



**YOUTH
CAPITAL**

YOUTH IN LOCKDOWN.

**TRACKING THE
IMPACT OF COVID-19
ON YOUNG PEOPLE**

BY SHINING A SPOTLIGHT

on young people's journey and signalling roadblocks, the Action Plan presents the 10 urgent priorities to address, to reduce youth unemployment. The Action Plan also offers a shared roadmap to track the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on our ability to complete our education, whether we are able to transition into the world of work, and the support we receive to leverage government initiatives to create job opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

Young people were one of the groups most disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent lockdown. Implementing solutions that provide us with protection and alternative routes requires understanding the impact the pandemic and lockdown have had on our lives.

There's a lot we don't yet know about how the pandemic and lockdown will affect our futures. But we have to begin with what we do know. The next few pages highlight some of the ways the pandemic and lockdown have impacted young people ■

**IMPLEMENTING
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THE ACTION PLAN

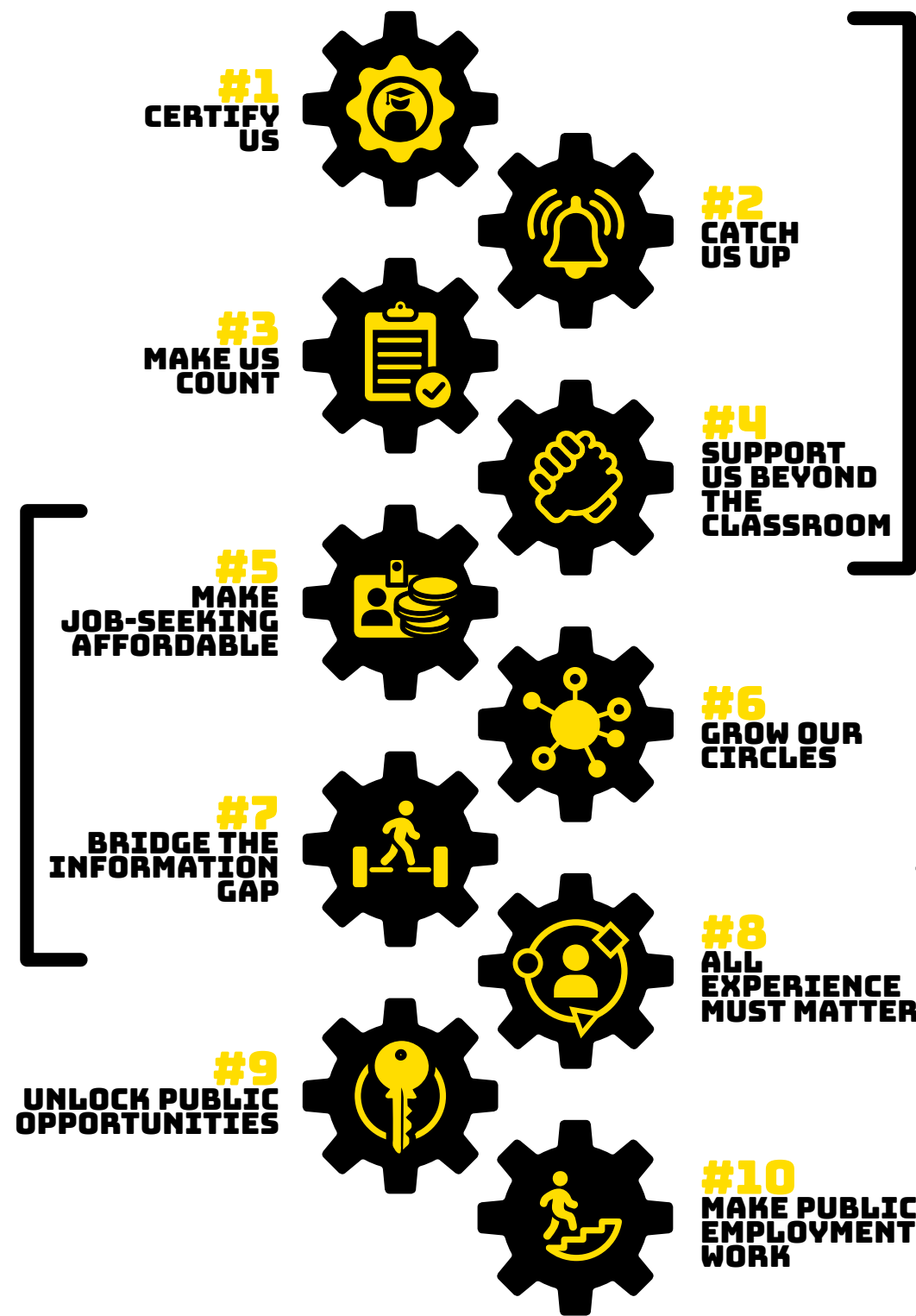
YOUTH CAPITAL

believes in the possibility of a South Africa in which all young people have the support we need to shift gears, overcome the roadblocks, and navigate our journey to quality jobs. To reach this destination, we must be supported in finishing our 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 us on course.

