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MPUMALANGA PROVINCE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



PROVINCIAL LABOUR BULLETIN

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KEY FINDINGS

- South Africa's employment figure increased by 21 067 on an annual basis from 17.08 million in Q4 2024 to 17.10 million in Q4 2025.
- The national unemployment rate (official definition) decreased/improved from 31.9% in Q4 2024 to 31.4% in Q4 2025.
- The Mpumalanga employment figure was 1.28 million in Q4 2025, which was 28 717 more on an annual basis and 37 420 more on a quarterly basis.
- On an annual basis, six provinces recorded job gains. Gauteng (101 558) registered the largest annual increase and Mpumalanga (28 717) recorded the fourth highest job gain.
- On a quarterly basis, employment levels increased in four provinces and declined in five. Western Cape (93 319) recorded the highest quarterly gains in job numbers, while Mpumalanga (37 420) showed the second highest quarterly increase in employment numbers.
- Mpumalanga's latest employment level of 1.28 million in Q4 2025 was the highest on record and 37 537 higher than the number employed in Q1 2020 before the lockdown was instituted.
- In Mpumalanga, the formal employees' share of total employment was 65.4% in Q4 2025, which was lower than the national formal employees' share of 72.0%.
- In Mpumalanga, the informal sector's share was 27.5% in Q4 2025, which was higher compared to the national share of 21.4%.
- In Q4 2025, trade (22.3%) made the largest contribution to employment in the province followed by community services (21.4%) and finance (14.3%).
- In Mpumalanga, the official unemployment rate declined/improved on an annual basis by 2.4 percentage points. The rate declined from 34.7% in Q4 2024 to 32.3% in Q4 2025.
- Mpumalanga's unemployment rate declined/improved over the last quarter from 34.0% to 32.3%.
- In Q4 2025, the female unemployment rate was 37.7% and that of males 28.0%.
- The unemployment rate for youth of working age (15-34 years) was 44.7%, whereas the unemployment rate of adults (35-64 years) was 22.2%.
- The female youth unemployment rate of 51.9% was significantly higher than the male youth unemployment rate of 39.1%.
- Unemployment among female graduates was significantly higher at 19.7%, compared with 5.7% among male graduates.
- In Q4 2025, Mpumalanga recorded a ratio of 35.2% of those 15 to 24 year of age not in employment, education or training (NEET), which declined/improved from 36.1% recorded in Q4 2024.
- On an annual basis, the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force in Mpumalanga declined/improved from 47.2% in Q4 2024 to 46.3% in Q4 2025.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the quarterly Provincial Labour Bulletin of the Economic Analysis Unit (Department of Economic Development and Tourism) is to provide an essential reference to policy makers by providing the latest labour data and analysis with specific reference to Mpumalanga. The data and analysis in this report is based on the *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Quarter 4, 2025* published by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) on 17 February 2026.

Stats SA has made important updates to the QLFS to better reflect changes happening both locally and internationally. These revisions align the QLFS with the latest international standards recommended by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS). Specifically, Stats SA has adapted its methods to follow best practices from recent ICLS resolutions on work and labour underutilisation (2013), work relationships (2018) and the informal economy (2023). These changes ensure the data and analysis remain accurate and relevant for understanding Mpumalanga’s evolving labour market landscape.

2. LABOUR FORCE PROFILE

South Africa’s employment figure increased from 17.08 million in Q4 2024 to 17.10 million in Q4 2025. The national economy gained 21 067 jobs on an annual basis and gained 44 085 jobs on a quarterly basis. The national unemployment rate (official definition) was 31.4% in Q4 2025, which was slightly lower than the 31.9% recorded in Q4 2024. The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force, however, increased/worsened from 41.9% in Q4 2024 to 42.1% in Q4 2025.

The provincial labour force of 1.89 million individuals in Q4 2025 was 25 504 less on an annual basis (Table 1). Mpumalanga’s provincial labour force, increased by 6 032 on a quarterly basis. In Q4 2025, the province experienced a year-on-year increase in employment, with 28 717 more individuals employed compared to Q4 2024. On a quarterly basis, employment in Mpumalanga increased by 37 420 in Q4 2025.

Table 1: Labour force profile of Mpumalanga, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025

Indicator	Q4 2024	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q3 2025 to Q4 2025 change	Year-on-year change
Working age population (15-64 years)	3 188 647	3 218 922	3 228 188	9 266	39 542
Outside the Labour Force	1 268 418	1 330 230	1 333 464	3 235	65 046
Labour Force/EAP	1 920 228	1 888 692	1 894 724	6 032	-25 504
Employment	1 254 534	1 245 831	1 283 251	37 420	28 717
Unemployed	665 694	642 861	611 472	-31 389	-54 222
Rates	%	%	%	%	%
Unemployment rate (strict)	34.7	34.0	32.3	-1.7	-2.4
Unemployment rate (combined rate)	47.2	47.5	46.3	-1.2	-0.9
Labour force participation rate (EAP/pop)	60.2	58.7	58.7	0.0	-1.5
Absorption rate (employed/pop ratio)	39.3	38.7	39.8	1.1	0.5

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Note: Due to rounding numbers do not necessarily add up to totals or change

The number of unemployed people (official definition) in the province declined by 54 222 on an annual basis and decreased by 31 389 on a quarterly basis. On an annual basis, the official unemployment rate of the province decreased/improved from 34.7% in Q4 2024 to 32.3% in Q4 2025. The provincial unemployment rate according to the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force also declined/improved from 47.2% in Q4 2024 to 46.3% in Q4 2025.

The labour force participation rate is the proportion of the working-age population that is either employed or unemployed. Mpumalanga’s participation rate deteriorated on an annual basis to 58.7% in Q4 2025. The absorption rate is the proportion of the working-age population that is employed. Mpumalanga’s absorption rate improved on an annual and quarterly basis to 39.8% in Q4 2025.

The gap between the labour force participation rate and the absorption rate – the labour market slack – was 20.9 percentage points in Q4 2024 and narrowed to 18.9 percentage points in Q4 2025. This gap represents the proportion of the working-age population that is actively seeking work, but is not currently employed. When the gap narrows, as in this quarterly change, it usually indicates that more people are looking for work and finding jobs.

3. EMPLOYMENT

The South African economy gained a total of only 44 085 jobs on a quarterly basis in Q4 2025 (Table 2). On a quarterly basis, employment levels increased in four provinces and declined in five. Gauteng (-53 544) recorded the highest quarterly job losses. Western Cape (93 319) recorded the biggest quarterly job gains, while Mpumalanga (37 420) showed the second highest quarterly gain in employment numbers.

On an annual basis, the South African economy recorded only 21 067 job gains. Three provinces recorded job losses and six recorded job gains. Gauteng (101 558) registered the largest annual increase and Mpumalanga recorded the fourth highest job gain amongst the six provinces that recorded an increase. KwaZulu-Natal (-176 170) recorded the highest job losses.

