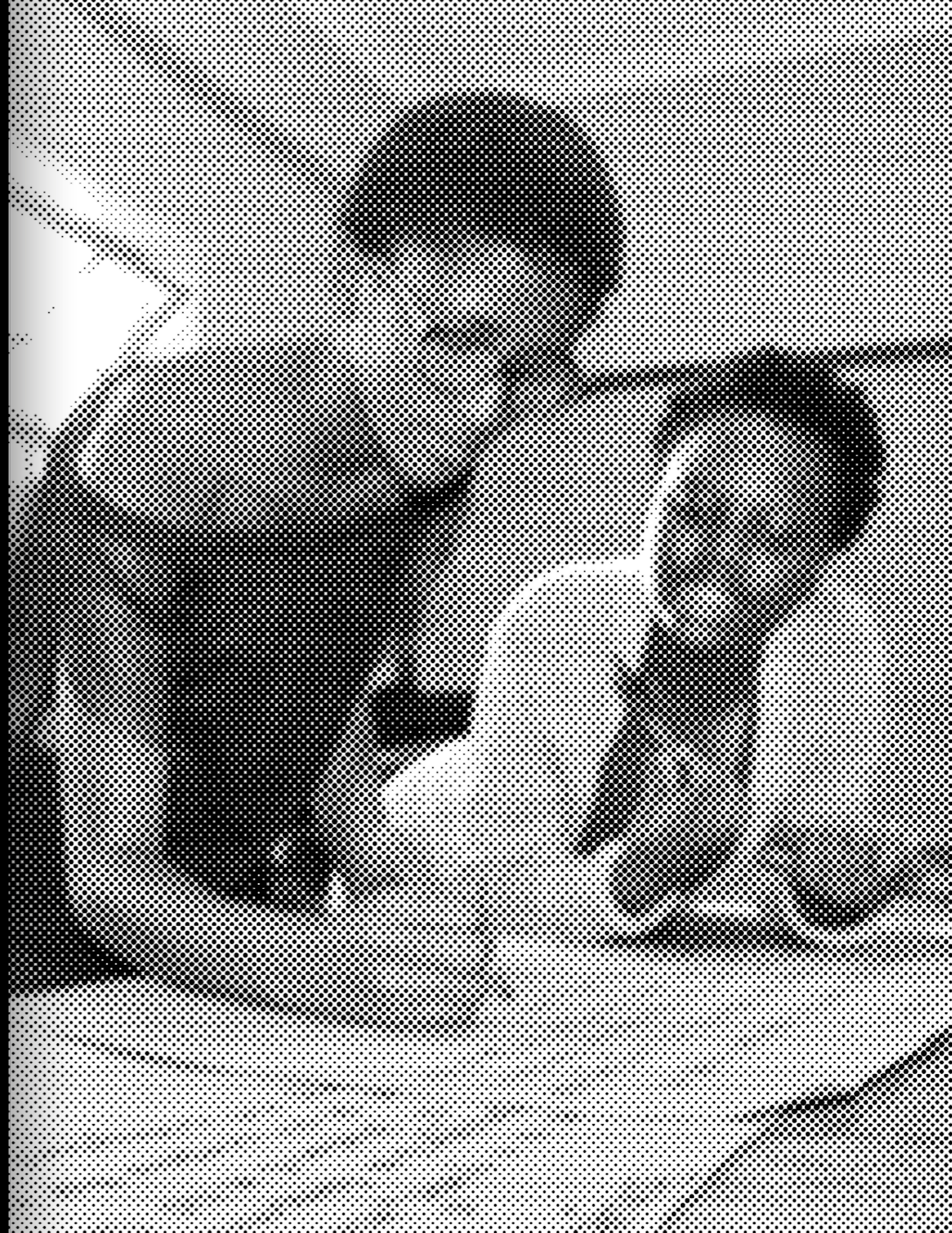


Youth Capital partnered with research hub Open Dialogue to carry out research to understand the impact of lockdown on young people's ability to look for work. JobJack, Hire Me and Youth Employment Service (YES) supported Youth Capital in sharing their survey across their networks of young people.