TRANSITIONS

Everyone should be supported.



EDUCATION



CERTIFY US

- In 2020, the matric pass rate was 5% lower than in 2019.
- Since the start of lockdown, an extra 500,000 young people have dropped out of school. School dropout has tripled over the course of the pandemic and is now the highest it's been in 20 years.¹
- Between February 2020 and January 2021, young people between the ages of 18-35 were the age group most likely to lose our jobs.² But educational qualifications also protected us from job loss: only those of us without a matric saw an overall decline in employment.³ Even before COVID-19, getting certified helped as keep our jobs. Between 2017 and 2020, young people (18-35 years old) without a matric saw a 41% employment loss, compared to 24% among those with a matric and 16.9% for those with a tertiary qualification.⁴
- By September 2020, six months into the COVID-19 lockdown, 40% percent of young people in post-school education and training had moved home. While staying at home, half of us reported challenges in communicating with our institutions. Nearly 60% of us reported that lockdown had reduced our time to study.⁵



ROADWORKS! A BRAND-NEW INTERCHANGE

*Given the impact that COVID-19 and lockdown has had on schooling, growing numbers of us are likely to seek routes to a matric qualification outside the formal, full-time school system. It is more important than ever to report on, support, and expand young people's pathways to a second chance matric. Read **Shift 2021** to find out more about what can be done to shift gears for 'matrics on the fringe'.*

In August 2021, the University of Cape Town announced that it would be launching an online high school in collaboration with the Valentre Institute. The school builds on the strides that have been made in online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has two offerings: a fee-paying option, delivered entirely online, direct to learners' homes; and a free option, delivered through an open-access online programme, but with limited online support. In 2020, a 'blended-learning' approach was piloted in Mitchells Plain, in the Western Cape, combining online material with in-person support. Learners reportedly jumped three grades in Maths, Science, and English within the academic year.⁶ Online matric rewrite programmes are also said to be in the pipeline.

Click here to
read more in
**SHIFT
2021.**

TRACKING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE



CATCH US UP

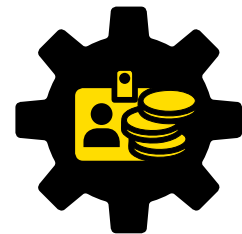
- School attendance is at the lowest level it's been in 20 years.⁷
- Between March 2020 and June 2021, most primary school learners lost 70%-100% (i.e. a full year) of learning relative to the 2019 cohort.⁸



SUPPORT US BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

- Over the first five months of the COVID-19 lockdown, 5-million children lost access to school meals.⁹ By March 2021, even fewer learners had access to food at school.¹⁰ Hunger is an obstacle to learning, and a burden on the household. When our homes are hungry, more of us are likely to drop out of school.
- Even before COVID-19 and lockdown, one third of South Africans were expected to experience a mental health disorder in their lifetime.¹¹ Between 2017 and June 2020, the number of South Africans experiencing depressive symptoms doubled.¹² COVID-19 disruptions to our schooling and social lives, as well as to our homes, livelihoods, and futures, have put a strain on our mental health. The South African Depression and Anxiety Group reports that, since the start of lockdown, the majority of their callers have been between the ages of 18-35.¹³

TRANSITIONS



MAKE JOB-SEEKING AFFORDABLE

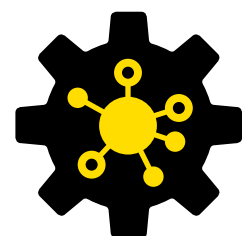
- Over the course of lockdown, South Africa has seen stubbornly high rates of food insecurity. As early as June 2020, child and household hunger had drastically increased. By March 2021, there had been little improvement, with nearly 40% of households reporting that they had run out of money to buy food in the previous month.¹⁴ This has made young people's search for quality work even more precarious. Even before COVID-19, we were weighing up the costs of job-seeking with other household necessities. Many of us were borrowing money from household members to fund our job search. If our households can't afford food, they certainly can't afford to support job-seeking.
- Between January and April 2021, 200,000 more South Africans became discouraged job-seekers, and the number of young people not in education, training, or employment increased.¹⁵



ROADWORKS! SMOOTHING THE POTHOLES

Over the course of the COVID-19 lockdown, a number of youth employment initiatives have found creative ways of using technology to ease our job search. Each of these innovations has allowed young job-seekers to access online support, networks, or opportunities using only our smartphones and low-cost data. Read **Shift 2021** to find out more about how technology is helping to shift gears for young people in Section 4: Make Job-Seeking Affordable.