Table 2: Changes in employment in South Africa and provinces, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025

Region	Q4 2024	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q3 2025 to Q4 2025 changes	Year-on-year changes
Western Cape	2 811 716	2 813 696	2 907 015	93 319	95 299
Eastern Cape	1 455 437	1 408 341	1 376 813	-31 528	-78 624
Northern Cape	354 685	319 423	336 896	17 474	-17 789
Free State	749 871	781 995	771 124	-10 871	21 253
KwaZulu-Natal	2 891 907	2 756 925	2 715 737	-41 188	-176 170
North West	935 302	936 954	973 331	36 377	38 029
Gauteng	5 081 415	5 236 517	5 182 973	-53 544	101 558
Mpumalanga	1 254 534	1 245 831	1 283 251	37 420	28 717
Limpopo	1 542 970	1 555 138	1 551 764	-3 374	8 794
South Africa	17 077 841	17 054 823	17 098 908	44 085	21 067

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Employment in Mpumalanga represented a 7.5% share of the South African employment

number in Q4 2025, which was higher than the 7.3% share in Q4 2024, and also higher than the share in Q3 2025 (7.3%). Over the last year, employment numbers increased by 0.1% in South Africa and by 2.3% in Mpumalanga (Table 3). Mpumalanga’s annual increase was the fourth highest among the provinces. The most significant annual employment growth was recorded in North West (4.1%), followed by Western Cape (3.4%).

Both South Africa and Mpumalanga recorded quarterly employment gains in Q4 2025. Mpumalanga’s quarterly employment gain of 3.0% was the fourth highest in percentage terms. The fastest quarterly growth was recorded in the Northern Cape (5.5%), whereas Eastern Cape (-2.2%) recorded the highest quarterly percentage decline.

Table 3: Employment change of South Africa and provinces, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025

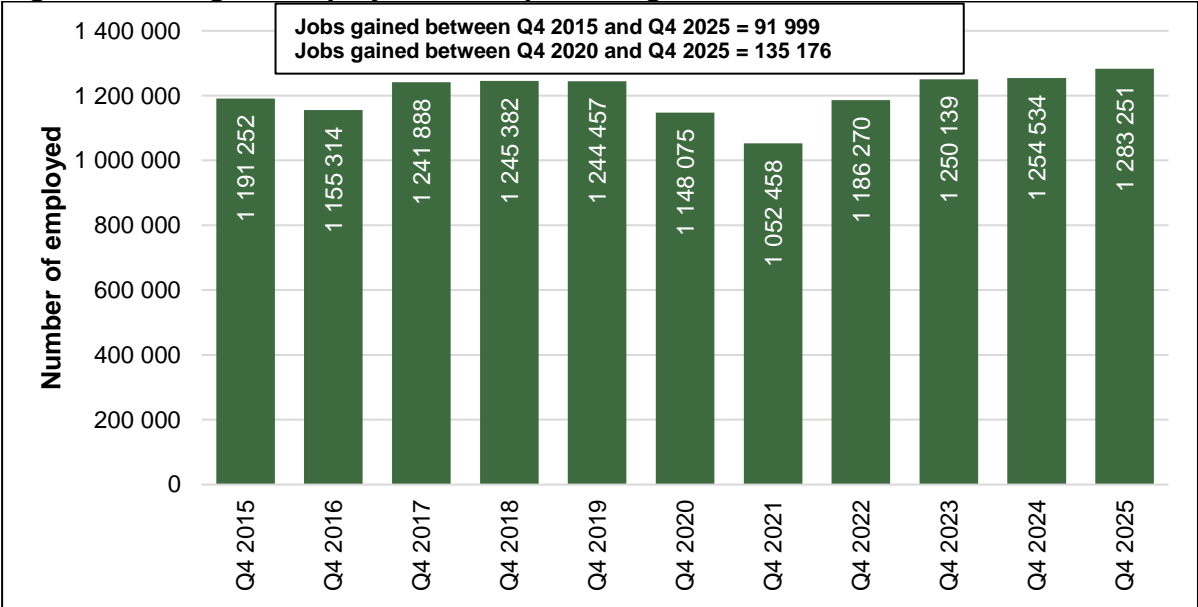
Region	Q3 2025 to Q4 2025 % change	Year-on-year % change
Western Cape	3.3	3.4
Eastern Cape	-2.2	-5.4
Northern Cape	5.5	-5.0
Free State	-1.4	2.8
KwaZulu-Natal	-1.5	-6.1
North West	3.9	4.1
Gauteng	-1.0	2.0
Mpumalanga	3.0	2.3
Limpopo	-0.2	0.6
South Africa	0.3	0.1

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Employment changes over a 10-year period

In Q4 2015, Mpumalanga’s employment level was recorded at 1.19 million and it increased to 1.28 million by Q4 2025 (Figure 1). Mpumalanga’s employment therefore increased by 91 999 in the 10-year period.

Figure 1: Change in employment in Mpumalanga, Q4 2015 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

The average annual job gain during the 10-year period was only 9 200 jobs, which was far less

than the annual provincial job creation target. Over the 10-year period, only Free State (-53 699) and Eastern Cape (-34 540) recorded job losses. Western Cape recorded the highest job gains (527 378) and Mpumalanga’s job gains were the fifth highest among the provinces at 91 999.

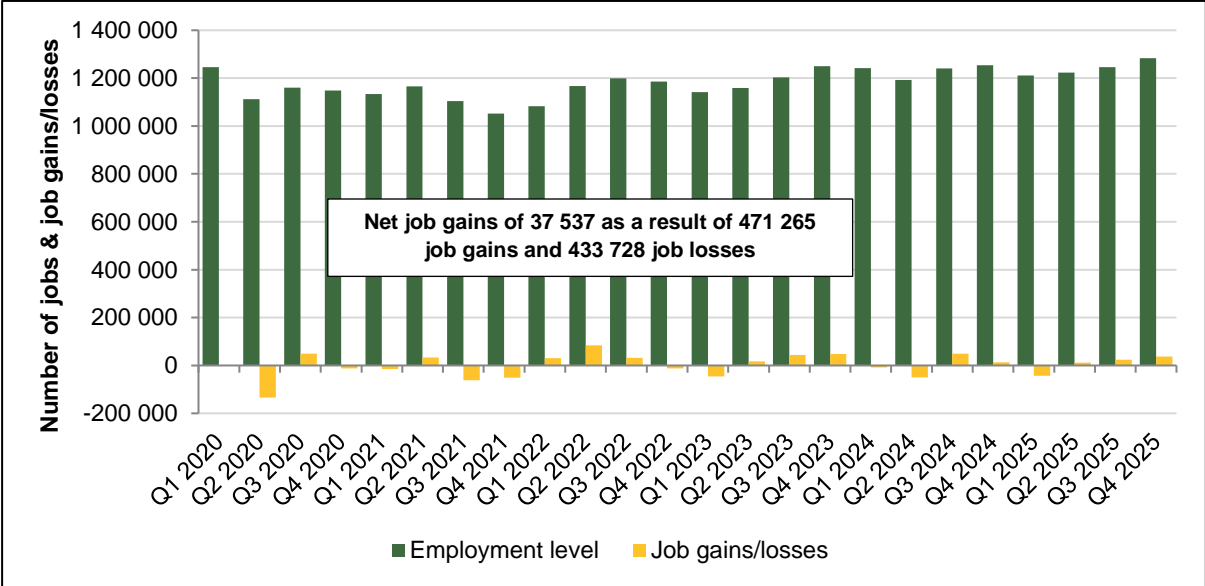
Employment changes over a 5-year period

Over the 5-year period, employment numbers improved by nearly 2.08 million in South Africa and increased in all nine provinces. Mpumalanga’s net job gains was 135 176 jobs between Q4 2020 and Q4 2025. The average annual job gains were therefore 27 035 per annum over the 5-year period and 45% of the provincial job creation target.