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**YOUTH CAPITAL
ADVOCATES FOR
COLLECTIVE
EFFORT AND
COLLABORATION,
TO TACKLE
THE SYSTEMIC
CHALLENGES
THAT RESULT
IN YOUTH
UNEMPLOYMENT
IN SOUTH AFRICA.**



INTRODUCTION.

[Youth Capital](#) - as an advocacy campaign with an [Action Plan](#) that combines data with young people's lived experiences to shift gears on youth unemployment - is driven by a mission to advocate for collective effort and collaboration to tackle the systemic challenges that result in youth unemployment in South Africa.

One of the major obstacles faced by job-seeking young people is the financial costs involved with looking for work. The Centre for Social Development in Africa (CSDA) at the University of Johannesburg, through the Siyakha Youth Assets for Employability Study, found that young South Africans spend on average R938 per month looking for work.¹ These costs include transport, data or internet usage, printing, certification, copying, postage, scanning, as well as application or agency fees.²

The Siyakha Study found that the cost of job-seeking represents an amount equal to or more than the average monthly income for a given person living in the household.² This means that many youth do not have the financial resources that are needed to start, and keep, looking for a job.

Youth Capital's Action Plan recognises the impact of high financial costs on young people's ability to look for work. In its Call to Action Make Job-Seeking Affordable, Youth Capital and its network of young people advocate for practical solutions to help young South Africans transition from a place of learning to a place of earning.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, increased costs of living, and the increased use of online platforms for job-seeking, a number of interventions have been launched to tackle youth unemployment; at the same time, there was a critical need for an updated understanding of the full costs of looking for work, and how widespread the use of data-light platforms is.

In South Africa, high data costs and the digital divide impact how young people access information on education and work opportunities. Data-light platforms help bridge this divide by functioning on low-end smartphones, slow and unreliable networks, and requiring very little data to operate.

This report therefore builds on the evidence from the Siyakha study, and provides an updated estimate with regard to transport and data costs. With the rise of zero-rated and data-light platforms, the report explores their current impact in bridging the gap between young job-seekers and access to work opportunities.³

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THE REPORT EXPLORES
THEIR CURRENT IMPACT
IN BRIDGING THE GAP
BETWEEN YOUNG JOB-
SEEKERS AND ACCESS TO
WORK OPPORTUNITIES.**

FOREWORD

Youth unemployment rates, deepened by the pandemic, prompt an urgency to finding solutions. And there certainly has been an uptick in coordinated efforts to address the challenge. These range from the continuation of the Employment Tax Incentive to the Presidential Employment Stimulus package, which saw several hundred thousand young people gain work opportunities.

We have seen in recent years large-scale, high budget interventions being driven by the state, with a range of other smaller scale, locally-connected interventions offered by civil society organisations and businesses. All of these interventions are crucial if we are to address the complex challenge of youth unemployment. But one issue where we have not seen much traction is that of the high costs of work seeking, coupled with the low levels of income that so many young work seekers face.

Youth Capital, in its grounded style of listening to the voices of young people, highlights this key issue in this report. Youth Capital managed to reach over 2200 young people through an online survey indicating that they continue to hold sway as an organisation committed to bringing young people's voices to the fore on key issues that affect them. While others have noted the challenge of work-seeking costs^{2,4,5}, in this report Youth Capital provides updated figures on work search costs, and unpacks how young people are looking for work in the wake of the pandemic. While work search costs continue to be an issue that has been mentioned by others, with this report Youth Capital brings the issue back to the centre of the debate, highlighting that, as a country, we are yet to figure this one out in our suite of interventions.

Much attention has been paid to creating work opportunities and to driving skills development; but if young people continue to be locked out of accessing these opportunities due to income poverty, then we will continue to leave far too many young people behind. One key mechanism to address the costs of work seeking is to ensure that young people have access to zero-rated platforms. Here too, Youth Capital delves into the debate, highlighting young people's experiences with these platforms.

