



VOICES UNITE
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
SUMMARY REPORT:

Top 10 Insights

November 2021





About this Report

This report summarises the **Top 10 Insights** that have come out of Voices Unite's first youth development report and is underpinned by the large-scale ongoing youth research that is being conducted through the Voices Unite platform, launched by In On Africa (IOA) in early 2020. The results contained within this report include detailed statistics and insights from the surveys conducted with **3,233 members** of the Voices Unite platform (all aged between 18-34) during the course of 2020.

The work being done by Voices Unite, including research through the Voices Unite platform (<https://app.voicesunite.co.za/>) and through the Voices Unite Foundation, is ongoing, and the results in this report therefore represent a snapshot of the perspectives and experience of Voices Unite members during the first year of the #VoicesUnite movement.

While IOA, the Voices Unite team and our partners believe that the information and insights contained herein are reliable, we do not make any warranties, expressed or implied, and assume no liability for reliance on or use of the information or opinions contained herein.

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INTRODUCTION

- Voices Unite was conceptualised by In On Africa (IOA) in 2017 and launched as a **game-changing digital youth research platform** in **February 2020**.
- Through this platform, Voices Unite conducts **ongoing youth-focused digital research as well as customised youth research for Voices Unite partners**, targeting youth in South Africa aged 18-34.
- As of early November 2021, Voices Unite has more than **6,000 youth members on the platform**, coupled with access to more than 50,000 youth through our consumer panel network for large-scale customised youth research.
- Since its launch, members of the Voices Unite platform have been completing a range of **detailed surveys, participating in online focus groups, and engaging through the Voices Unite online discussion forum**.



Voices Unite aims to inform data-driven decision-making at corporate, government, organisation and institutional levels through ongoing, meaningful youth research and engagement.

The Voices Unite ecosystem consists of:

- the **Research Platform** for ongoing research
- the **Insight Community** for custom research
- the **Non-Profit Foundation** for youth-focused impact projects

VOICES UNITE RESEARCH PLATFORM

The heart of the Voices Unite ecosystem, where members aged 18-34 engage on important topics, such as education, employment, healthcare, technology, finances, lifestyle and infrastructure.



VOICES UNITE INSIGHT COMMUNITY

A wide range of customised digital research offerings for partners and clients to guide their decision-making. These include focus groups, discussion forums, web surveys, insight missions, quick polls and more.

VOICES UNITE FOUNDATION

Where insights from the Voices Unite platform guide in-depth youth development research and projects with the aim of turning insights into action!



DATA COLLECTION

THREE STREAMS OF RESEARCH

The Voices Unite findings that are presented in this and other Voices Unite reports are drawn from data that is being collected across three research streams:



Data in the form of youth insights, experiences and perspectives are collected primarily via the **Voices Unite digital platform**, which houses seven purely quantitative research surveys of more than 500 questions in total.



In addition, Voices Unite members are encouraged to engage with each other on pertinent topics via the **Voices Unite discussion forum**, and the views of members through this forum offer important qualitative data to deepen the insights presented in the Voices Unite reports.



Voices Unite also conducts **online focus groups** with our student ambassadors, discussing and debating topics that are covered through the Voices Unite platform and guiding future areas of research.

INSTRUMENTATION

Detailed quantitative questionnaires have been implemented through the survey system on the Voices Unite platform. In addition to the demographics instrument, there are six topic-specific instruments disseminated through the platform. Each of the instruments have between 60 to 100 items (questions). These six instruments include:

- Education and Skills Development
- Employment, Entrepreneurship and Work Experience
- Finance
- Healthcare and Lifestyle
- Infrastructure
- Media and Technology

During the timeframe covered in this report, Voices Unite members participated in a total of 9,700 surveys. The Voices Unite digital platform is accessible to youth through digital devices such as smartphones and laptops. Members can complete the surveys over several months and respondents are incentivised via weekly competitions with rewards for lucky winners throughout the research process.

TOP 10 INSIGHTS:

What we have learned from the experiences and perceptions that have been shared by our youth Voices on the state of education, employment and entrepreneurship in South Africa.



“

*Voices Unite is the conversation
many generations have been
dreaming of having in spaces and
with people where it has great
potential to materialise.*

Siphesihle Tlisane
Student Ambassador
Voices Unite

”

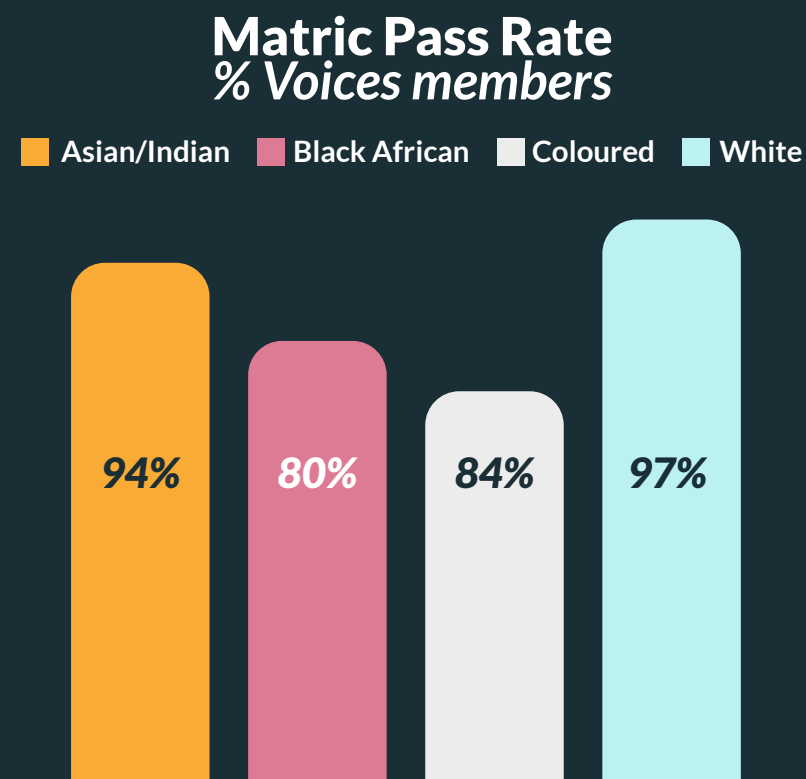
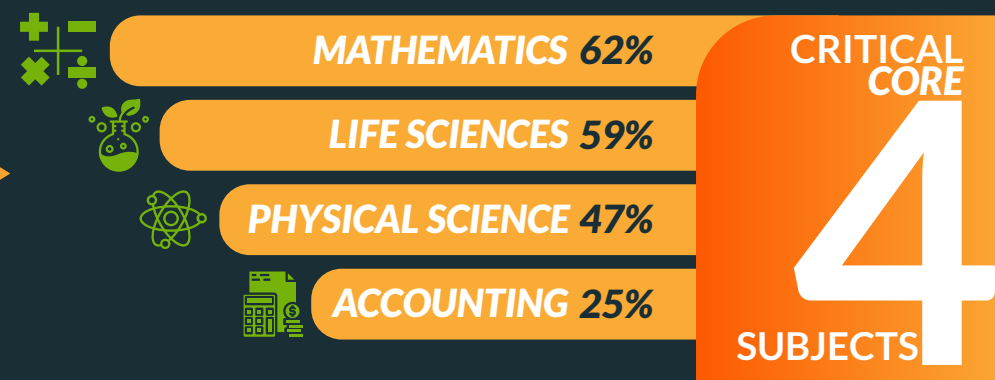


1. DECLINE OF CRITICAL 4 SUBJECTS

Despite South Africa investing a sizeable amount in basic education, a prescribed R225.1 billion in the 2021/22 budget, the state of education is still poor, particularly for the majority of Black Africans. Over the past years, there has been a general decline in enrolments in the critical STEM subjects.

Almost **1 in 5** Voices members (19%) who studied Matric Mathematics **did not pass**.

Less than half of Voices members studied **Physical Science (47%)** and **Accounting (25%)**.



This comparably low pass rate was driven by **20% of Black African** members failing.

