



J O B J A C K

# THE 2026 JOB SEEKER REPORT

## The cost of trying

**The numbers in this report highlight the significant scale of the challenges job seekers face in South Africa.**

Behind these numbers are real people. People who are not asking for charity. They are looking for an opportunity to work, grow, and build a better life.

**1 July 2025 – 31 July 2026**

867,706 newly registered users | 5087 survey respondents

# Key findings from the Job Seeker Report

**1 in 132** of new sign-ups to JOBJACK during the reporting period were appointed

867,706 people registered on the JOBJACK platform over the period, looking for work and sending 4,919,035 applications between them. 6,566 of the candidates who signed up during the research period were appointed.

**11x** higher appointment rate for those with a work history

Whether someone has worked before is used as the single biggest predictor for getting hired.

**36.4%** of the unemployed candidates who did not attend an interview, had no money for transport

Transport is the highest cost for job searching. The cost of transport or the distance to travel is the most common reason unemployed respondents gave for missing an interview and nearly one in five unemployed respondents (18.9%) say distance or transport would make them turn down an offer.

**78%** of classified interview cancellation reasons by candidates were based on an obstacle, not a choice

Cancelling an interview is not a decision; it's an outcome from a set of circumstances.

**82.4%** of unemployed respondents chase growth (salary: 37.2%)

This is not a population chasing any job. The opportunity for growth in a place of work ranks above just earning a salary by a wide margin, for both employed and unemployed respondents.

**22.3%** of unemployed respondents used "hopeful" to describe job seeking

The resilience of the population is real, and it sits right alongside the strain of job seeking.

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# A note from our founder

Hello, good people of South Africa.

Yes, *good people*, because we have so many. South Africa is like a pressure cooker pot of potential, waiting to explode with growth.

If anything, this report has reconfirmed our belief that people have **hope, resilience, skills and potential**. **Most importantly, they are looking for growth.**

But unfortunately, that pot is full of holes so the pressure can't build.

We need to be critical about the barriers and perceptions around employment that are adding to the holes in our pot: People still need to print a CV to apply for a job. Print? In 2026? That's a hole. Then you still need transport to throw your CV into a box. Why are employers still enabling this method?

Then there is the cost around interviews; the first may be fair, but having to go to a second interview for a job that pays minimum wage becomes questionable. Having to submit a video for a minimum wage role (with what data?), hole. Job scams, a big hole, and hiring blindly by putting people into jobs at which they can't succeed...yet another hole.

***"This report is to show that there is a cost to not only trying to find a job, but staying within a job, because we are unknowingly adding to the barriers and perceptions of frontline employment."***

**Heine Bellingan**

*Co-founder and CEO of JOBJACK*

It's our responsibility as employers to fix the holes in the pressure cooker pot of SA's people potential.

Job seekers can't fix your hiring process; you have to fix it. At the end of the day, you don't build a business, you build people and people build a business. Invest in making sure every honest and hard working person in SA can afford to apply for your job opportunities. Invest in who you bring into your business, that they are the right person for the role, so we can build the leadership of tomorrow.

**There's more to it than just recruitment: When you invest in people, you invest in your business.**

## PART 1: WHO IS LOOKING?

**867,706** people  
registered on  
JOB JACK looking  
for **store-level work**

Who are they and where are they on their employment journey.

# Platform snapshot

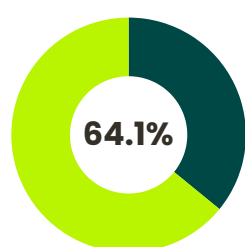
867,706 people signed up looking for store-level work between 1 July 2025 and 31 July 2026. This is what we know about their job seeking journey.

**867,706**  
people signed  
up on JOBJACK

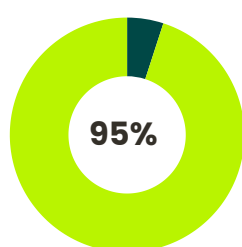
**4,919,035**  
applications sent

**1 in 132**  
of the sign ups  
were appointed

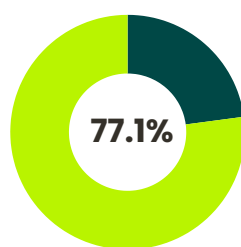
## Who are they?



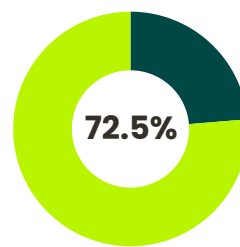
are women



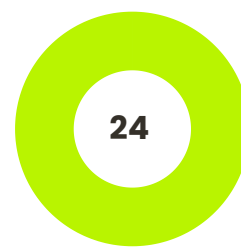
rely on public  
transport



have Matric



have worked  
before



median age

*\*Demographic fields are drawn from an optional profile step, answered by roughly four in five job seekers unless otherwise noted.*

## Why it matters

This is not simply a picture of unemployment. It is a picture of available talent: young people with Matric, work experience and a strong desire to work.