Changes in employment since COVID-19

To demonstrate the employment, change in Mpumalanga since before the COVID-19 lockdown, Figure 2 presents the quarterly employment changes up to Q4 2025. Over the twenty-three quarters under consideration, job gains were recorded in thirteen quarters and job losses in ten. The latest employment level of 1.28 million in Mpumalanga was 37 537 higher than the number employed in Q1 2020 before the lockdown was instituted. In Q4 2025, Gauteng (613 031) and Western Cape (569 359) exceeded their respective pre-COVID levels by the highest number.

Figure 2: Employment level and quarterly job gains/losses in Mpumalanga, Q1 2020 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Aggregate employment

Table 4 shows the aggregated employment composition of employment in South Africa and the province between Q3 2025 and Q4 2025. In Mpumalanga, the formal employees’ share of total employment declined from 67.2% in Q3 2025 to 65.4% in Q4 2025. The formal sector in Mpumalanga (65.4%) recorded a significantly smaller share of total employment than was the

case nationally (72.0%). In Mpumalanga, the informal sector's share increased from 26.1% in Q3 2025 to 27.5% in Q4 2025 on a quarterly basis.

Table 4: Aggregate employment in South Africa & Mpumalanga, Q3 2025 – Q4 2025

Sector	Q3 2025		Q4 2025	
	SA	MP	SA	MP
Formal sector	70.3%	67.2%	72.0%	65.4%
Informal sector ¹	23.2%	26.1%	21.4%	27.5%
Private households	6.5%	6.6%	6.6%	7.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Employment by industry

Table 5 summarises the performance in employment by industry in Mpumalanga between Q4 2015 and Q4 2025. Over the 10-year period, six employment industries recorded job gains, whereas four industries shed jobs. Manufacturing, in the secondary sector, recorded the highest number of lost jobs over the 10-year period. Finance and trade, in the services sector, and agriculture, in the primary sector, gained the highest number of jobs. Over the 5-year period, seven industries recorded job gains, while the other three industries experienced job losses. There was a net gain of 135 176 jobs over the last five years.

Table 5: Changes in employment by industry in Mpumalanga, Q4 2015 – Q4 2025

Industry	Employment number Q4 2025	10-year change in		5-year change in:		1-year change in:	
		Number	Average annual %	Number	Average annual %	Number	Average annual %
Agriculture ²	114 458	22 185	2.2%	14 866	2.8%	-16 437	-12.6%
Mining ³	62 543	1 054	0.2%	1 613	0.5%	-7 164	-10.3%
Manufacturing ⁴	65 591	-31 712	-3.9%	-24 747	-6.2%	-39 986	-37.9%
Utilities ⁵	35 164	8 370	2.8%	9 066	6.1%	9 325	36.1%
Construction ⁶	113 245	-9 780	-0.8%	38 734	8.7%	15 770	16.2%
Trade ⁷	285 939	44 161	1.7%	34 892	2.6%	45 060	18.7%
Transport ⁸	55 487	-5 913	-1.0%	-8 145	-2.7%	-11 024	-16.6%
Finance ⁹	183 794	54 055	3.5%	36 861	4.6%	36 055	24.4%
Community services ¹⁰	275 092	16 316	0.6%	32 498	2.5%	-9 866	-3.5%
Private households	91 933	-6 738	-0.7%	-463	-0.1%	6 984	8.2%
Total	1 283 251	91 999	0.6%	135 176	1.7%	28 717	2.3%

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

In the most recent year, between Q4 2024 and Q4 2025, five industries saw job gains, while the other five industries experienced losses. As a result, there was a net gain of 28 717 jobs in the last year. During this period, six industries nationwide gained jobs, with manufacturing,

¹ The informal sector comprises i) Employees working in establishments that employ less than 5 employees, who do not deduct income tax from their salaries & ii) Employers, own-account workers and persons helping unpaid in their household business who are not registered for either income tax or value-added tax.

² ISIC detailed description = Agriculture, forestry and fishing

³ ISIC detailed description = Mining and quarrying

⁴ ISIC detailed description = Manufacturing

⁵ ISIC detailed description = Electricity, gas and water

⁶ ISIC detailed description = Construction

⁷ ISIC detailed description = Wholesale and retail trade, catering and accommodation

⁸ ISIC detailed description = Transportation, storage and communication

⁹ ISIC detailed description = Finance, insurance, real estate and business services

¹⁰ ISIC detailed description = Community, health and personal services

trade, mining and private households losing jobs.

Employment in Mpumalanga increased by 0.6% per annum over the 10-year period and by 1.7% per annum over the 5-year period. Mpumalanga's employment also increased by 2.3% in the year since Q4 2024, the fourth fastest increase of the provinces. Over the 10-year period, finance experienced the fastest average annual employment growth, increasing by 3.5% per year. Construction led in the 5-year period with a growth rate of 8.7% per year. Utilities saw the most significant growth over the last 12 months, surging by 36.1%.

On the other hand, manufacturing saw the steepest decline in employment over the 10-year period, with a decrease of 3.9% per year. Manufacturing also recorded the sharpest decline in the 5-year period (-6.2% per year) as well as in the 1-year period (-37.9%).

Among the provinces, Mpumalanga's trade and finance industries recorded the largest gain in percentage terms and Mpumalanga recorded the second largest gain in utilities. Mpumalanga's manufacturing recorded the largest loss while agriculture recorded the second largest loss among the provinces. Transport and community services recorded the third largest loss, whereas construction and private households recorded the third largest gain, respectively.

Table 6: Changes in employment by industry in Mpumalanga in comparison with other provinces, Q4 2024– Q4 2025

Industry	Annual gains/(losses)		Gains/(losses) ranking in terms of % change
	Number	% increase/decrease	
Agriculture	-16 437	-12.6%	(2 nd largest loss)
Mining	-7 164	-10.3%	(5 th largest loss)
Manufacturing	-39 986	-37.9%	(largest loss)
Utilities	9 325	36.1%	2 nd largest gain
Construction	15 770	16.2%	3 rd largest gain
Trade	45 060	18.7%	largest gain
Transport	-11 024	-16.6%	(3 rd largest loss)
Finance	36 055	24.4%	largest gain
Community services	-9 866	-3.5%	(3 rd largest loss)
Private households	6 984	8.2%	3 rd largest gain
Total	28 717	2.3%	4th largest gain