While we, as a research, policy and practice community of people, continue to seek solutions to the complex challenge of youth unemployment, we must remain aware of the experiences of young people. Youth Capital has done an excellent job of placing their voices about work seeking costs onto the table, in an effort to nudge us back to thinking about and testing solutions with young people's experiences in mind.

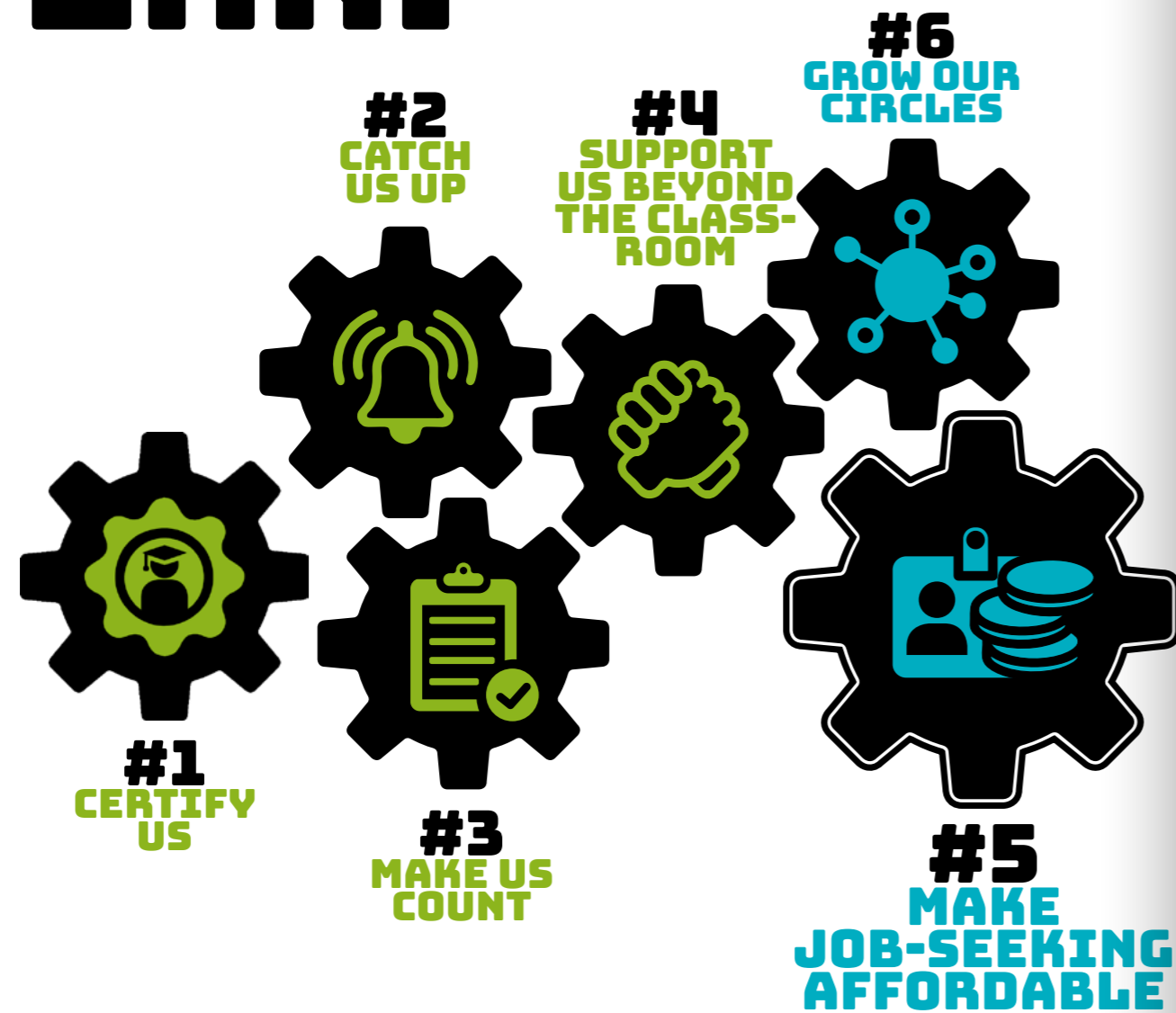


PROF LAUREN GRAHAM
Associate Professor and
Director of the Centre
of Social Development
in Africa at the University
of Johannesburg