**Catering to this demographic from a recruitment perspective requires a mobile-first approach and internal progression planning to retain them.** The vast majority use public transport, which is a dependency and, in many cases, a barrier to getting to work. Taking this into consideration with interview and shift scheduling can enable better punctuality rates and limit employee turnover rates.

HR and talent leaders must take into account workplace safety mechanisms and gender-inclusive policies to broaden their talent pool to accommodate the high percentage of female job seekers.

# Survey snapshot

5087 responses were compiled from a voluntary survey sent to users who signed up on JOBJACK between 1 July 2025 to 31 July 2026.

Every respondent forked at the question: *Are you currently employed?*  
**These are the main findings from the questions asked.**

|                                                                            |  Unemployed |  Employed |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| How long does it take to find a job?                                       | 48.2% of respondents have been job searching for over a year                                 | 26.1% of the respondents took over a year to find a job                                      |
| Does the employer brand matter?                                            | 46.6% say yes, the employer brand does matter                                                | 65.3% say yes, the employer brand is a key factor                                            |
| What factors were important to them when deciding whether to accept a job? | 82.4% selected growth                                                                        | 74.3% selected growth                                                                        |
| What is their main mode of transport when looking for or getting to a job? | 28.5% walk while job seeking                                                                 | 13.2% walk to work                                                                           |
| Are they the main breadwinner or have no other income?                     | 42.2% have no other income at all                                                            | 63.5% are the sole earner in their household                                                 |

## Why it matters

**Employed or not, job seekers want the same thing: a chance to grow and build a better life, not just a place to work.** Growth was the top factor for both groups, and the employer behind the job matters most to people who already have a job.

That gives employers a reason to act: a job proposition built around growth, recruitment and onboarding designed around the person actually applying. The effort of trying cannot be underestimated. Nearly a third of unemployed job seekers walk while searching, and six in ten employed respondents are the sole earner in their household. Employers who can find ways to ease that physical and mental load, day after day, can make a real difference to whether people can stay and succeed. Challenges traditionally connected to job seeking alone do not disappear once you get hired.

## PART 2: WHAT WE FOUND

**Nearly 5 million  
applications,  
only 6 and a  
half thousand  
appointments**

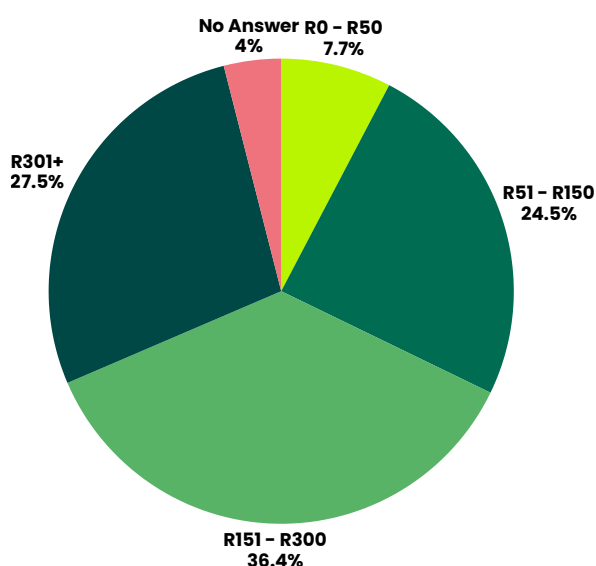
The challenges connected to job seeking do not disappear once they get hired.

# The cost of applying for a job

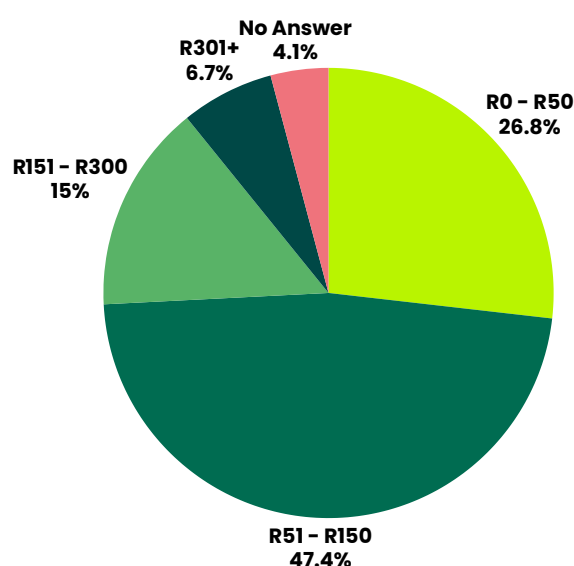
Spending money for the opportunity to earn money. Job seekers shared what they spend each month on data, transport for interviews, CV drop-offs and printing.

**R490** Average estimate spent each month on data, transport and printing combined just to look for a job

Transport spend



Printing spend



Among unemployed respondents, 62.4% spend between R51 - R300 on printing CVs and documents each month. Of unemployed respondents, more than four in ten report no income at all.