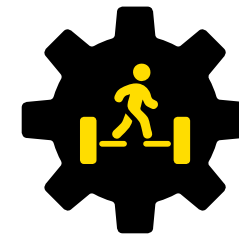
Click here to read more in **SHIFT 2021**.



GROW OUR CIRCLES

- Two out of five young people in post-school education and training reported that one of our key lockdown challenges was having lost social contact.¹⁶ We know that building and growing social networks is essential for our access to quality jobs.

TRACKING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE



BRIDGE THE INFORMATION GAP

- The COVID-19 lockdown kept many of us from the computer labs, libraries, internet cafés, and Youth Hubs where we get vital information to guide our journey to a first, decent job. We were stuck in our homes, with many of us unable to access the data and devices we need to learn, network, and find opportunities.



ROADWORKS! BUILDING BRIDGES

WhatsApp-based technology is being used to help bridge the information gap between us and our potential employers. By using WhatsApp to build our CVs and complete psychometric tests, we get easy access to the tools we need to showcase our skills and experience. Meanwhile, employers are provided a quick route to reaching and filtering young talent. Read **Shift 2021** to find out more about how to make job-seeking affordable.

Click here to read more in **SHIFT 2021**.



ROADWORKS! IMPROVING ROAD READINESS

Community service organisations and funders have proposed a Basic Package of Support (BPS) for young people. The BPS aims to give those of us aged 15-24, who are outside of education, training, or employment, a 'starter pack' to begin the job search. It will be piloted in Atlantis, Cape Town, in October 2021. The BPS programme could help bridge the information gap by equipping us with the advice, resources, networks, and support we need to transition into the world of work. Based on a comprehensive assessment, the package of support we receive will be targeted to our specific needs and the barriers we face in accessing education, training, or employment. It will also equip us with a plan to set out on the road to quality work, as well as the contacts, referrals, and follow-up support we need on the journey.¹⁷

JOBS



ALL EXPERIENCE MUST MATTER

- Lockdown has made it difficult for us to get workplace experience. With young people having been last on the vaccination list, our access to volunteer work, internships, and even public employment programmes was limited for the first 18-months of lockdown. We need innovative solutions to ensure work experience remains a priority, and that these opportunities are safe and accessible to young people, even under COVID-19 conditions.



UNLOCK PUBLIC OPPORTUNITIES

- Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) aim to jumpstart employment opportunities for young people, by supporting training and on-site experience in their sectors. But SETA-accredited training must be face-to-face. The COVID-19 enforced lockdown has blocked many of us from SETA funding to support workplace-based learning (WBL). Meanwhile, digital migration has been a challenge for many SETAs.
- Some SETAs pay in advance for learners to take up WBL in companies, while others require businesses to claim retrospectively. This makes it very difficult for small businesses, who have already been hard-hit by COVID-19, to find resources to support our work placements.¹⁸

TRACKING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUNG PEOPLE



MAKE PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT WORK

- The COVID-19 lockdown put capacity limits on workplaces, particularly under level 4 and 5 restrictions. This meant that public employment programmes either could not hire as many people as they had before, or were forced to stop operations altogether.



ROADWORKS! BUILDING BRIDGES

*Part of the response to COVID-19 and lockdown has been the use of public employment programmes to contribute both to the healthcare response and to economic recovery. The support measures are being delivered through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and the Presidential Employment Stimulus package. Included in this package is the Basic Education Employment Initiative (BEEI), which aims to generate employment opportunities within the basic education system, while also supporting quality schooling. Now more than ever, public employment must be a rewarding, transferable experience for us, accelerating our journey to better futures. Read **Shift 2021** to explore the opportunities and challenges of the BEEI, and how it could work better for young people.*

Click here to read more in
SHIFT 2021.

WE NEED A POLICY ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT SIMPLY PASSENGERS, BUT DRIVERS OF CHANGE IN OUR OWN LIVES.

