

The Matriculation Conundrum: Unemployment Crisis After Matric.

By Astrid Ayanda Sibindi

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Every matric learner in South Africa looks forward to completing school someday and be able to look for a job to provide basic needs for themselves. They are not aware that post-matric, there is a lot of pressure on young people trying to be placed and enrolled at a university or college. Much harder is finding a well-paying job that brings financial relief.

Life is hard for many school-leaving youth in South Africa. According to some records, at least 47.6% of young people who hold a matric do not have a job, while nearly half (44%) fall into the NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training) category.

“I thought my matric certificate would open doors for me in higher places of employment, but till today I am at home with nothing to offer,” said Ells Hamilton from Malvern High School, who matriculated last year.

“This is heartbreaking, knowing that you passed very well, and all you can do is drown as a couch potato. It is sad because it’s not that we are not trying to look for employment, but the opportunities are scarce, or even worse, we are told that we do not meet the requirements, we do not have the skills, or experience. We all thought that once you apply for a certain vacancy, you are shown the ropes on how you can do the job. Every vacancy requires one to have a ‘predominant’ obtained skill and experience, which recent matriculants do not have,” Continued Hamilton.

There has to be a national plan for new matriculants to draft them into employment, education, or training. Since we live in an economy that is very much stagnant, there is no chance that will happen.

There is a clear structural misalignment between school curricula and current industry requirements. “I matriculated in 2022 with hopes that I would find a job. It’s 2026, I am still rotting in my parents’ house,” said 21-year-old Junior Mboko. The youth are forced to find ways to deal with the high unemployment and find alternatives. Prolonged unemployment and being unemployable can have a detrimental impact on their mental health. It is easy to lose hope when a series of job applications go unanswered. Regardless of how much we try running away from the situation, we are faced with the fact of being unemployed still haunts them every single day.

Samantha Ndlovu reported that it took her about three years to find employment. Her contract only lasted one year and was not renewed. Even when young people find jobs, these are often short-term contract-based tenures, leading to renewals of unemployment when the terms end. This situation does not help reduce unemployment despite a boost in reportable statistics by the government, ostensibly showing that youth unemployment has dipped, for a period. This is now basically a structural issue.

Once students and other young people could occupy jobs in retail, especially as cashiers and till packers, in the hospitality industry as waiters/waitresses, those opportunities are gone, now filled by a more permanent staff as the South African economy continues to shed jobs.

Youth unemployment after matric is no longer a temporary crisis, it is a structural challenge requiring urgent reform. Aligning education with labour market needs, expanding

vocational training, and stimulating economic growth are critical steps toward ensuring that a matric certificate once again becomes a gateway to opportunity rather than a symbol of stalled ambition.

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