## Why it matters

**The cost of looking for work appears to be decreasing, but the data shows there is a large cost to look when earning nothing.**

A 2019 study by the [University of Johannesburg's Centre for Social Development in Africa](#) put the average monthly cost of job hunting at R938 and found that cost was a key reason some young people stopped looking at all.

In our measurement period, the average cost was R490. That is roughly half the earlier figure in nominal terms, and lower still once inflation is taken into account. This decline, while not precise, is consistent with what digital platforms set out to do: take out the printing, the travel to drop-off CVs and the data costs. Even so, R490 a month is a barrier.

Mobile-first and data lite platforms such as JOBJACK can lower the price of trying; they can't lower it to zero, as getting to an interview still costs money.

# The cost of getting to work

Before anyone can start their first day of work, there is a cost to getting there.

Among employed respondents, the daily commute itself is not the headline problem: **69.3% travel under 40 minutes, and 57.1% travel under 10km.** The cost of making that trip every day is a different story.

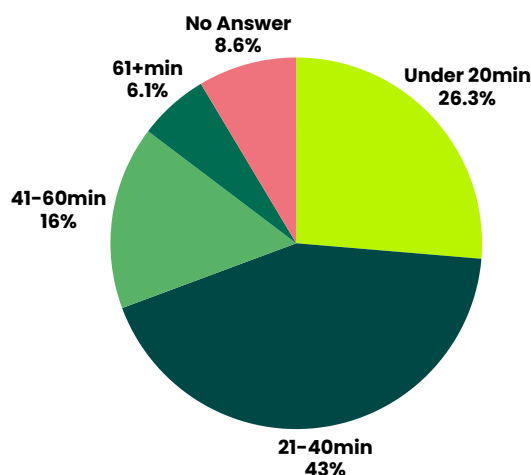
Minibus taxis are the dominant mode of transport for getting to work, used by 57.2% of employed respondents.

It is not that the journey is unreasonable; it is what the journey costs every working day, against an income that is often minimal to begin with.

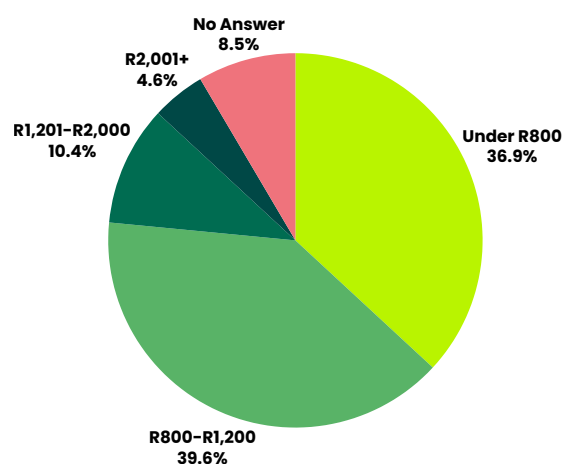
## How people get to work



## Commute time



## Monthly cost of transport to work



54.6% of employed respondents spend between R800 and R2001+ per month on transport alone to get to work and back.

## Why it matters

**With 73.8% of employed respondents earning no more than R6,500 a month and 54.6% spending between R800 and R2,001+ a month on transport, getting to work can cost anywhere from about 12% to almost a third of a salary or more.**

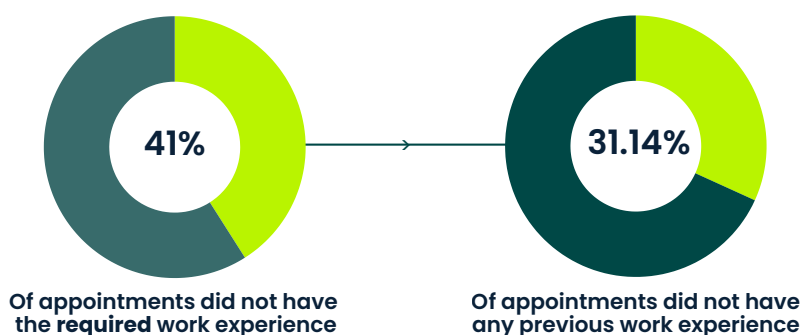
Paying this much to get to work works like a pay cut and it becomes a pressure point that can decide whether someone can afford to clock in. Hiring closer to where people live not only shortens the commute, it lowers the daily cost and takes some of that pressure off, which can mean fewer unplanned absences and abscondments, two of the most disruptive events for day-to-day operations.

# Previous work experience: Still the prized screening method for deciding who to hire

**11x** the appointment rate for job seekers who have worked before

Without proper screening tools, the job market is only able to screen based on what is on the CV in the form of work experience. Those without experience have a thinner profile and are excluded from the candidate pool based on the paper rather than the person.

Data published in 2026 by JOBJACK showed that, of the candidates employers appointed through the platform between Jan 1 – July 2026 into roles advertised as requiring prior experience, 41% did not have that experience, and of this cohort, 31% had no work history at all.