“MUCH ATTENTION HAS BEEN PAID TO CREATING WORK OPPORTUNITIES AND TO DRIVING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT.”

“BUT IF YOUNG PEOPLE CONTINUE TO BE LOCKED OUT OF ACCESSING THESE OPPORTUNITIES DUE TO INCOME POVERTY, THEN WE WILL CONTINUE TO LEAVE FAR TOO MANY YOUNG PEOPLE BEHIND.”

THE ACTION PLAN.



YOUTH CAPITAL BELIEVES

in the possibility of a South Africa in which all young people have the support they need to shift gears, overcome the roadblocks, and navigate the journey to quality jobs. To reach this destination, young people must be supported in finishing their education, transitioning into the world of work, and leveraging existing opportunities for work experience and employment.

In the landscape of youth development, Youth Capital is a cartographer, using the Action Plan as a shared map. The campaign is charting direction and plotting key role-players, while also flagging the hazards, new developments, bridges, and alternative pathways, to keep young people on course.

To add your voice, resources and knowledge to collaborate on the Action Plan, click [here](#).



JOB-SEEKING IN CONTEXT.

Currently over 9.2 million young people (15-34 years old) in South Africa are not in employment, education, or training (NEET)⁶. The majority of this group are black African, income-poor, have no post-school education, and live in households in which nobody works.⁷

Youth unemployment is a complex issue. Because of systemic roadblocks, young people are often stuck in an endless game of snakes and ladders, with detours and dead-ends that can set them back years.⁸ Additionally, they often navigate the many work-seeking barriers and challenges they face with very little support.

Transitioning from a place of learning to a place of earning is challenging because looking for work needs resources; it takes time; and job-seeking increasingly requires connectivity and data.

LOOKING FOR WORK NEEDS RESOURCES.

The Siyakha Study showed that the majority of young people who participated in the study, lived in households that are food insecure and rely on social grants, and food insecurity has only worsened as a result of COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns.⁹

In 2021, the National Income Dynamics Study – Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) reported that 35% of households had run out of money to buy food.¹⁰

Consequently, many households currently lack financial resources to enable or support work-seeking efforts. With the cost of the average household food basket increasing, young people are less likely to allocate resources to job-seeking.¹¹

LOOKING FOR WORK TAKES TIME.

The longer young people are unemployed, the more difficult job-seeking becomes; while they can grow increasingly discouraged and give up looking altogether, employers also view long-term unemployed youth as riskier hires, as long gaps between opportunities in the formal economy can be perceived as 'red flags'.^{7,12} Research shows by the time they turn 24, six in ten young people have never had a job, despite spending years looking.^{12,13}

LOOKING FOR WORK REQUIRES CONNECTIVITY.

Even before the pandemic, almost 90% of young people were using the internet to look for work, with mobile data being one of the biggest expenses. But with only 10% of South Africa's population having internet access at home, the majority of young people are dependent on local hotspots, internet cafés and mobile data.¹⁴ Access to zero-rated and data-light platforms are therefore critical to unlock access to opportunities for young people.¹⁵ While these platforms are not a silver bullet, zero-rating educational websites leverage the technology of reversed billing as a way of making resources more equally available.