To increase enrolment in critical subjects, a change is needed in the way these subjects are taught. Global trends in education show a number of ways to do this, including teaching STEM subjects in a manner that is inquiry and project-based – this will help learners build their own knowledge through solving real-world problems.





2. CAREER GUIDANCE IS NOT EMPHASISED



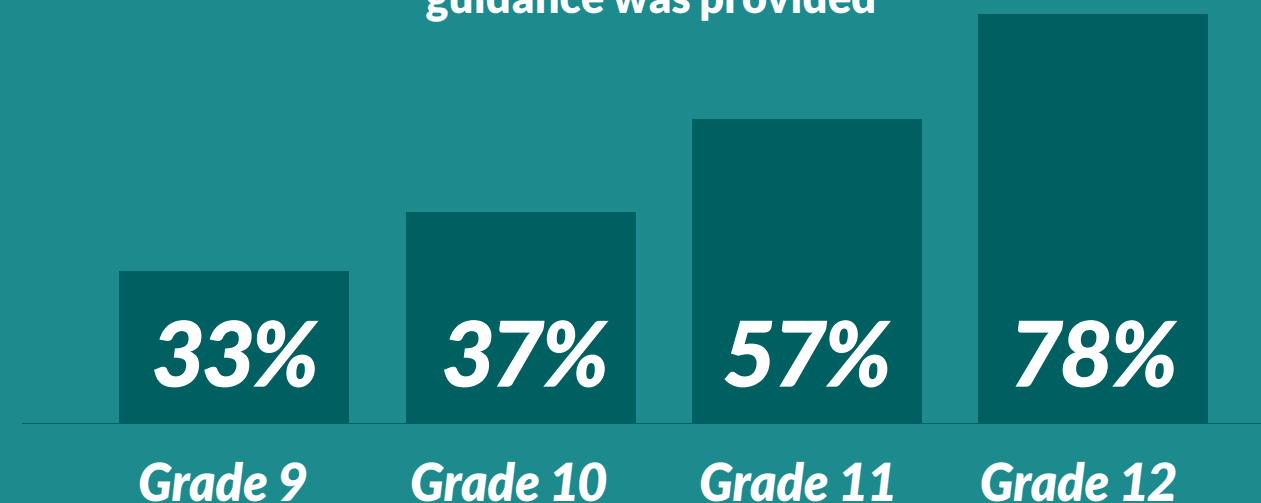
Our Voices Unite results indicate that career guidance is not emphasised enough to encourage and educate students on the respective job prospects after leaving school, directly impacting the views and ideas Grade 12 learners have regarding career choice. As a result, school leavers who qualify for post-school education often choose qualifications that they do not entirely understand or are passionate about.

At the time of their schooling, 49% of our members were not aware of career guidance opportunities in their high schools.



- Not aware of career guidance
- Aware of career guidance, but did not use it
- Used career guidance services

Grade in which career/academic guidance was provided



“

“What we also lacked was proper career guidance. I had to do that entirely on my own which was very overwhelming, especially when there are so many fields and career paths to choose from.”

Voices Unite Member, Female, 28 years old

”



In order to properly emphasise the importance of career guidance, schools need to first invest in qualified, trained career counsellors. These could be individuals who also hold teaching qualifications and can provide career advice to assist learners in making informed decisions when it comes to their future careers. In addition, career guidance needs to be provided as early as Grade 8 so that learners start thinking about their futures much earlier.





3. EMPHASISE THE IMPORTANCE OF BRIDGING COURSES

Just under half of Voices members are unaware of bridging courses for matriculants (44%), suggesting a lack of information about these courses.

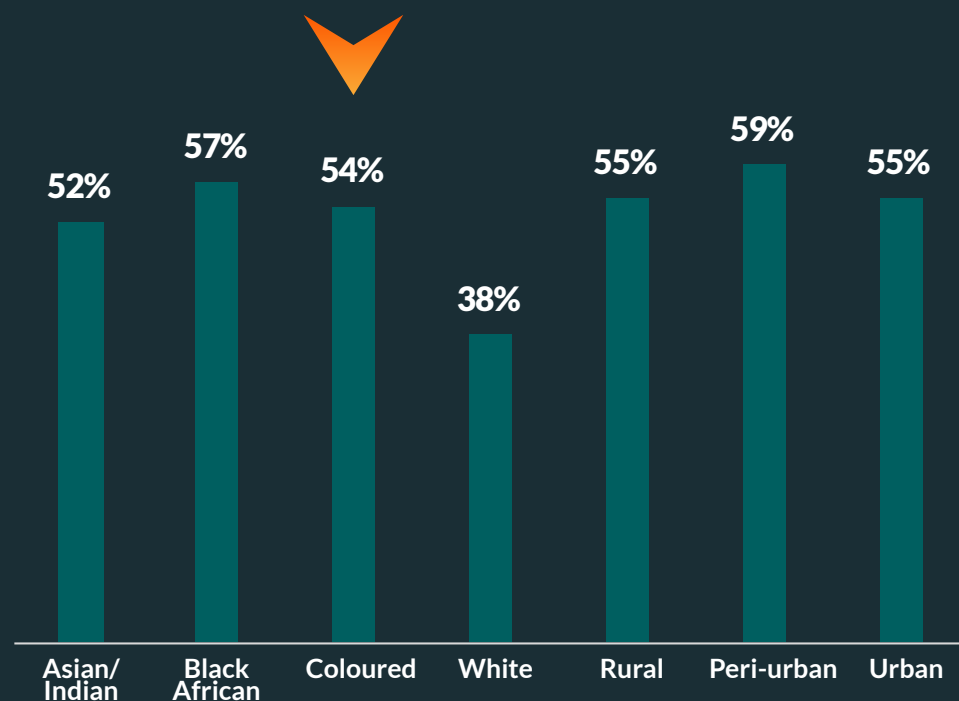


It is alarming that only 11% of our members have attended bridging courses, especially with the documented difficulties students experience when transiting from high school to post-school education.

56%

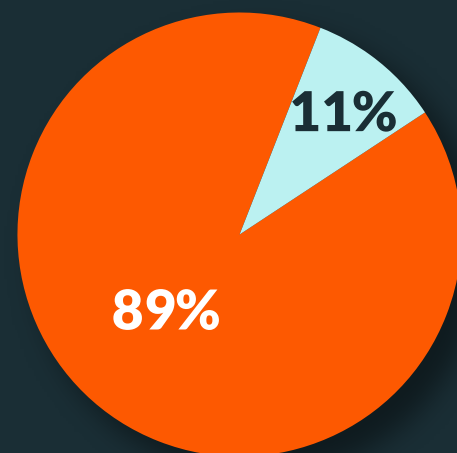
44%

Aware of bridging courses Not aware



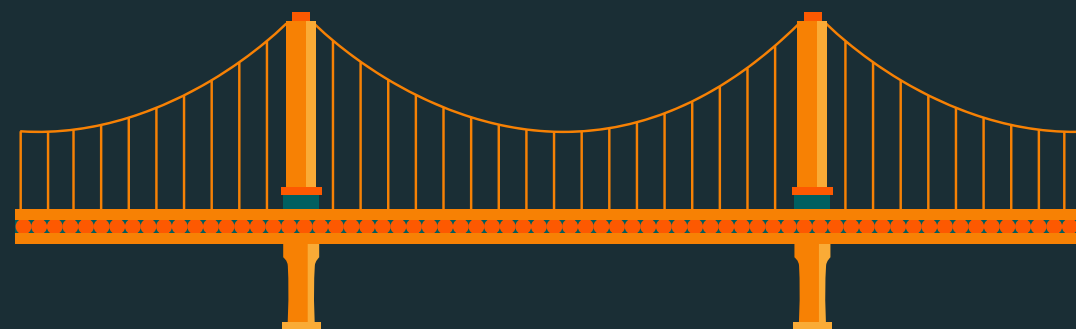
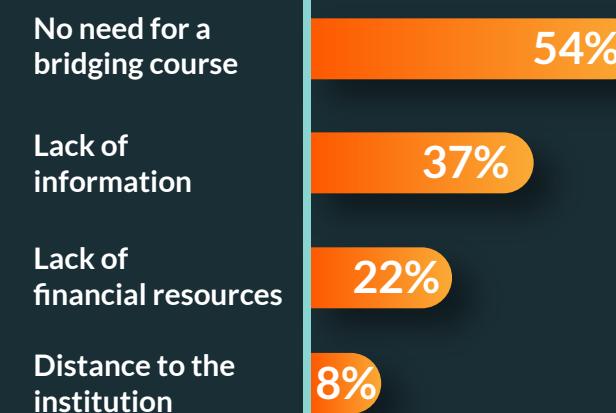
White Voices Unite members (38%) are the least aware of bridging courses.