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

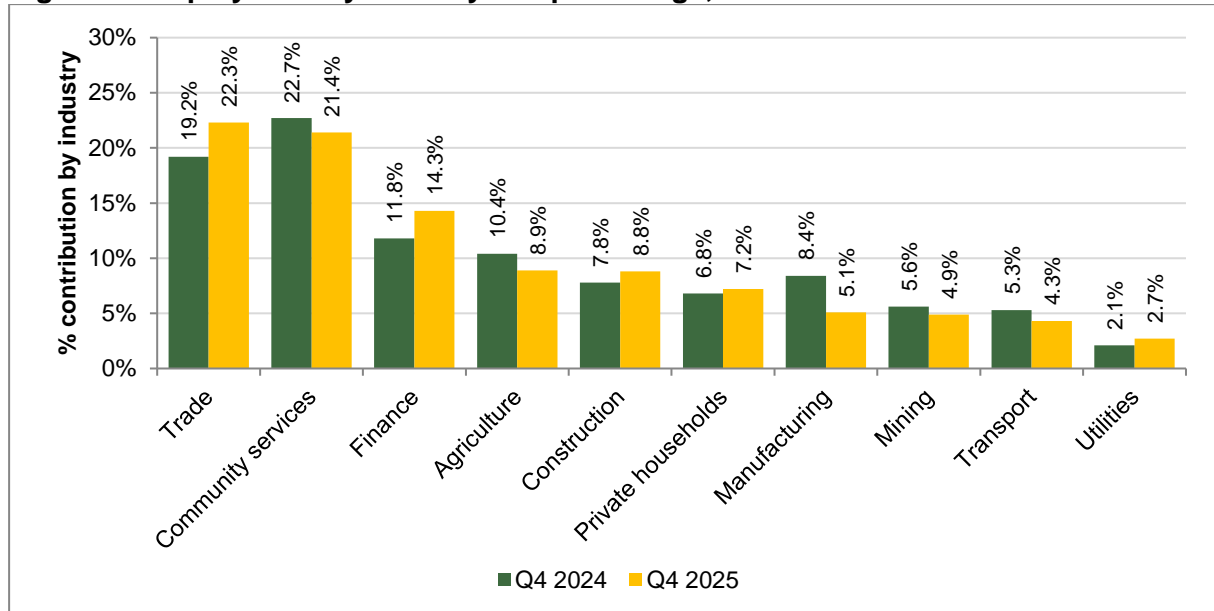
Figure 3 displays the contribution by each industry to total employment in the province in the respective fourth quarters of 2024 and 2025. In Q4 2025, trade (22.3%), community services (21.4%), finance (14.3%) and agriculture (8.9%) made the largest contributions to employment in the province. Beyond the formal agricultural employment, 188 788 individuals indicated participation in subsistence farming, reflecting a significant level of non-market production for own-household use. The shares of trade along with finance, construction, private households and utilities increased between Q4 2024 and Q4 2025, whereas the contribution of community services and four others decreased.

Changes in employment by industry since COVID-19

Table 7 presents the combined quarterly employment changes since the start of the COVID-19

lockdown up to Q4 2025. The employment numbers of agriculture, utilities, construction, trade, finance and community services were higher in Q4 2025 than in Q1 2020. Manufacturing (-39 238) recorded the highest net job losses, which was the result of combined quarterly job gains over the period under review of 116 918 and combined quarterly job losses of 156 156.

Figure 3: Employment by industry in Mpumalanga, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Table 7: Quarterly job gains/losses in Mpumalanga’s industries, Q1 2020 – Q4 2025

Industry	Employment numbers		Combined quarterly		Net job gains/(losses)
	Q1 2020	Q4 2025	Job gains	Job losses	
Agriculture	86 188	114 458	159 578	131 308	28 270
Mining	68 781	62 543	74 448	80 686	(6 238)
Manufacturing	104 829	65 591	116 918	156 156	(39 238)
Utilities	26 370	35 164	49 452	40 658	8 794
Construction	100 598	113 245	107 11	95 064	12 647
Trade	264 859	285 939	215 836	194 756	21 080
Transport	64 836	55 487	79 499	88 848	(9 349)
Finance	149 934	183 794	159 658	125 798	33 860
Community services	273 876	275 092	160 451	159 235	1 216
Private households	105 439	91 933	69 012	82 518	(13 506)
Total	1 245 715	1 283 251	1 192 563	1 155 027	37 537

Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Occupational profile

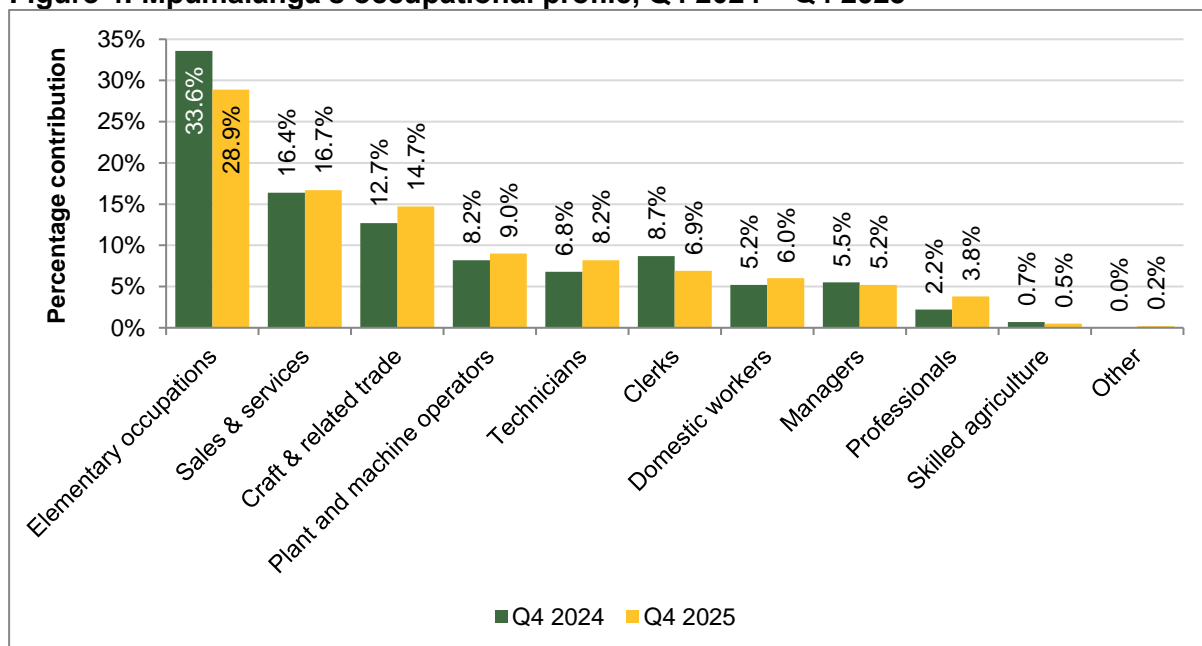
Figure 4 illustrates the occupational profile of Mpumalanga in the fourth quarters of 2024 and 2025, respectively. The occupational profile is an indicator of the quality of the labour force. It provides information on the proficiency levels and assists in identifying the shortage of skills in the economy, by matching the demand for labour with its relative supply.

The occupational profile was skewed towards semi-skilled and unskilled occupations in both years. The share of skilled occupations (managers, professionals and technicians) increased from 14.5% in Q4 2024 to 17.2% in Q4 2025.

The share of semi-skilled occupations increased from 46.7% to 47.8% over the period under

review. The combined share of elementary occupations and domestic workers (unskilled occupations) was 34.9% in Q4 2025, down from the 38.8% share of one year earlier.