In accordance with the Disaster Management Act, the Department of Higher Education and Training approved the zero-rating of over 500 websites in 2020.¹⁶ Recent spectrum bidding requires bidders to ensure that information on Public Benefit Organisations will be zero-rated; however, ensuring that zero-rating works for young job-seekers is critical.¹⁷

“SOME OF THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS WHO USED TO HELP ME FINANCIALLY, LOST THEIR JOBS. MORE COMPANIES ARE CLOSING DOWN SO THERE ARE LESS JOB OPPURTUNITIES”

A survey respondent

THE SURVEY

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK: THE SURVEY METHODOLOGY.

In order to better understand young people's experiences of looking for work, over a year into lockdown, Youth Capital partnered with Open Dialogue to run an online survey.

The survey focused on the financial costs associated with looking for work, the length of time job-seeking takes, and the initial impact of zero-rated platforms. The survey was live from 11 August 2021 until 12 November 2021, and had 2 200 respondents, most of whom were looking for work at the time. The survey was advertised on social media, and shared by recruitment platform JobJack and HireMe, as well as Youth Employment Service (YES).

THE ROLE OF DATA AND TRANSPORT

SAMPLE SIZE: 2 200 young people

HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND ON TRANSPORT ?

40%

said they spend between R250-R499 on transport per month

HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND ON DATA ?

42%

said they spend between R250-R499 on data per month

HOW MUCH DO YOU SPEND ON PRINTING AND APPLICATION FEES?

47%

said they spend between R0-R249 on printing and application fees per month

DO YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN LOOKING FOR WORK AND BUYING FOOD?

84%

said that they have to choose between looking for work and going for interviews, and buying food

WHERE DO YOU GET THE MONEY TO LOOK FOR WORK?*

69%

family member

20%

friend

36%

my savings or earnings

27%

gov. grants, incl COVID-19 Social Relief of Distress grant

11%

other

* Responses are not mutually exclusive.

**Other: Money Lender and Do Not Know.

The survey results highlight that young job-seekers spend the bulk of their money on transport and data costs in their journey to finding employment. These costs are comparable with the findings of the Siyakha Study with a total average cost of R938/month.¹

Nearly seven in ten respondents borrow money from family to look for work.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Seven out of ten respondents said that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the costs of looking for work.

"The amount of money I spend on data has increased drastically".

A survey respondent

"The transport fare has increased due to lockdown - in a way, lockdown meant more expenses for us".

A survey respondent

"I HARDLY GET MONEY FROM MY PARENTS TO BE ABLE TO LOOK FOR WORK, BECAUSE THEY ALSO NEED MONEY TO BE ABLE TO BUY GROCERIES AND ELECTRICITY."

A survey respondent

RESULTS

“Do you have to choose between looking for work and going for interviews, and buying food?”

YES, ABSOLUTELY

84%

NO

16%

2200 responses

#ASKUS
“I have to make choice; either look for a job or put food on the table.”
A survey respondent



TIME SPENT LOOKING FOR WORK.

Four in ten respondents look for work for more than a year before finding a job. This is confirmed by the Quarterly Labour Force Survey for Quarter 2 of 2021, which shows that three out of four unemployed young people have been without a job for one year or longer.¹⁸

HOW LONG DO
YOU USUALLY
LOOK FOR
WORK BEFORE
FINDING A
JOB?



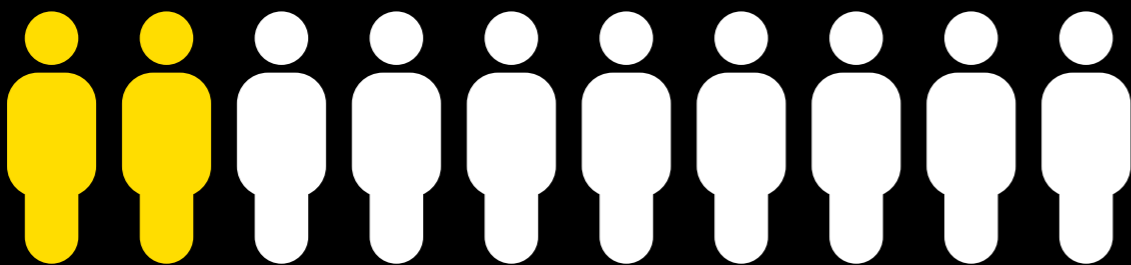
**“I HAVE BEEN
APPLYING FOR
A JOB FOR MANY
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HAVE HOPE.”**

A survey respondent

THE IMPACT OF ZERO-RATED PLATFORMS



6 OUT OF 10 respondents said they have used a zero-rated or data free platform to apply for a job; and 75% of those said it made applying for a job easier.