Attended Bridging Courses



Attended a bridging course Did not attend

89% of members did not attend a bridging course – their reasons for this were:

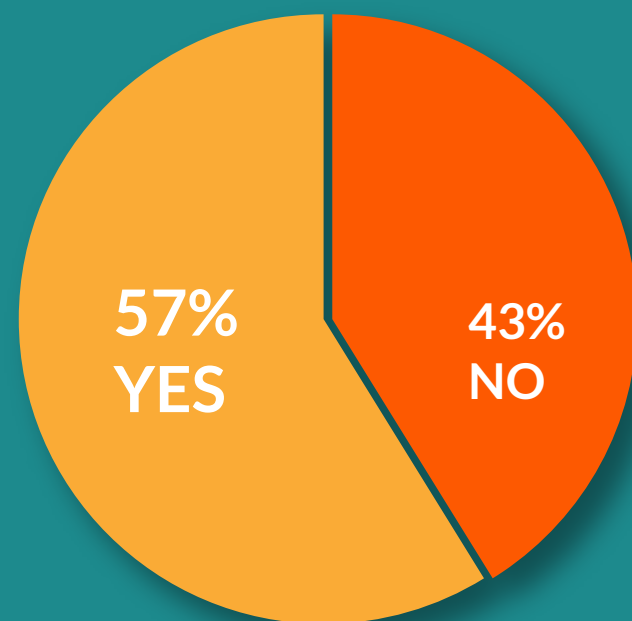


Teachers should not only encourage learners to produce excellent matric results but also teach them about the value of bridging courses. Presenting bridging courses as a second chance to improve their subject results also helps reduce the prevalence of mental illness that often affects matriculants.



4. YOUTH ARE NOT PREPARED FOR POST-SCHOOL

High school preparation for post-school education



- High school did not adequately prepare me for post-school education
- High school adequately prepared me for post-school education

Close to half (43%) of our members were not properly prepared for post-school education. In addition, 35% of our members found the transition into post-school education either **very or extremely difficult**, highest among Coloured members (47%) and lowest among Whites (16%).

How can high schools improve?

Many students struggle with the independence, increased workload and method of teaching that comes with being in post-school education. There is a need for programmes that can be implemented earlier on in high school that inform learners about the requirements of higher education, time management and how to identify the right career path.

11% 23% 31% 19% 16%

Not at all difficult Only a little difficult Somewhat difficult Very difficult Extremely difficult



RANK 1 Provide an earlier understanding of academic requirements

RANK 2 Offer more career/academic guidance (psychometric, personality tests)

RANK 3 Teach critical thinking and analytical skills early on

RANK 4 Assist with applying for funding

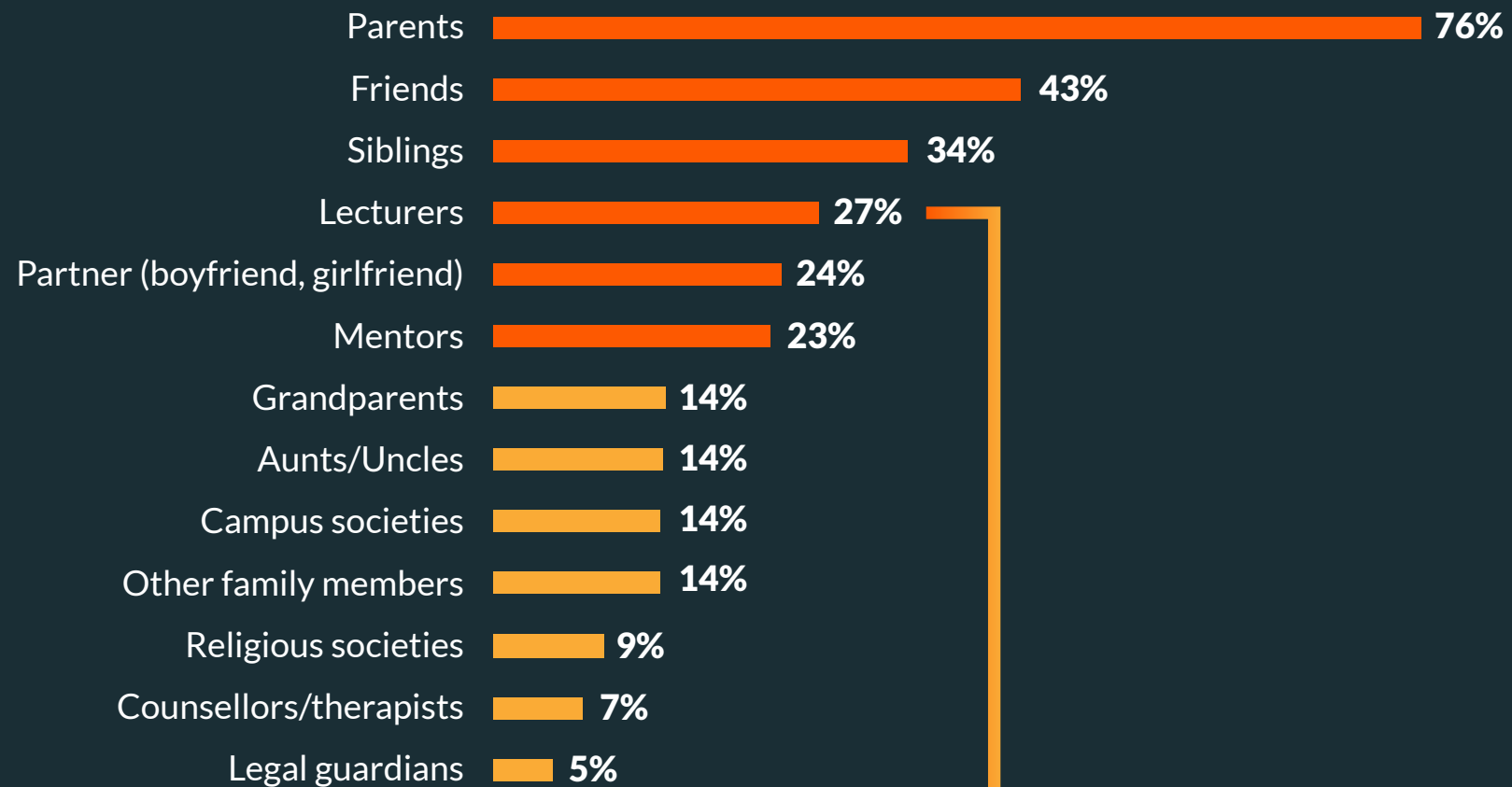
RANK 5 Offer a preparatory course for post-school education