Figure 4: Mpumalanga’s occupational profile, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025

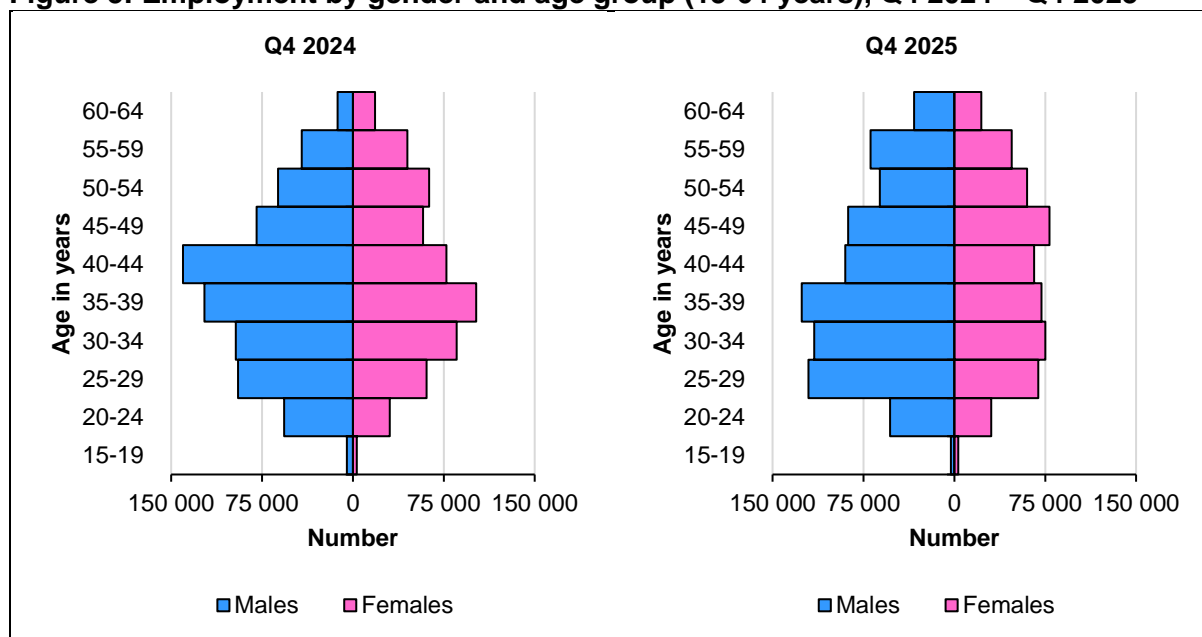


Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Employment by gender and age

Figure 5 displays the employment by gender and age for Q4 2024 and Q4 2025, respectively. There were more males (59.2%) employed in Mpumalanga in Q4 2025 than females. Over the past year, the male employment number increased by 47 227 to 759 221. Female employment numbers declined by 18 508 to 524 032, and therefore recorded a smaller share in Q4 2025 (40.8%) than a year earlier (43.2%).

Figure 5: Employment by gender and age group (15-64 years), Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



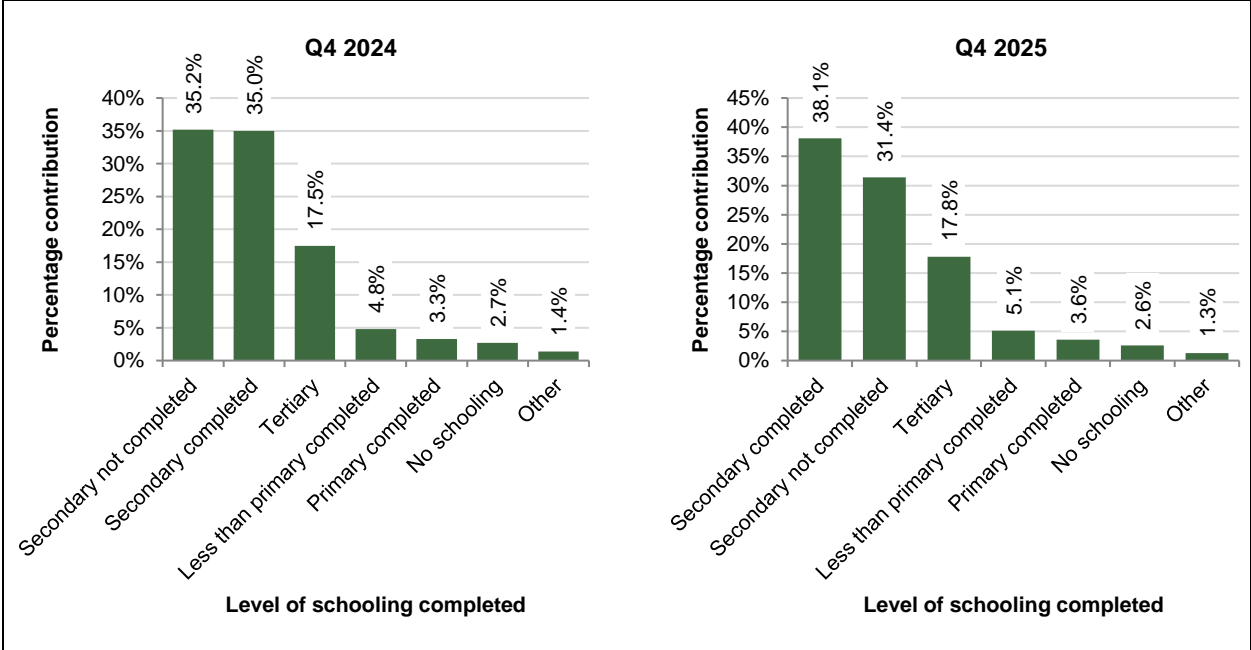
Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

In Q4 2025, adults (35-64 years) held the majority of jobs in Mpumalanga with a share of 63.4%. The adult employment numbers decreased by 8 113 from a year earlier and the share decreased from 65.5% in Q4 2024 to the current 63.4%. The youth (15-34 years) employment numbers increased by 36 831 and therefore the youth share increased from 34.5% in Q4 2024 to 36.6% in Q4 2025.

Educational profile of employed

In Q4 2025, some 38.1% of the employed in Mpumalanga indicated that they have completed their secondary education (Figure 6). In Q4 2024, this figure was lower at 35.0% and therefore it increased/improved to the current level. The share of the employed that completed some post matric education increased slightly from 17.5% in Q4 2024 to 17.8% in Q4 2025. It is apparent that, in total, 12.6% of the employed have not completed any level of schooling higher than primary¹¹ in Q4 2024.

Figure 6: Educational profile of employed in Mpumalanga, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Non-market activities

Economic activities are those that contribute to the production of goods and services in the country. There are two types of economic activities, namely:

- Market production activities (work done for others and usually associated with pay or profit).
- Non-market production activities (work done for the benefit of the household, e.g. subsistence farming).

Table 8 shows the figures of the involvement in non-market activities in Mpumalanga. On an

¹¹ Not completed higher than primary school includes Primary completed, Less than primary completed, No schooling & Other.

annual basis, involvement in subsistence farming, fetching water and production for household use increased, whilst construction or major repairs to own household and hunting or fishing for household use declined. On a quarterly basis, subsistence farming, construction or major repairs to own household as well as hunting or fishing for household use increased.