2 OUT OF 10 respondents report to have applied for a job via WhatsApp.

“VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS ARE QUITE CONVENIENT; LESS MONEY SPENT ON TRAVELLING AND CLOTHES.”

A survey respondent

WHAT WE NOW KNOW: INSIGHTS.

Despite a broad range of interventions – across the public, private, and civil society sectors – to address youth unemployment, the number of young people who are unemployed is high and continually increasing.¹⁹

The responses from this small sample confirm that the costs associated with looking for work have not decreased since 2019 and remain comparative to the average cost of R939 per month reported previously. Furthermore, that these costs are prohibitive for young job-seekers, with data and transport remaining the biggest cost drivers; that job-seeking can take a long time, so long in fact that young people simply give up; and that zero-rated platforms seem to be effective in helping to connect young job-seekers to opportunities.

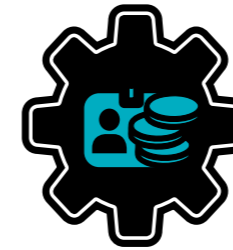
Young people's ability to search for, find, and hold onto work opportunities is significantly affected by whether they have the financial resources to look for work. While the survey highlights that the cost of looking for work is one piece of the puzzle, it's critical that we recognise the roadblocks young people face beyond the financial cost; and that we identify and integrate a range of existing interventions to reduce the overall financial cost and time spent looking for work.

CASH TRANSFERS: STIMULATING THE LOCAL ECONOMY.




The provision of some kind of social support in the form of a cash transfer for job-seekers would go a long way to support young people to have the financial resources to look for work. However, given the high levels of poverty in South Africa, preliminary findings on the Social Relief Distress grant indicate that these grants would, in most instances, be used to support basic needs in the household and not solely on job-seeking costs. It is therefore critical that a comprehensive set of interventions are put in place to support young job-seekers specifically. ²⁰ It's critical that social support is viewed as a mechanism to stimulate local economies, and provide household support for basic necessities, which in turn creates an easier path into the labour market for young people. ²¹

MAP THE SERVICES: OVERCOMING BARRIERS.

Evidence shows that income alone is insufficient. ²¹ For cash transfers to have real impact, they need to be combined with other services and opportunities that tackle the systemic causes of poverty. There are a range of services designed to connect young people with what they need to overcome barriers to earning an income, but often young people are not aware of them.



MAP THE SERVICES: EXAMPLES.

-  Currently in its pilot phase, the [Basic Package of Support](#) is designed to help young South Africans who are NEET, (re)connect to education or training opportunities, or to show available pathways to help them enter the labour market as part of a successful transition into young adulthood.²²
-  Young people need to have services in their communities that lower the cost of job-seeking, such as the use of public libraries and community areas to do online applications. [Youth Explorer](#) is an interactive platform that gives access to this type of information, such as locations of public libraries. Using the evidence provided by Youth Explorer, young people can demand that local services work better for them; to do so, however, ward councillors need to be responsive.
-  Often young people are a piece of information away from an opportunity. One of the reasons for information asymmetries is that multiple departments and public offices are responsible for pathways. Examples include labour centres and Employment Services of South Africa (ESSA) from the Department of Employment and Labour, and the Department of Higher Education and Training and Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA). Information related to available pathways should be integrated and centralised on one platform, to ensure that opportunities are visible, and information communicated clearly.

SKILLS TRAINING: BRIDGING THE GAP.