RANK 6 Provide more lessons on financial literacy

RANK 7 Make last year of high school more challenging and rigorous

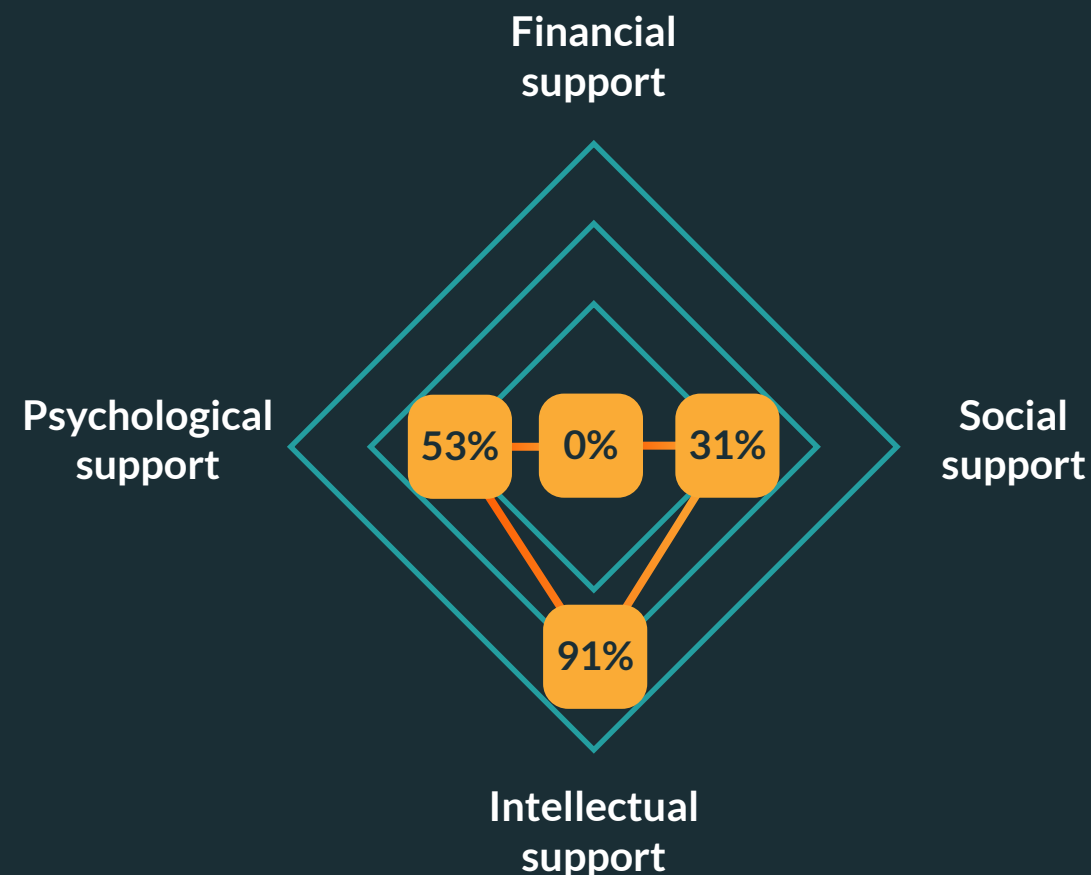
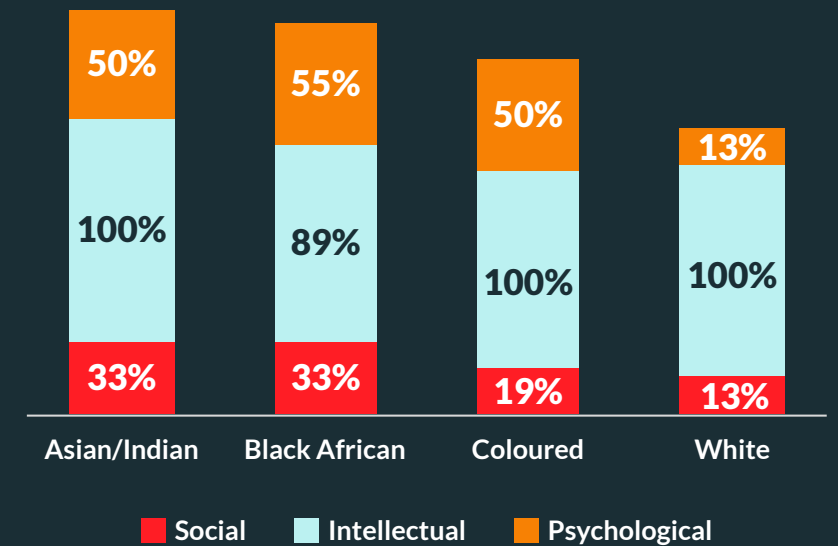


5. LECTURERS ARE A KEY SOURCE OF SUPPORT



Lecturers are the 4th most popular source of support in post-school studies, looked to by more than ¼ Voices Unite student members (27%).

Lecturers provide a substantial amount of intellectual support across all demographics, followed by psychological support. However, White members receive less psychological support than other race groups (13% vs 50-55%).



The rating of lecturers as the 4th largest source of support for post-school students is a surprising finding that came out of our research. Students are regularly looking to their lecturers as a source of support and there could therefore be value in equipping lecturers with additional training on the challenges faced by students in their transition into post-school education.





6. GRADUATES ARE NOT READY FOR WORK

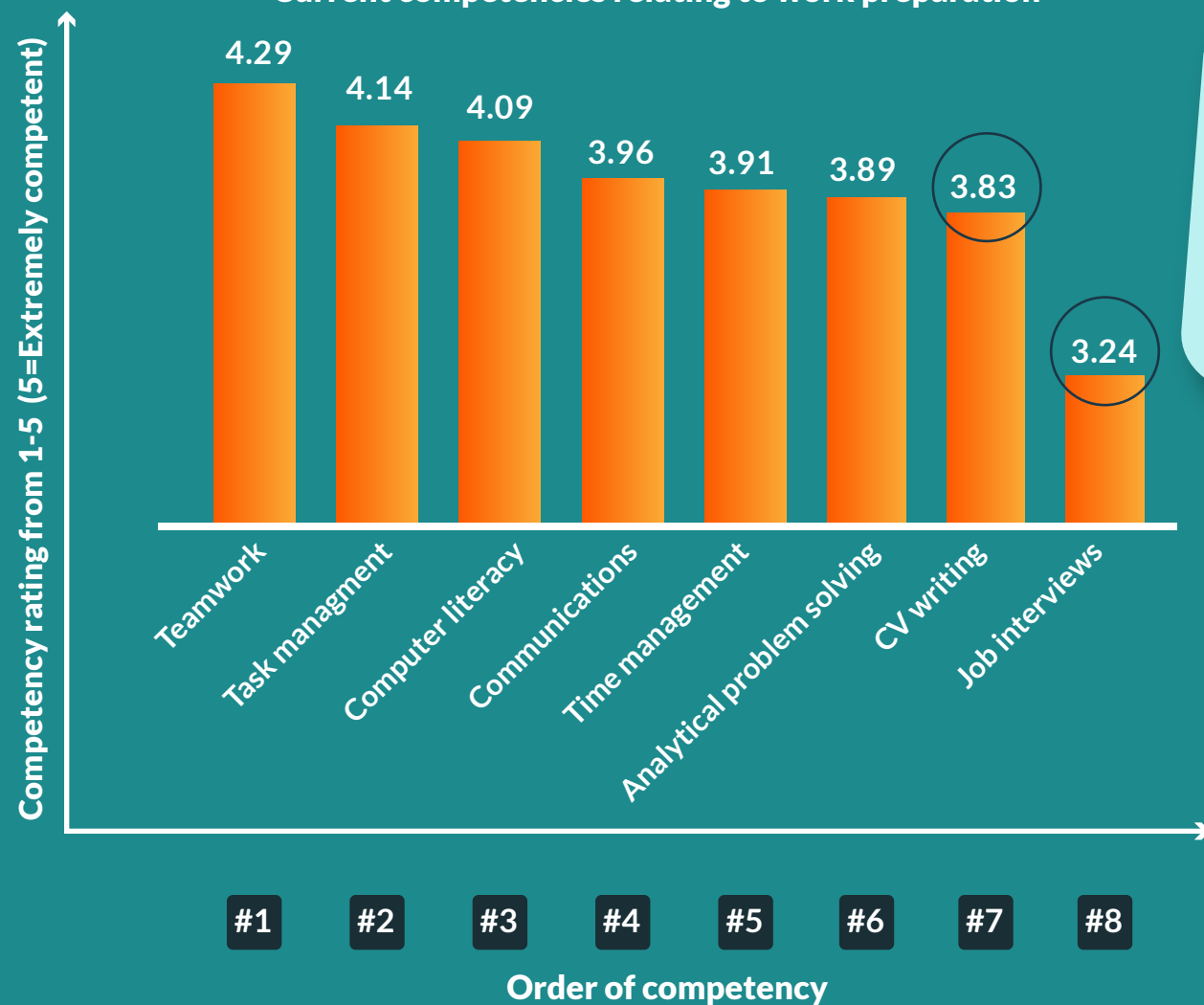
Although 95% of student members indicated that work readiness is an important part of post-school education, a much smaller percentage (57%) believe that this has been sufficiently emphasised.