These appointments were made possible by using alternative screening methods that specifically look beyond what is just on a CV. JOBJACK's psychometric assessments measure a candidate's potential to perform well in a specific store-level role by looking at their natural skills and abilities. This evidence supports the need for a screening method to look beyond just work experience.

## Why it matters

Prior work experience is the largest differentiator in the JOBJACK platform data. Part of what forms the 11x gap is legibility, as an empty CV gives an employer very little to make a decision on. This recurring gap can also point to another emerging issue: If experienced workers are the majority being hired again and again, and many of them move on for a better offer, then employers are drawing on the same pool and competing for the same people. This comes up in a job's filtering questions around requirements quite often, i.e. *Have you worked at X restaurant group?* Candidates who meet the requirements but not the exact filter miss out.

**The data suggests what retains people is growth. 74.3% of employed respondents rated "growth opportunities" as important when deciding whether to accept a job.** Employers who offer growth give new hires fewer reasons to leave and reduce their need to compete for the same workers, opening the business up to a wider talent pool.

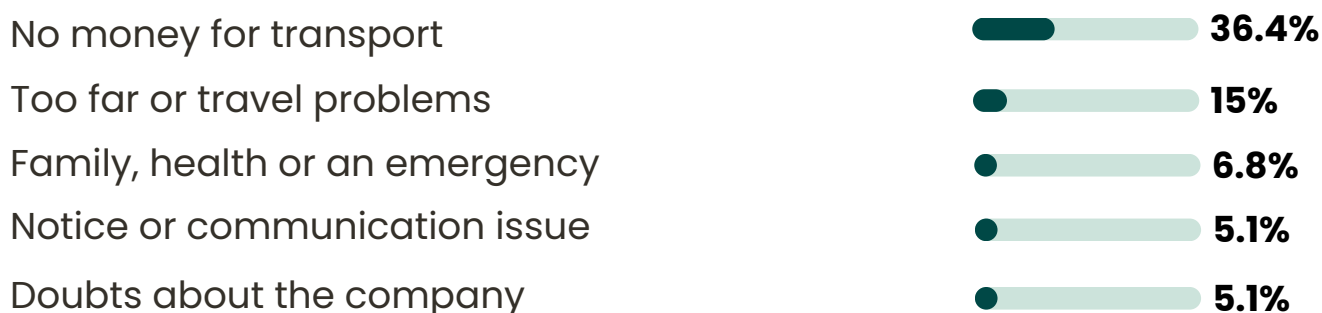
# Why candidates cancel an interview before it happens

Getting an opportunity for an interview should be considered progress, not another barrier to getting a job. Of the interviews cancelled by job seekers, we classified them into several themes.

**8.7% of unemployed survey respondents admitted to accepting an interview and not attending.**

“*It's because it was far and the basic salary was too small to accommodate me on grocery and transportation.*”  
—Survey respondent

## Why candidates are not attending interviews



## Why it matters

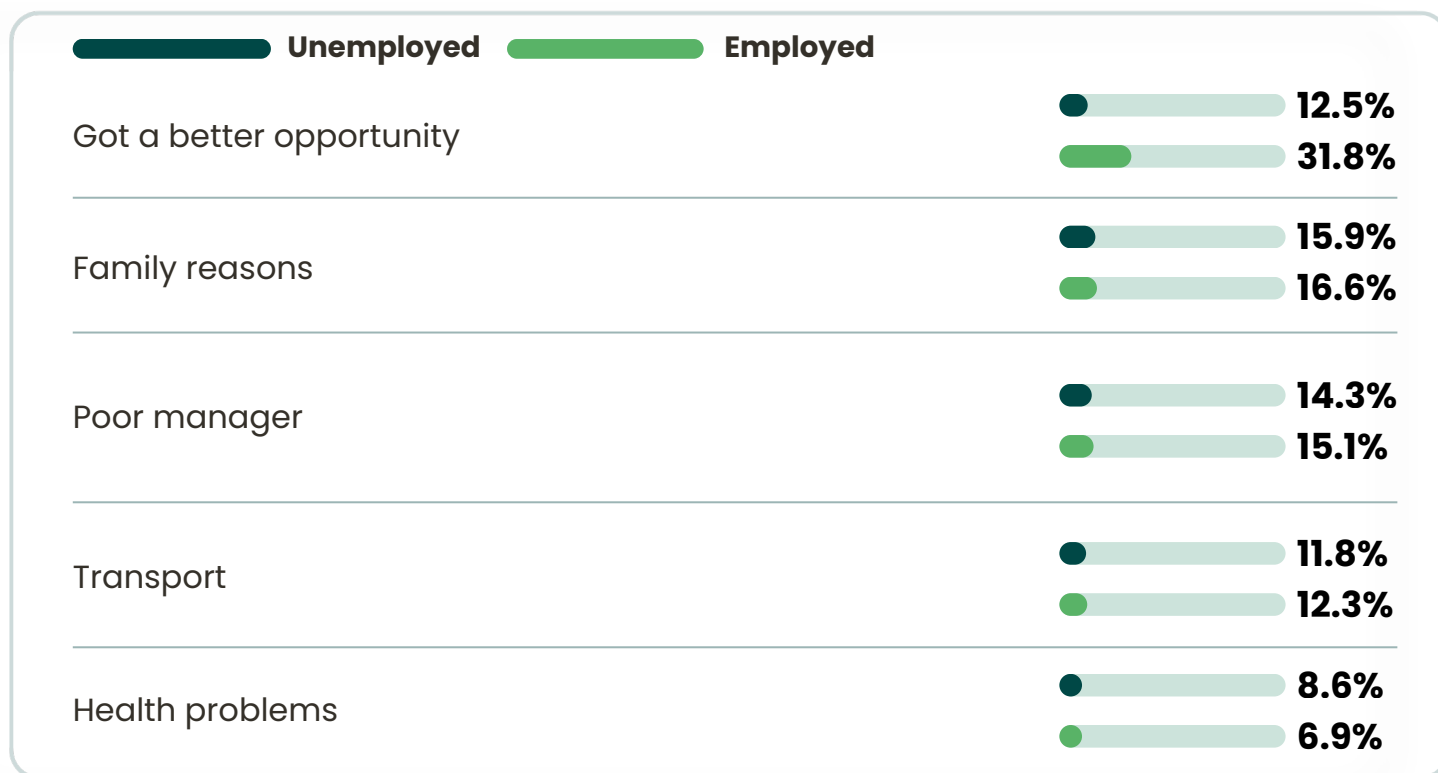
**Barriers don't pause for an interview. A missed interview is usually read as an unreliable candidate, but the data points to a different reality.**