There are many Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organisations that provide young people with skills training. However, these organisations must be better equipped to connect young people to employment opportunities, and ways to stay engaged in activities that strengthen their CVs- such as volunteering and job shadowing. More specifically, youth employment programmes (YEPs) offer skills training to young people that help them access learning or earning opportunities. Research demonstrates that YEPs can positively contribute to young people's labour market outcomes, further education outcomes, and resilience, despite unemployment ¹. In order for YEPs to be successful in their aim to improve their participants' employment outcomes, they need to ensure a good fit between young people and potential employers (matching), as well as equip young people with transferable skills.²³

PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMMES: PROVIDING STEPPING STONES.

Public employment programmes, such as the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and Community Works Programmes (CWP) are government initiatives that aim to directly create employment and are often designed as low-skilled work opportunities.

To respond to the impact of COVID-19, at the end of 2020 the Presidency launched the Presidential Employment Stimulus to amplify existing government commitments to employment creation, while the labour market recovers. One of these initiatives is the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI); coordinated by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the programme is the largest public employment programme yet to be implemented in South Africa.

In Phase One, the BEEI placed over 300 000 Education and General School Assistants, while Phase Two placed 287 000 unemployed young people. ²⁴

According to Youth Capital's research, which focussed on Phase One of the BEEI, the programme has the potential to be a pathway to productive economic activities for young people. But to do so, it needs to provide young people with training on relevant and transferable skills; build their social networks through mentorship; and support young people with exit pathways.



ZERO-RATED AND DATA-LIGHT PLATFORMS: DIGITAL INNOVATION FOR INCREASED MATCHING

Ensuring that young people can find and apply for opportunities through zero-rated or low-data platforms, can significantly reduce the cost of job-seeking. However, this is only true if coupled with programmes that increase the matching between potential employers and candidates. These platforms could also be leveraged to train young people on in-demand skills.

ZERO-RATED PLATFORMS

In 2021, the Presidency launched SAYouth, a platform that provides young people with learning, earning and volunteering opportunities through a zero-rated site and a contact centre. SAYouth is supported by Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator, the Department of Higher Education and Training, Training, the National Youth Development Agency, and the Development Bank of South Africa.

DATA-LIGHT PLATFORMS

The use of data-light platforms such as WhatsApp, are emerging as another way of reducing job-seeking costs. According to Statista, WhatsApp is the most popular social media platform in South Africa. As of the third quarter of 2020, some 93% of internet users in the country used the messaging app.²⁵ By March 2021, almost 23 million South Africans were WhatsApp users. A number of organisations are leveraging cutting-edge chatbot and artificial intelligence (AI) technology to build tools that plug into the messaging apps we already use. The ZanoKhayo Network and chat-based workforce employment Mintor provide employment support to help young people write their CV and apply for jobs directly from WhatsApp. ¹⁵