Member rating of their work readiness



Just over half of our members (51%) are feeling quite or extremely work ready.

Current competencies relating to work preparation



CV writing and Job interviewing are skills needed to secure a position in the workplace, however, have the lowest competency rating.



These results demonstrate that students are not receiving the necessary skills they need, not only to succeed in the workplace but also just to successfully apply for a job after graduating. A lot of emphasis has been placed on the skills that graduates need once getting into the workplace, but basic skills like CV writing and interviewing skills have been relatively neglected. As a result, graduates applying for jobs do not know how to effectively market their skills, experience and academic achievements to potential employers.



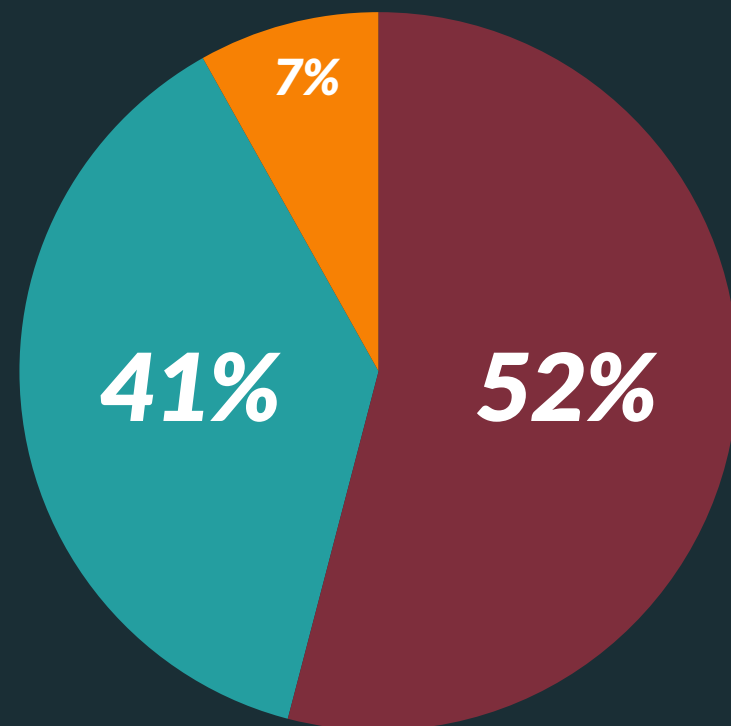
7. UNDERUSE OF EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES

Slightly more than half (52%) of our members are aware of the services offered by online employment platforms, with a higher proportion of Male member awareness than Female (59% vs 48%).

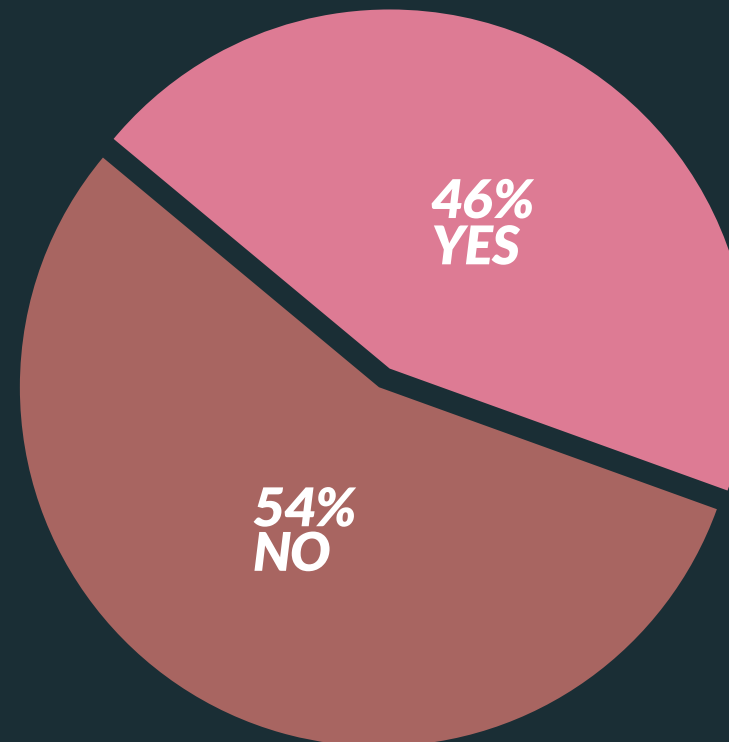
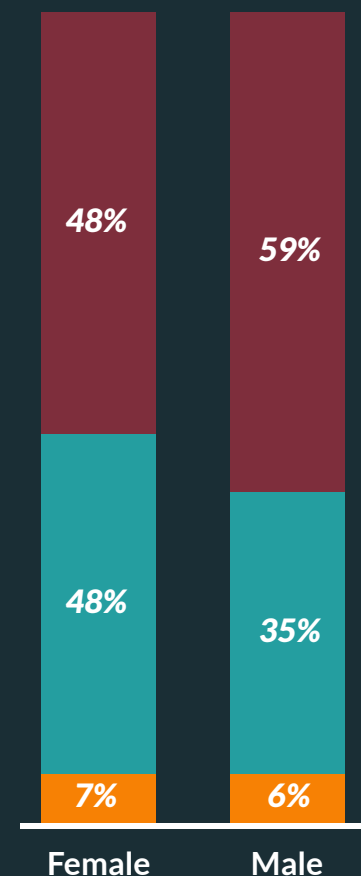


Just under half of our members (46%) have made use of online employment platforms

Employment agencies and platforms were created to connect talent with employers in tandem with assisting companies in finding the right person for open positions. However, as our results demonstrate, the services provided by these agencies and platforms are not properly understood, and resultantly, underutilised.



■ Aware of them
■ Not aware of them
■ I don't know



Our recommendation is for education institutions, corporates and government to work together to increase awareness of these platforms. These stakeholders should further collaborate to make such platforms easily available through making their websites zero-rated. Vodacom provides a great example of how this could be done. In 2016, the mobile service provider partnered with the country's most reputable career websites to launch the NXL LVL zero-rated career website. Vodacom SIM card holders are able to search for jobs, apply online and follow up on applications without using their data.