Table 8: Involvement in non-market activities in Mpumalanga, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025

Non-market activities	Q4 2024	Q3 2025	Q4 2025	Q3 2025 to Q4 2025 changes	Year-on-year changes
Subsistence farming	114 964	159 547	188 788	29 241	73 824
Fetching water or collecting wood/dung	354 834	452 423	419 512	-32 911	64 678
Produce other goods for household use	15 116	24 488	20 342	-4 146	5 226
Construction or major repairs to own household	10 741	4 965	8 719	3 754	-2 022
Hunting or fishing for household use	2 067	216	1 531	1 315	-536

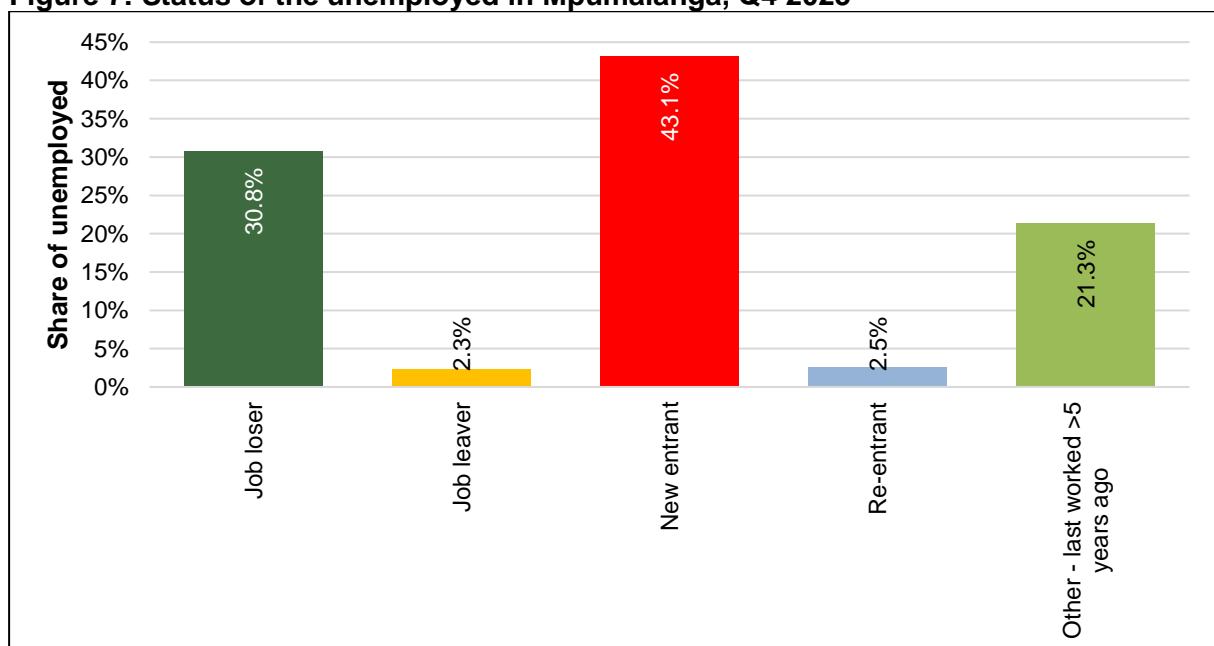
Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

4. UNEMPLOYMENT

Based on the latest Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) by Stats SA, the province witnessed a quarterly reduction in the number of unemployed individuals during Q4 2025, declining from 642 861 in Q3 2025 to the latest 611 472. The number of unemployed individuals declined on an annual basis by 54 222.

Figure 7 presents an overview of the status of the unemployed in Mpumalanga during Q4 2025. Among the total of unemployed individuals, 43.1% were classified as new entrants, indicating they joined the job market during the last quarter, while 30.8% lost their jobs during the last quarter. Highlighting the systemic nature of unemployment in Mpumalanga, a notable 21.3% of the unemployed indicated that they had not worked for more than five years. The data emphasises the persistent and long-standing nature of unemployment in the province.

Figure 7: Status of the unemployed in Mpumalanga, Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

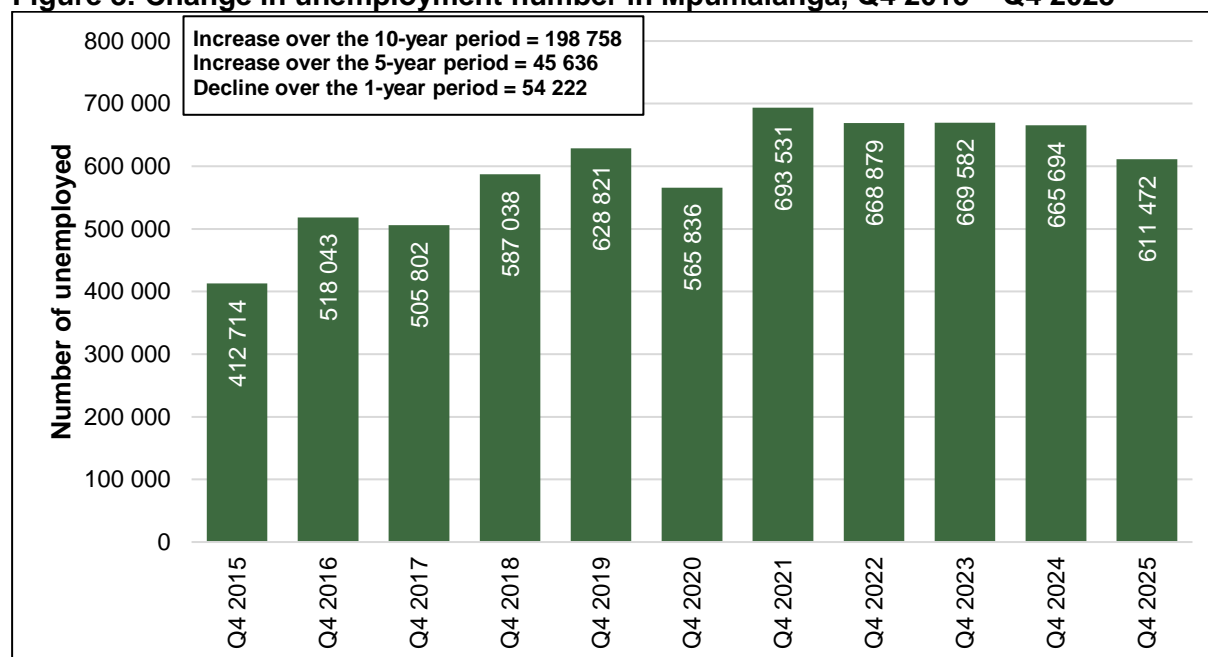
Change in official unemployment numbers over a 10-year period

In Q4 2015, Mpumalanga's number of unemployed was 412 714 and over the course of the following decade it increased to 611 472 as depicted in Figure 8. Consequently, Mpumalanga witnessed an increase of 198 758 in unemployment during the 10-year period. Notably, this rise in unemployment exceeded the corresponding increase in employment, as employment increased by only 91 998 over the 10-year period.

Change in official unemployment numbers over 5-year and 1-year periods

Between Q4 2020 and Q4 2025, the unemployment number in Mpumalanga increased by 45 636. The increase can in part be explained by the unnaturally low unemployment figure of Q4 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 lockdown, when individuals were restricted in search of work. In contrast, employment numbers in Mpumalanga increased by 135 175 over the 5-year period. The decline in Mpumalanga's unemployment number over the last year was 54 222, whereas the number of employed increased by 28 717.