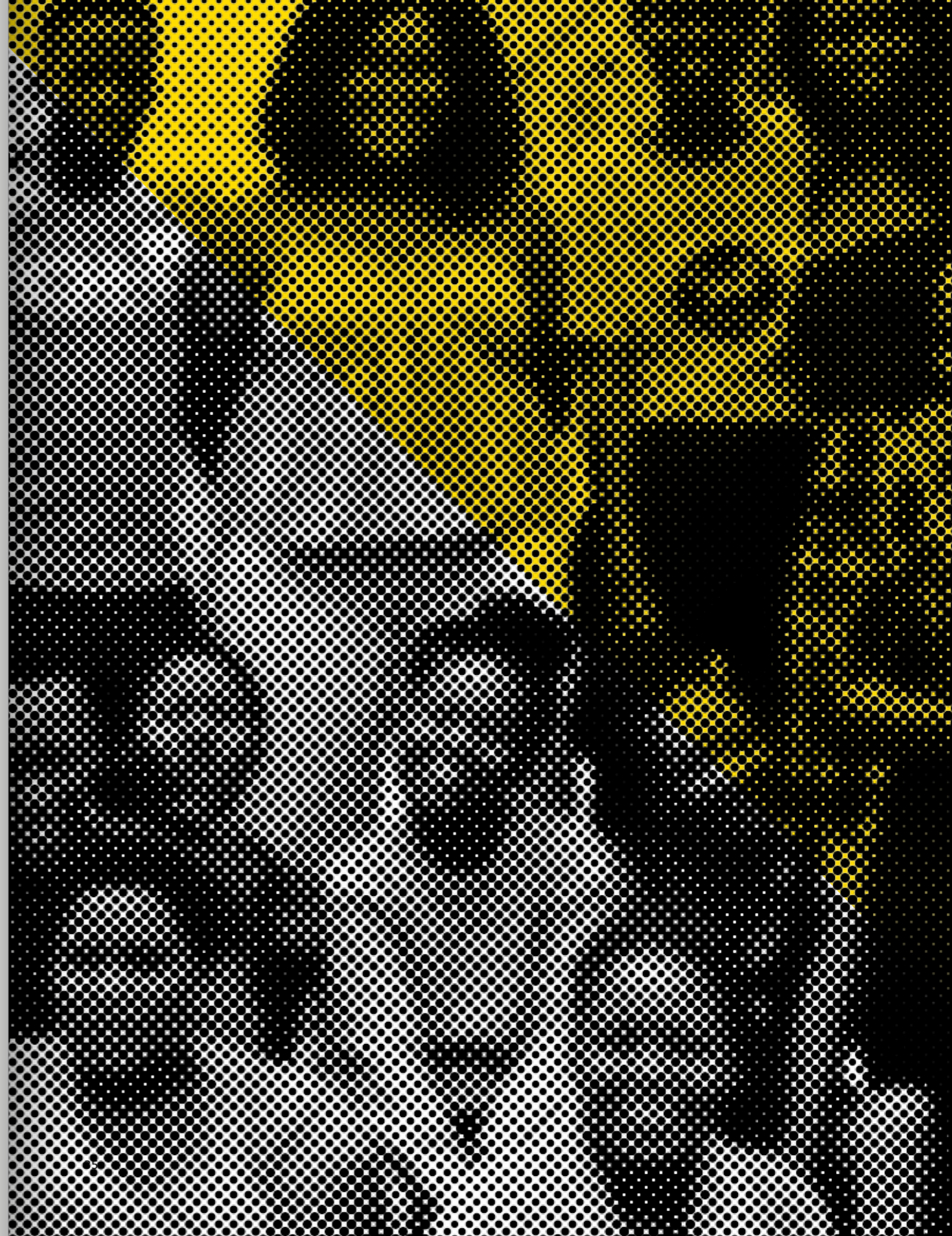
CONCLUSION.

With over 9.2 million young people not in employment, education or training, it's urgent that we make existing pathways visible and accessible for young people to engage in learning and earning opportunities. Tackling youth unemployment requires commitment, effort, and coordination from stakeholders across the public, private, and civil society sectors.

One of the major roadblocks that young people face when looking for work is the financial costs involved. Yet we have the tools to overcome this obstacle through existing technology and programmes, which makes access to information, resources, tools, and opportunities more easily accessible to work-seeking young people. But these platforms cannot be effective on their own. It's critical that solutions to address the job-seeking costs go beyond only the financial costs, and build on existing interventions to remove the roadblocks that young people face on their journey to a sustainable livelihood.

In this context, research focussing on youth is essential, so that solutions reflect the realities experienced by young people.

Collective effort and collaboration are needed to advocate, coordinate, and maximise solutions that alleviate work-seeking costs; and contribute to unlocking the potential of millions of South Africa's youth.



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Youth Capital is a youth-led campaign with an Action Plan that combines data with young people's lived experiences to shift gears on youth unemployment.

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Youth Capital is a project currently incubated by the DG Murray Trust (DGMT). DGMT is a South African foundation committed to developing South Africa's potential through public innovation and strategic investment. dgmt.co.za