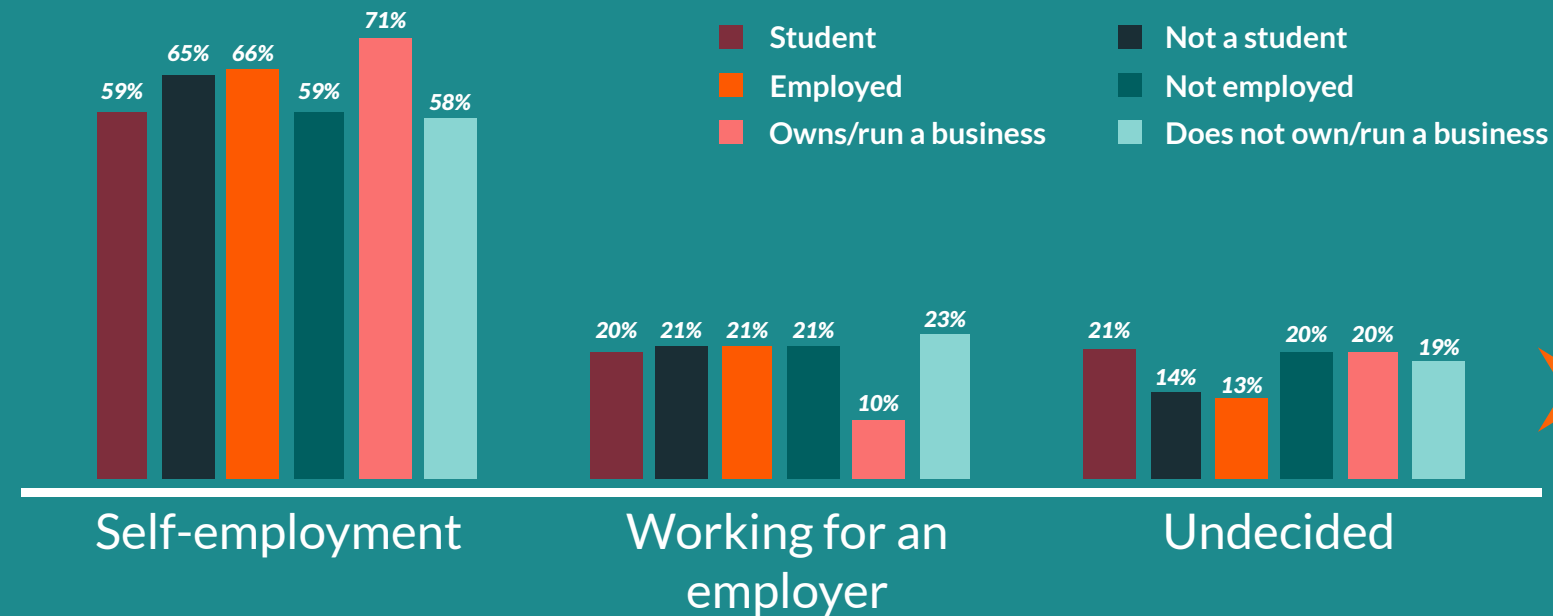




8. SELF-EMPLOYMENT IS THE FIRST CHOICE



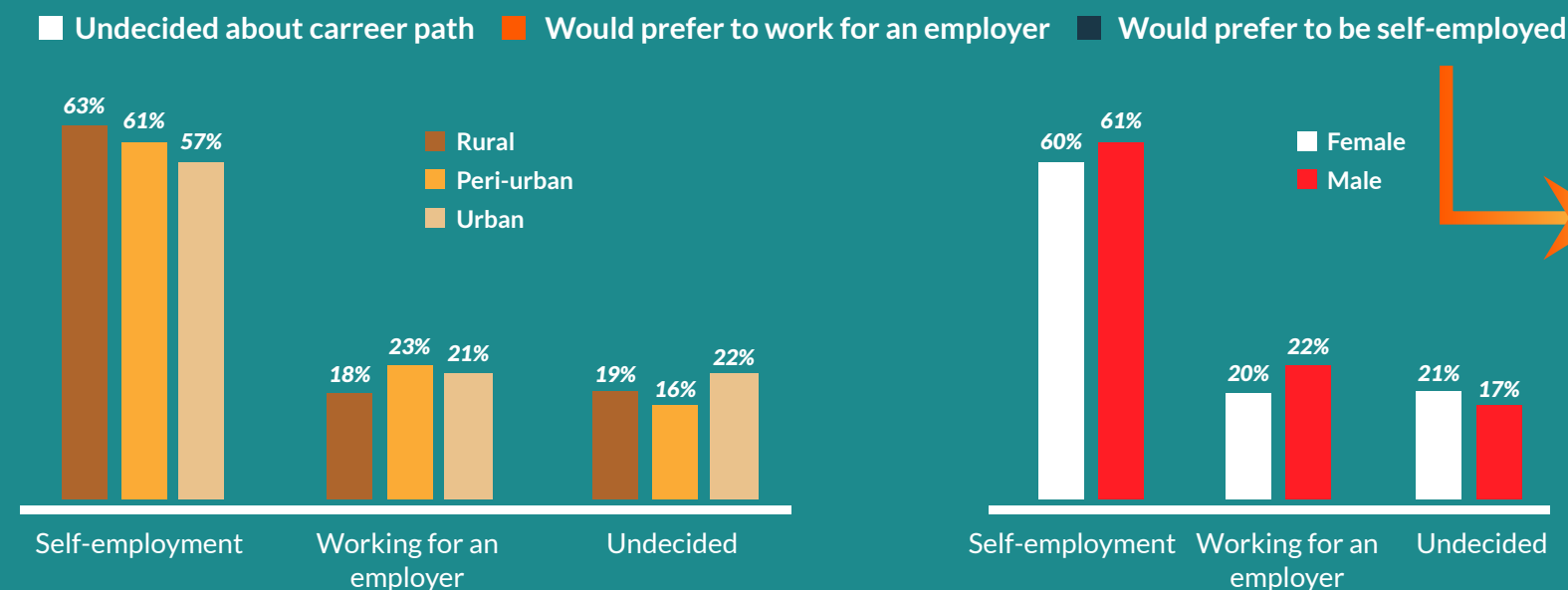
A large majority (60%) of members would ideally like to be self-employed.



Our findings support the growing trend in South Africa (and globally) towards self-employment through entrepreneurship and side-hustling. The pandemics of youth unemployment and more recently COVID-19 have further accelerated this shift, and Voices Unite members are clearly on board.



This is almost identical across gender, but differs across location, with rural-based members being more likely to pursue self-employment.



With the growing trend among youth towards entrepreneurship and side-hustling, there is a critical need for our education system (basic and post-school) to adjust accordingly. Considering the potential benefits that a culture of entrepreneurship can have on a country such as ours, providing youth with the necessary skills to succeed in self-employment is just as critical as preparing them for the 4IR.



9. PERCEPTIONS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP MISALIGNED

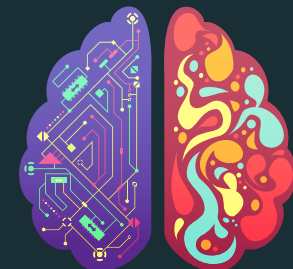


Entrepreneurship development has been identified as a key national priority in South Africa's efforts to address wide-spread youth unemployment. Despite this, when posed with four statements regarding the role of entrepreneurs, only 5% of Voices members selected "Entrepreneurs are key drivers of national growth and prosperity."

More than half (58%) of Voices Unite members agree with the statement that entrepreneurs are creative innovators.



#1
Entrepreneurs are creative innovators capable of creating, identifying and leveraging new opportunities



58%

#2
Entrepreneurs are skilled risk-takers who take responsibility for their own success and/or failure



25%

#3
Entrepreneurs are self-employed business people



13%

#4
Entrepreneurs are key drivers of national growth and prosperity



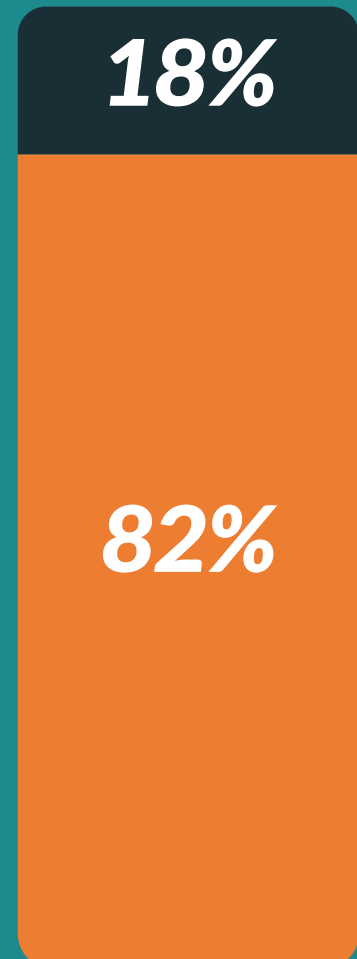
5%

We recommend a unified effort by government, corporates, non-profits and education institutions to position entrepreneurs as potential heroes in the story of a country in need of true champions. These efforts could include national marketing campaigns to highlight the importance of entrepreneurs and small businesses, public recognition of entrepreneurs who are making significant impacts in their communities, and the broad repositioning of what it means to be an entrepreneur.