Among unemployed survey respondents who admitted to *missing an interview*, 36.4% had no money for transport, and of 3,569 *cancelled interviews*, 46% of the classified reasons were related to life circumstances or cost.

So what can businesses do? They can send a confirmation message that asks, “*Can you get here?*”, that turns a potential cancellation or non-attendance into a problem they can plan around and gives the candidate a chance to be considered for the role instead of being penalised for their circumstances.

# Leaving a job

Employed and unemployed respondents were asked why they left their previous job. The two groups differ in one way more than any other.



Employed respondents are far more likely to have left a job because a better one came along: 31.8%, against 12.5% of the unemployed respondents.

Unemployed respondents still left when they had a job to leave, for largely the same practical reasons on both sides (family, management, transport, health) but without the safety of having a different opportunity lined up.

## Why it matters

### Work experience is the trading commodity for future growth.

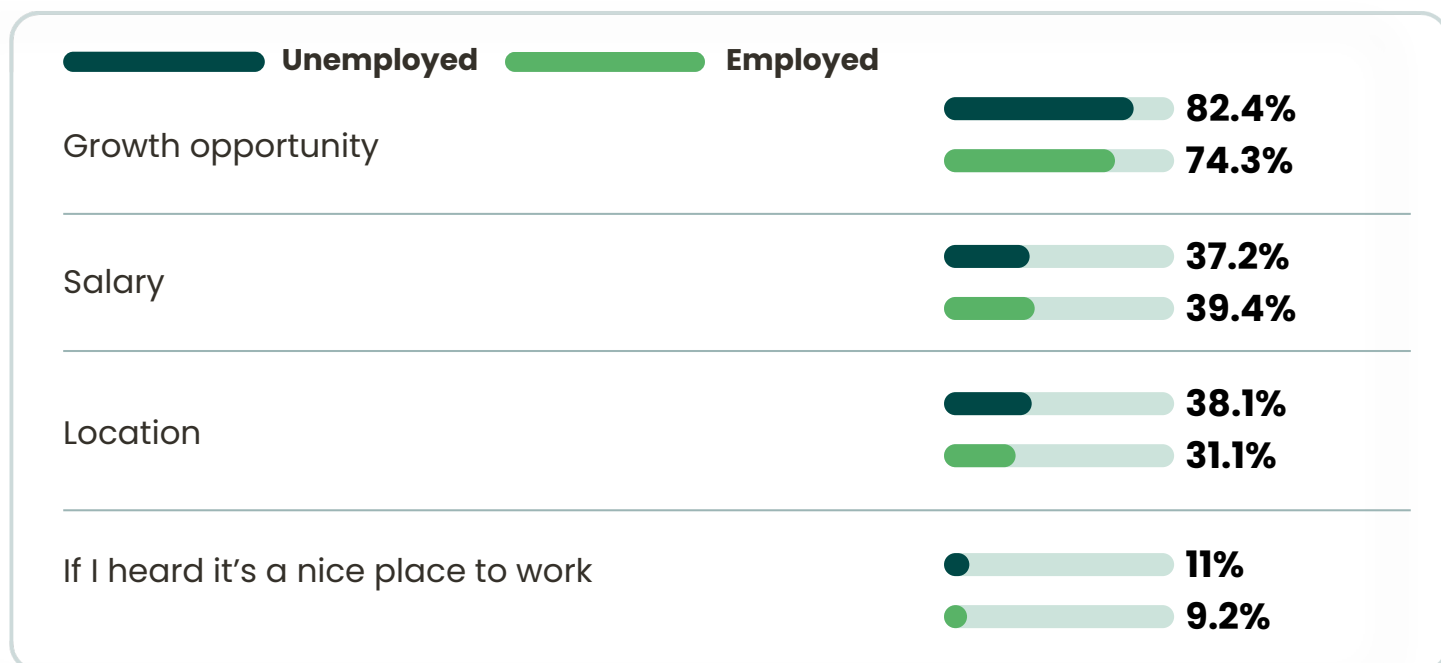
It's what lets people move into a better role.