Figure 8: Change in unemployment number in Mpumalanga, Q4 2015 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Change in official unemployment numbers since COVID-19 lockdown

In Q1 2020, prior to the implementation of the COVID-19 induced lockdown, the recorded unemployment number in Mpumalanga stood at 623 280. The unemployment figure declined by 11 808 between Q1 2020 and Q4 2025 to 611 472, despite some intervening fluctuations.

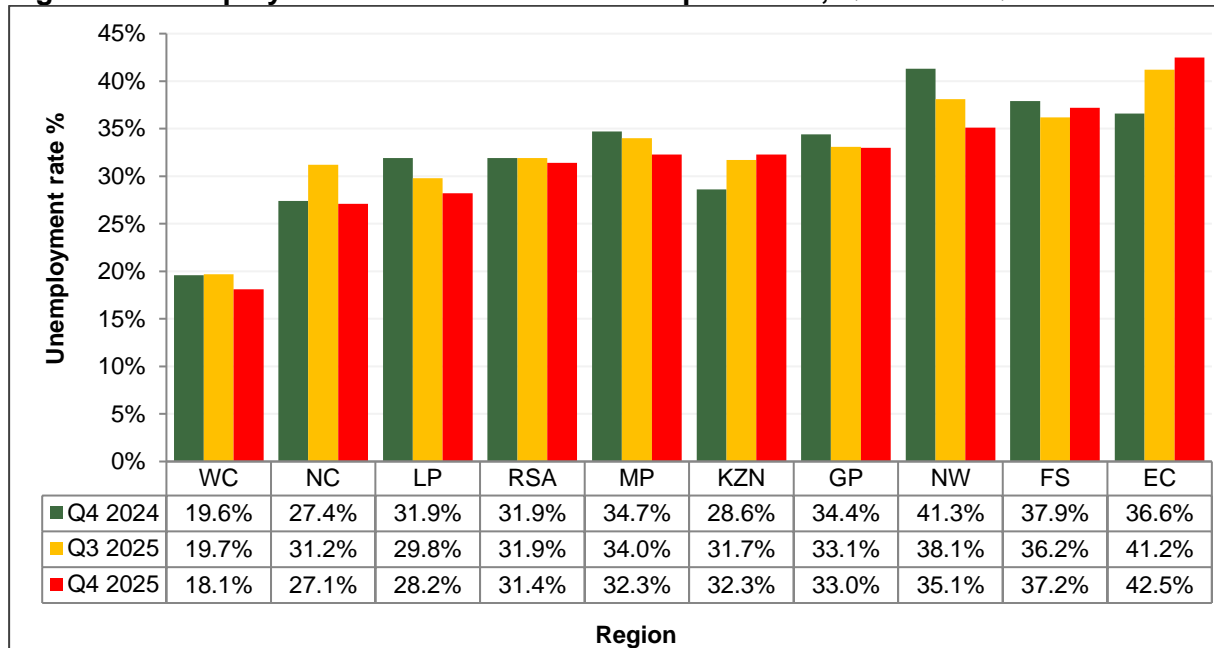
Official definition of unemployment

Figure 9 provides a visual representation of both the provincial and national unemployment rates. In Q4 2025, the provincial unemployment rate of 32.3% in Mpumalanga exceeded the national average of 31.4%, with Mpumalanga recording the joint fourth lowest unemployment

rate among the nine provinces. Eastern Cape recorded the highest unemployment rate at 42.5% and Western Cape, the lowest unemployment rate at 18.1%.

Over the past year, the unemployment rates of South Africa and all the provinces, with the exception of KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape, declined/improved. The official unemployment rate in Mpumalanga also declined/improved on a quarterly basis from 34.0%.

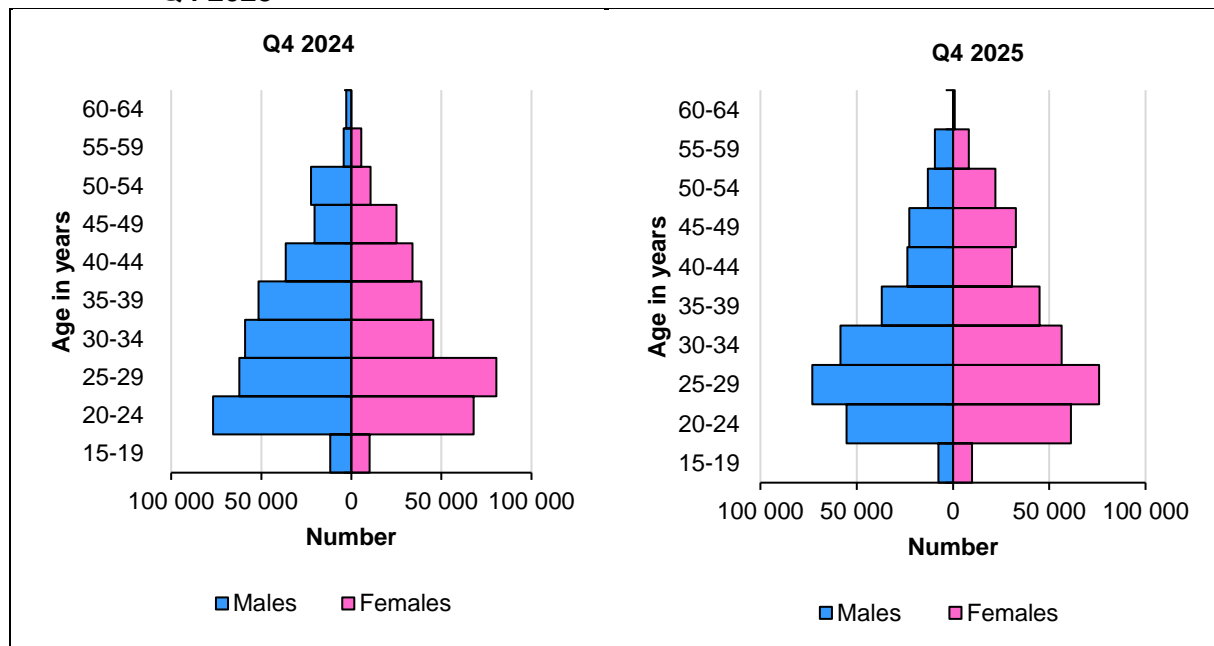
Figure 9: Unemployment rate for South Africa & provinces, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Official unemployment by gender and age

Figure 10: Mpumalanga’s unemployed by gender and age group (15-64 years), Q4 2024 Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Figure 10 displays the breakdown of unemployment by gender and age for the fourth quarters

of 2024 and 2025, respectively. In Q4 2025, females accounted for 51.8% of the total number of unemployed individuals, while males constituted 48.2%. This female share was sharply higher compared to twelve months earlier when females made up 47.8% of the unemployed population. Among the unemployed, the youth cohort represented 62.1% of the total in the province, which was equal to the share recorded in Q4 2024. In Q4 2025, the unemployment rate of males stood at 28.0%, which was lower than the female unemployment rate of 37.7%.

The unemployment rate for youth of working age (15-34 years¹²) was 44.7%, whereas the unemployment rate of adults (35-64 years) was 22.2%. The female youth unemployment rate of 51.9% was substantially higher than the male youth unemployment rate of 39.1%. Additionally, the unemployment rate of the 18-24 year age cohort was 57.0% in Q4 2025, with the female unemployment rate in that age group reaching 62.6%.