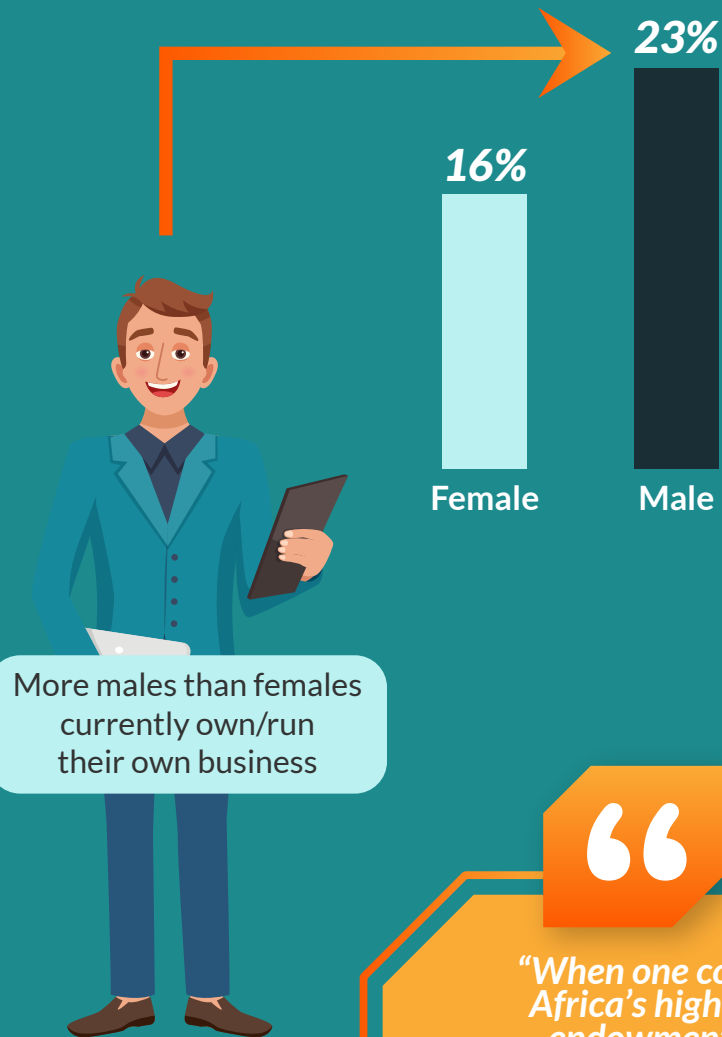


10. LACK OF FUNDING FOR YOUTH-LED BUSINESSES

Just under 1/5 of our members own/run some form of business.

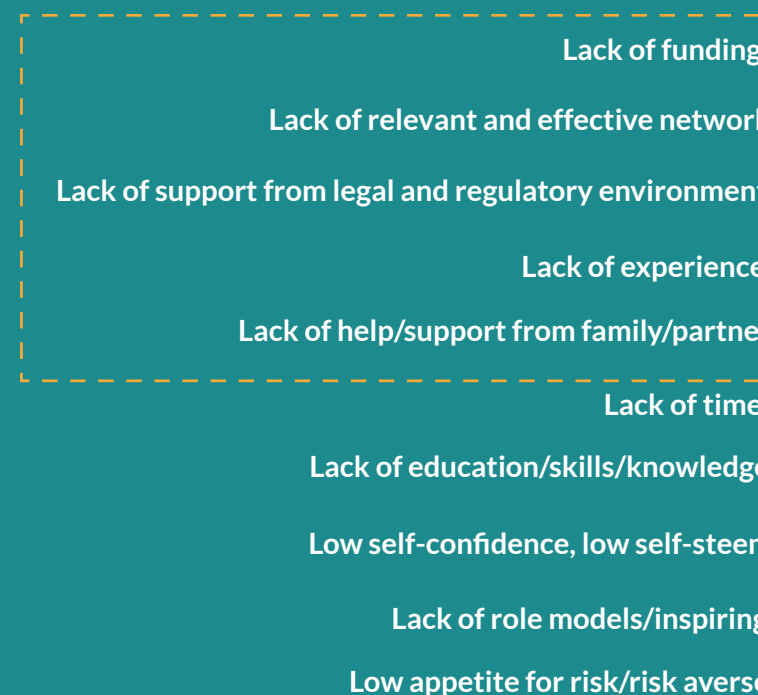


■ Own/run a business
■ Do not own/run a business

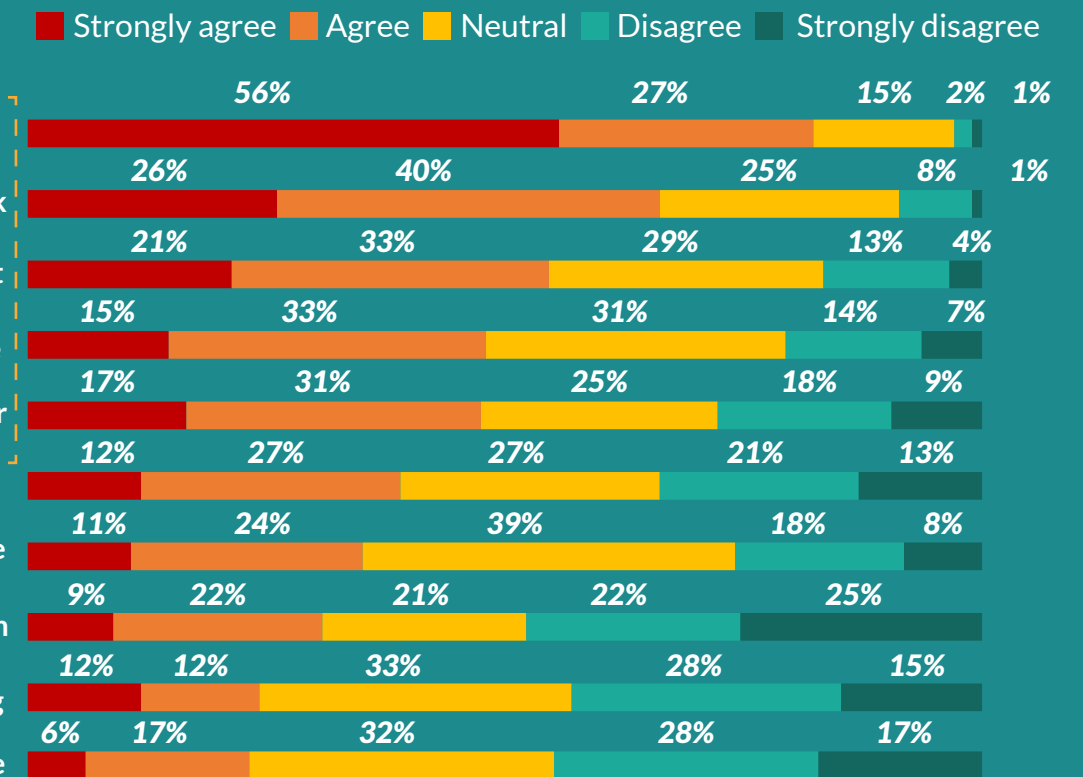


More males than females currently own/run their own business

In terms of barriers, the lack of funding is the top barrier encountered by entrepreneurs.



Top barriers encountered by entrepreneurs



“When one considers the fact that South Africa’s high youth unemployment is an endowment of the country’s structural unemployment challenge, entrepreneurship is vital to addressing the fundamental landscape of employment.”

Voices Unite Member, Male, 24 years old

Despite the large and growing interest in youth entrepreneurship and the potential positive contributions that entrepreneurs can offer to the South African economy and unemployment, the lack of available funding significantly limits the impact these budding businesses can have.



CONCLUSION

Although we at Voices Unite have been working on the plans and implementation of our Voices Unite 'ecosystem' since early 2017, the platform has only been live for just over a year (since February 2020). Our growth plans have been negatively impacted by COVID-19, particularly in relation to promoting Voices Unite at universities and colleges across the country. However, the team has persevered and innovated brilliantly, and we are proud of what has been achieved thus far. As of November 2021, our youth membership is over 6,000 and growing steadily. And we're only just getting started.

Our plans for the remainder of 2021 and going into 2022 revolve around exploring new avenues to access growth funding and sponsorships to help scale the Voices Unite platform locally and across the African continent. The Voices Unite Foundation, which was registered as a Non-Profit Company (NPC) in mid-2020, is well-positioned to begin actively working towards specific action plans outlined in the Voices Unite reports, and this is another key priority as we move forward.