The job market's preference for experience is clear in who gets appointed: We know now that candidates with a work record are appointed at 11 times the rate of those without. That creates a catch-22, because the best way to get experience is to land a first job.

By investing in reliable tools that allow you to screen for signals broader than what is just on a CV, and by extension just work experience, employers have the opportunity to identify more candidates suited for a role and offer them an actual pathway to growth. The payoff is a pipeline of people who start with you, grow with you and have a reason to stay, instead of competing for experienced workers who leave for the next offer.

# What keeps people going

Growth is what this population is aiming for, well ahead of salary, and this hardly shifts whether someone currently is employed or not.



The data does not read as a population that will just take anything. It reads as a population selecting for where a job leads, even when the choices on the table are thin.

## Why it matters

### People are looking for growth.

82.4% of unemployed and 74.3% of employed respondents said they are looking for growth opportunities in a job. For employers, that makes the employer value proposition a transparent job spec and visible training as part of retention as well as attraction. People want to know what the role is and where it leads; that matters where churn is high.

**In more than 150 demo calls with prospects, the average self-reported annual churn for frontline staff was 40%.** Our report data shows that 31.8% of employed respondents left their last job for a better opportunity. Even in an entry-level role, it is something an employer can control.

## PART 3: PEOPLE STORIES

**A population  
focused on growth,  
not just their  
next job**

# How job seeking feels

When asked to describe job seeking in their own words, many reached for hope alongside the strain, and one in five did so in the same answer.

**58.4%**

used at least one  
negative word

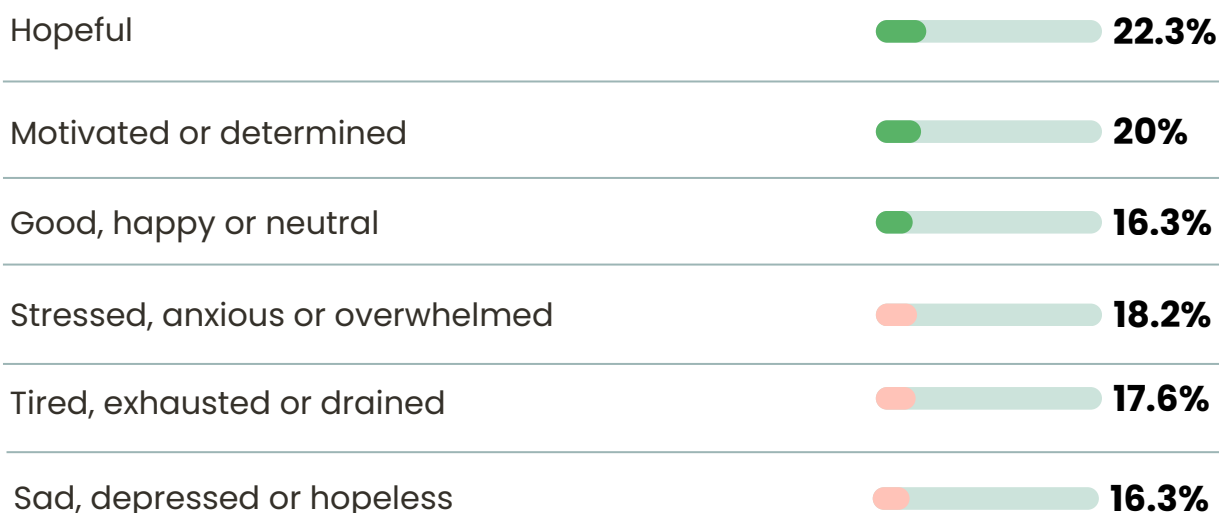
**44.7%**

used at least  
one positive word

**19%**

used both in the  
same answer

## How people feel about job seeking



“

*“Job seeking makes me feel nervous and motivated. Sometimes it is stressful to Apply and don't get a response but it's also motivating me to keep improving my Cv.”*

—Survey respondent

”

## Why it matters

**The resilience of the job seeking population represented in this report is very real and goes hand in hand with the immense strain that comes with looking for a job**, not only to grow but also to put food on the table for their families.

There are many well-documented structural barriers to job seeking, with many corroborated in this report. Despite these, the job seekers adapt by using zero-rated platforms to remain actively seeking for longer, localising their search radius to mitigate transport needs and maintaining their psychological resilience by participating and aiding each other through digital peer groups and interactions.