The policy landscape in South Africa, particularly as it relates to youth, can best be described as a complex web that attempts to strike a balance between ideas, innovation, and inclusion; whilst running through a gauntlet of politics, access, and inequality. For many young people, policy is seen as a pursuit of the elites – those who have attained a certain level of education and who speak, think, and behave in a certain way; thus, highlighting the intersections of class, race, and gender as well as the ways they are manifested in our understanding of not just our roles, but our value as young citizens.

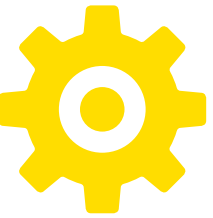
This calls for us to think about policy development in South Africa in different, more nuanced ways. Is it possible to cultivate a culture of policy development that is inclusive, participatory, and efficient; and what are the things that youth themselves need to do to move this process forward?

Contextually, South Africa finds itself at a crucial policy moment – the extension of the National Youth Policy, the creation of the Integrated Youth Development Strategy and the looming appointment of a new board at the National Youth Development Agency, nestled within the framework of the National Development Plan, have all occurred concurrently, whilst grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Having already felt the brunt of the unemployment crisis before COVID-19, the pandemic has placed youth in a precarious position, many young people inching dangerously closer to a point of no return. In this context, policy development is an essential part of the puzzle – youth need to genuinely believe that those who govern have their best interests at heart and are willing to put in the actual work of addressing the myriad of issues we face. Unfortunately, this has often not been the case. By excluding young people from regular engagement with policymaking, we break the social contract we have made with each other. It erodes the faith young people are meant to have in their government and shatters any kind of vision for collaboration and cooperation. One of the key interventions that must occur for this to be addressed, is a deep introspection of the way we think about youth and the kinds of resources and leadership we need.

However, this is not a one-sided endeavour. Young people themselves need to continue to step up to the plate and play their part. We have already seen the ways in which youth in South Africa continue to be engaged in the development of their communities. Throughout the length and breadth of this country, young people continue to challenge the status quo, demand better for them and their communities, and prove, constantly, that youth are not lazy or apathetic. This is a culture that must continue. Youth always find themselves in spaces that matter, and it is imperative for us to continue to find spaces, organisations, people, and institutions who are genuinely committed to advancing our development and use the time and talents we have to co-create work, which is both impactful and sustainable. Doing this fosters a culture of leading by example, and showing what is possible when there is a vested interest in development, and the fruits it can bear.

Youth Lab is a policy think tank offering platforms for young people and decision-makers to exchange ideas, develop strategies, and execute plans that will enhance the lives of young South Africans.



YOUNG PEOPLE AS DRIVERS OF POLICY DEVELOP- MENT

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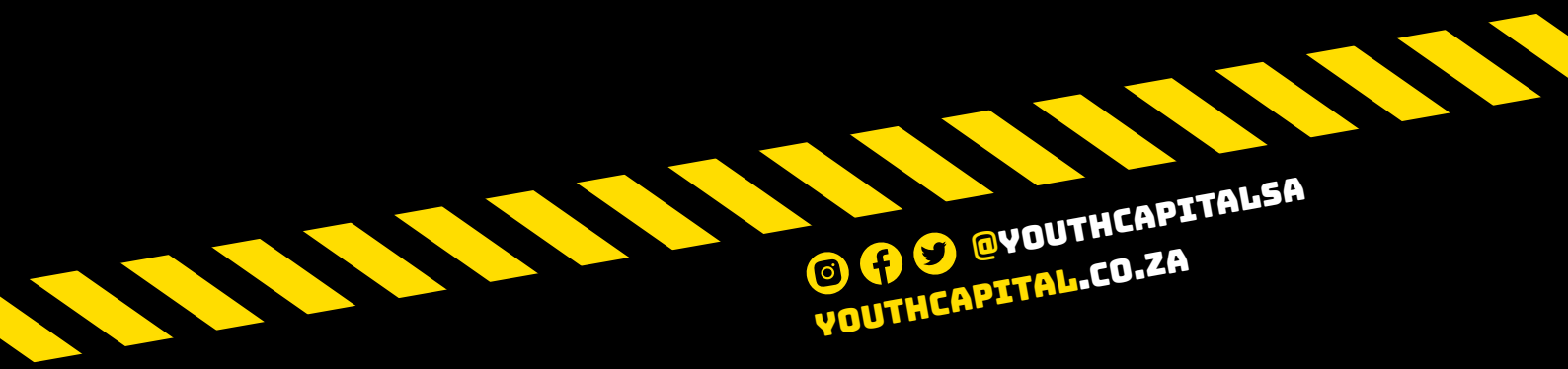
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