Ongoing research to better understand youth views, interests, perspectives and experiences will always be at the very core of Voices Unite's objectives, and we will be expanding on these efforts, not only through the Voices Unite platform, but also via topic- and partner-specific research to better inform the decision-making of our institutional, non-profit, corporate and government partners. In this regard, the Voices Unite team is working on a number of exciting plans to enable Voices Unite members to directly engage with decision-makers, bringing their voices more truly and meaningfully into decision-making processes – particularly those that have an impact on the lives of young people.

These and other exciting plans will define the future of Voices Unite, and we will continue to work towards our vision to become the leader in youth research, youth engagement and youth-driven impact on the African continent.

JONATHAN MUNDELL
FOUNDER, VOICES UNITE





SAMPLE BREAKDOWN

3,233

Voices Unite MEMBERS

More than 4,000 youth in South Africa signed-up to the Voices Unite platform in 2020 and around 80% of members completed surveys during the course of the year. This report presents the results from a total sample of 3,233 Voices Unite members.



Female
66%

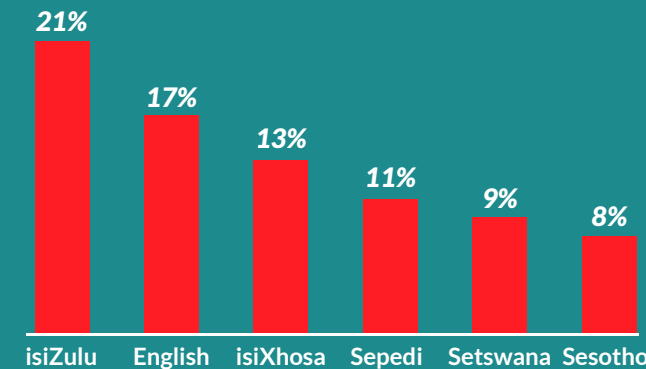


Male
32%

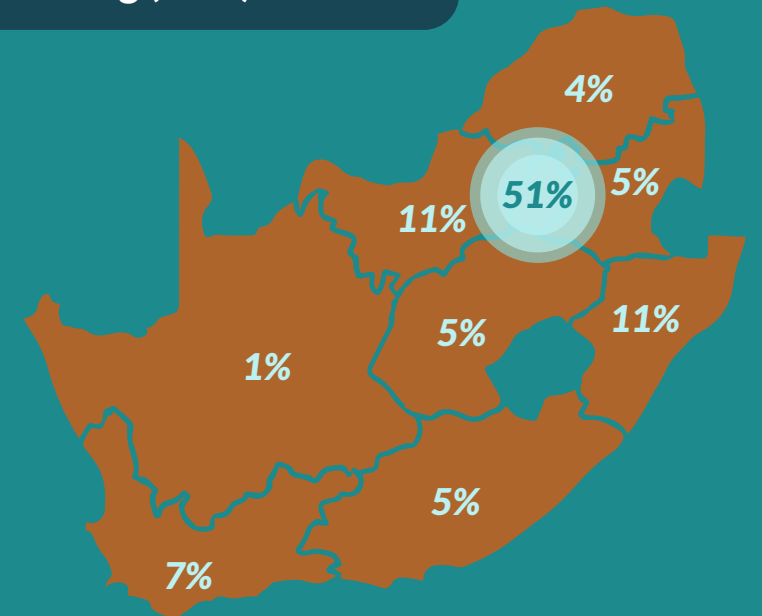


Intersex
1%

1/5 speak Zulu as their home language. English is the second most popular home language.



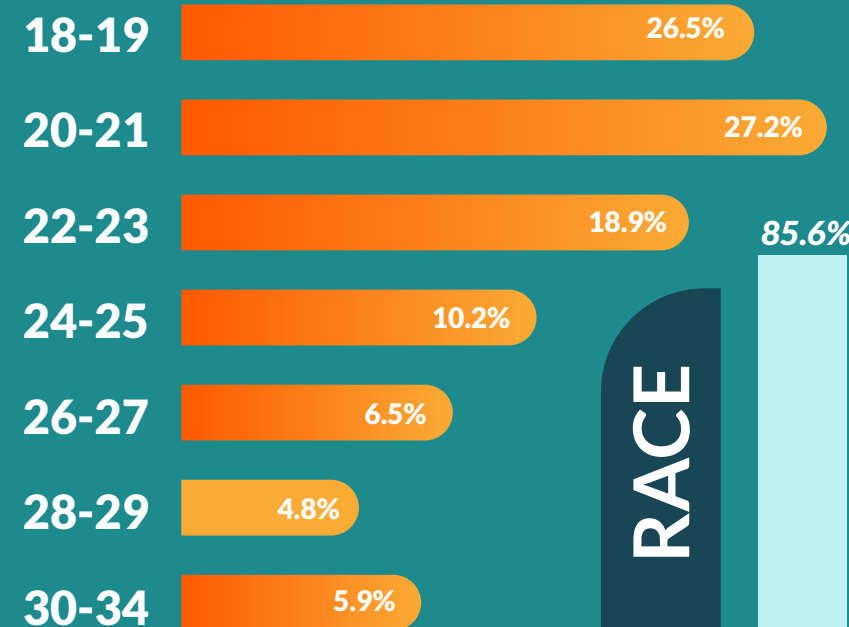
Slightly more than half of the members currently reside in Gauteng (51%).



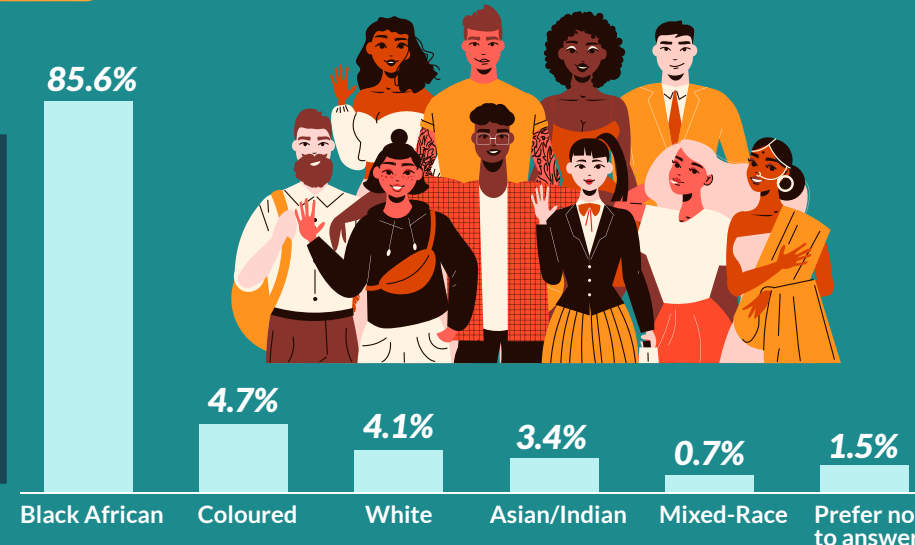
But 25% did not grow up in the province in which they currently reside...



AGE



RACE



Most of Voices Unite members (86%) are Black African, and just over half (52%) are aged 18-21 years old.



Country of Origin (Top 4)



93%
South Africa



3%
Zimbabwe



1%
DRC



1%
Nigeria



NEXT STEPS

HOW WILL WE SCALE VOICES UNITE LOCALLY AND ACROSS AFRICA?

Voices Unite has major plans to scale locally and across the African continent, with the aim of being the leader in youth research, youth engagement and youth-driven impact in Africa.



Scale across Africa

Phase 1 of Voices Unite has been rolled out in South Africa, with the aim to scale into Southern Africa and then the rest of the continent. The proof of concept in South Africa sets the stage for rollout in various other markets.

Scale the functionality of the platform

The Voices Unite team and partners have already conceptualised several future functions and services of the platform, such as youth recruitment services, bursary/funding information access, online youth counselling services, and skills development.

Scale to other youth segments

Phase 1 of Voices Unite has been rolled out in South Africa, with the aim to scale into Southern Africa and then the rest of the continent. The proof of concept in South Africa sets the stage for rollout in various other markets.

Scale the foundation

The Voices Unite Foundation has huge potential to use the research from the platform and panel to work with partners on a wide range of youth development initiatives, while also creating work opportunities for Voices Unite members.