# What people shared

## How does job seeking make you feel?

“

*It makes me feel **drained but motivated** at the same time to keep seeking for some opportunities.*

–Survey respondent

*Tired but I keep pushing because **at the end of the day I need job.***

–Survey respondent

*Job seeking is **a emotional rollercoaster and its completely normal, ups and downs, anxious, frustrated, small and doubting myself.***

–Survey respondent

*It makes me determined. I know it is not easy to find a job, but it pushes me to **work harder** to keep learning until I get an opportunity.*

–Survey respondent

*Motivated to never give up, **better days are ahead.***

–Survey respondent

”

## What keeps you motivated?

“

*Each application teaches me something, how to write my cv better, what employers in east london are actually looking for, how to answer that interview question. I'm not starting from zero each time, I'm getting sharper. **One yes changes everything.***

–Survey respondent

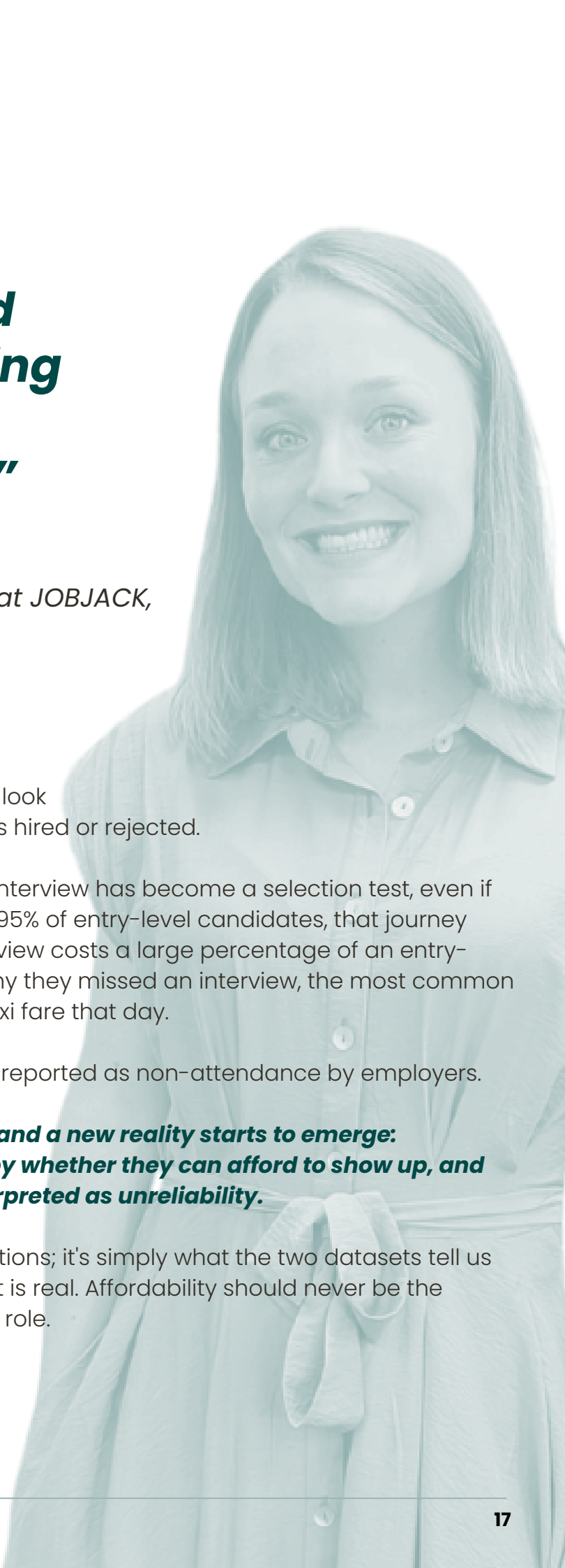
*It's that I **get my experience for future purposes and chances are possibly high for the employers to hire me again in the coming season.***

–Survey respondent

***I wanna stand up for myself and take care of my family.***

–Survey respondent

”



## ***“Affordability should never be the screening test for someone's suitability for a role.”***

**Ashleigh Nel**

*Head of Research and Development at JOBJACK,  
Registered Industrial Psychologist*

When we look at recruitment data, we often look for the things that explain why someone was hired or rejected.

One of the most striking findings is that the interview has become a selection test, even if that is not the intention, simply because for 95% of entry-level candidates, that journey involves public transport. Getting to an interview costs a large percentage of an entry-level wage, and when we ask candidates why they missed an interview, the most common answer is that they simply didn't have the taxi fare that day.

At the same time, 13.1% of all interviews were reported as non-attendance by employers.

***Put those two datasets next to each other and a new reality starts to emerge: Candidates are essentially being filtered by whether they can afford to show up, and when they don't, that absence can be interpreted as unreliability.***

That isn't a judgement about anyone's intentions; it's simply what the two datasets tell us when we put them together, and the impact is real. Affordability should never be the screening test for someone's suitability for a role.

The second area that deserves a closer look is work experience.

Work experience is an understandable default in recruitment. It is easy to identify on a CV and can provide a useful indication of someone's previous exposure to a role or working environment. But when we use it as a method for potential, we risk screening out more than a quarter of the available talent before considering what might actually predict their future performance. The data shows that without work experience, your chances of being given an opportunity drastically decrease, and it turns into a cycle because you can't get experience without being given a chance at it.

What is surprising is that 82.6% of job seekers under 24 have already worked. So “young” doesn't necessarily mean inexperienced.

***What we're seeing is a mismatch between the way we define experience and the actual experience that exists within the workforce and that mismatch can lead to a misfit. The full picture of the talent pool is not considered when making selection decisions.***

A small, historic component of an applicant's resume is used as the full story of what potential lies ahead. But looking back doesn't tell you what is ahead. So why do we do that with recruitment?

Something that gives me hope for the future of South Africa's workforce is resilience and future-mindedness that will make up the next generation of leaders. 82.4% of unemployed respondents (and 74.3% of employed) said growth opportunity matters to them, against 37.2% for salary, and that holds whether they're currently working or not. Among employed respondents, the most common reason for leaving a job was a better opportunity, not unhappiness.

The truth is that growth doesn't start at onboarding. By the time someone arrives for their first day, some of the most important decisions have already been made: whether they could afford to reach the opportunity, whether they were screened out based on a proxy, and whether they could see a reason to stay and grow. The people making those decisions today are also shaping the workforce of tomorrow.

Your entry-level intake isn't simply a group of people you staff and move on from. It is the population from which your future supervisors, team leaders and store managers may come.

***Every selection decision is therefore two decisions: Who can perform in this role today and whom are we allowing to become a leader tomorrow. The data suggests we need to be much more deliberate about both.***

# Whether you lead a business, a function or a team, this report helps you understand where the job seekers are coming from

## For the **CEO**

Use this report to ask what is standing between your people and the best candidates, and what you can clear out of the way. This is your future supervisory talent. Fairness and accessibility here aren't ESG line items; they're the quality of the pipeline you'll promote from. Your future leaders are dependent on how you structure, build and focus on accessing and appointing the right people.

## For the **CHRO**

Attracting and retaining talent is one of the key tasks for HR, and frontline talent is no less important than head office talent. Use this report to shape how your employer brand shows up by understanding how job seekers experience the search, what shakes their confidence, and what keeps them going. It gives you a clear picture of the people you're trying to attract and retain, and of what the early moments of the relationship say about your culture.

## For the **COO**

COOs and HR leaders should be in lockstep regarding the human capital brought into a business. It's people who drive operational efficiencies and enable business leaders to plan effectively based on the realities of the floor. Use this report to look at what sits behind early exits, lost shifts, unstable stores and no-shows. Attendance failures are logistics failures. Interview locally, cluster slots, first round by phone. A low attendance rate is not an immediate indicator of unreliability.

## For the **TA Leader**

The overarching theme of the report's data is that the cost of looking for a job is a barrier that removes talent from consideration. Use this report to inform your operational roadmap on how you can accommodate the economic reality of job seekers, not only improving their experience with your brand but also opening you to a larger talent pool. The differentiator you can offer as an employer is a visible path to growth. Transparency allows the applicant to see a future they want to buy into. And to take ownership of it.

# Methodology

This report focuses only on the findings from a cohort of 867,706 new users who registered on JOBJACK between 1 July 2025 and 31 July 2026 and their job seeking journey over this period.

The 2026 Job Seeker Report draws on two separate evidence bases, using a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to strengthen the evidence.



## Platform data

People who have registered a profile on the JOBJACK platform 867,706

The period under review 1 July 2025 to 31 July 2026

*The behaviour that the system logged for every person who registered a profile on JOBJACK during the stated period. Outcomes were recorded on the extract date. No questions were asked of this cohort.*



## Job seeker survey

Respondents from a survey sent to a subsample of individuals from the platform 5087

Date of survey 8 Sept – 7 Oct 2026

Split in respondents that are unemployed | employed 4073 | 1014

*A subsample of job seekers from the platform data extract was invited to participate in the qualitative survey to provide further context on what it cost to look for a job in South Africa. Respondents were forked into two paths based on whether they were employed and were reported separately throughout the study.*



**JOBJACK is the FIT-based hiring system built for South Africa's store-level workforce.**

Founded in Cape Town in 2018 with the belief that every hard working and honest person deserves affordable access to job opportunities.

JOBJACK set out to turn store-level hiring into a science for employers and break down the barriers job seekers face with a single platform. Instead of relying on minimal CV data, JOBJACK took the guesswork out of recruitment with their JobFIT™ technology by combining behavioural science, mobile-first ASSA-certified psychometrics, literacy-sensitive design and local performance data into a role specific JobFIT™ score.

[www.jobjack.co.za](http://www.jobjack.co.za)