In Q4 2025, the graduate unemployment rate of all ages was 14.4%. Unemployment among female graduates was significantly higher at 19.7%, compared with 5.7% among male graduates. Graduate unemployment was particularly pronounced among youth aged 21-34 years, with a rate of 26.5%.

Educational profile of unemployed

In Q4 2025, a significant proportion (43.8%) of the unemployed in Mpumalanga indicated that they have completed their secondary education. This was followed by 39.1% who had not completed their secondary education, as revealed by Figure 11. Notably, 5.7% of the unemployed in Q4 2025 reported not having completed any level of education beyond primary¹³ education. Moreover, 11.3% of the unemployed individuals possessed qualifications higher than matric, indicating a mismatch between their educational attainment and current employment status, and also alarmingly higher than the 9.7% in Q4 2024.

Those not in employment, education or training (NEET)

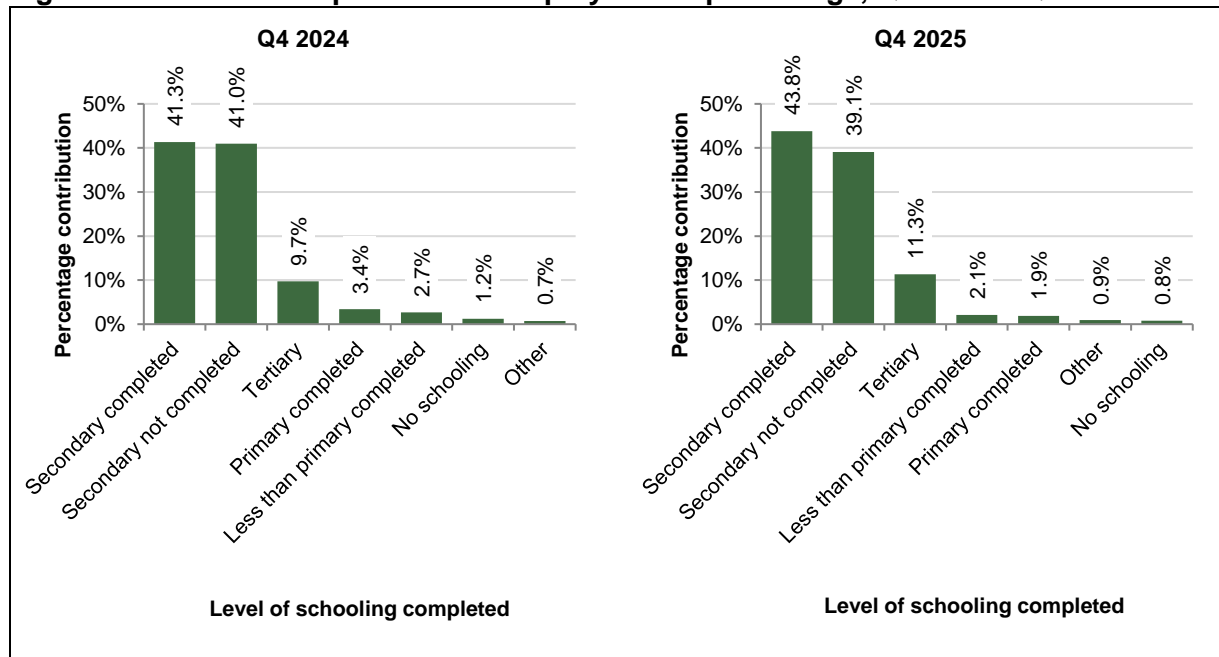
Some young people have been disengaged from the labour market, and they are also not building on their skills base through education and training – they are not in employment, education or training (NEET). The NEET rate serves as an important additional labour market indicator for young people aged between 15 and 24 years. In Q4 2025, some 3.5 million or 34.0% of the total South African population aged 15-24 years were classified as NEET (Figure 12). This share was slightly higher/worse than the share recorded in Q4 2024 of 33.5%. Among the provinces, Northern Cape had the highest NEET ratio of 44.5%, while Western Cape had the lowest/best ratio at 29.3%. Mpumalanga's NEET ratio was the sixth lowest/fourth highest

¹² The International Labour Organization defines youth as individuals between the ages of 15 to 24 years, with 15 being the minimum school-leaving age and legal employment age. It is important to note, however, that Stats SA utilizes a broader definition, covering individuals between the ages of 15 and 34 years, which is also therefore used in this report.

¹³ Not completed any level higher than primary school includes Primary completed, Less than primary completed, No schooling and Other.

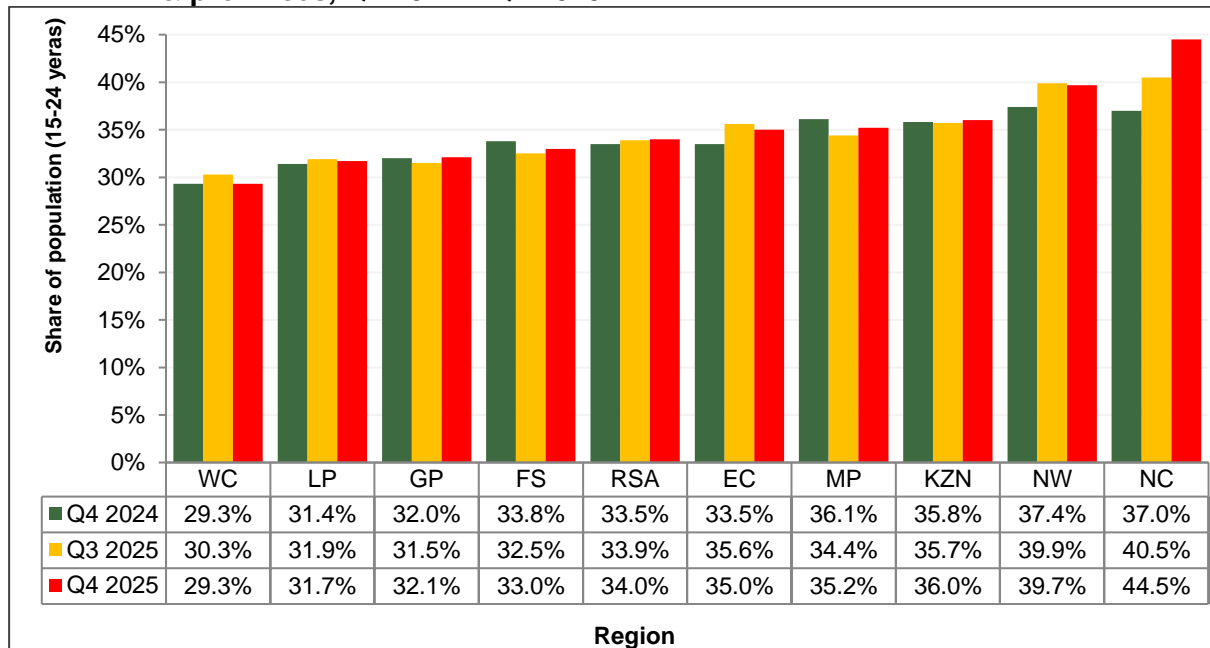
among the nine provinces at 35.2% and declined/improved from 36.1% recorded in Q4 2024.

Figure 11: Educational profile of unemployed in Mpumalanga, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Figure 12: Those not in employment, education or training (15-24 years), South Africa & provinces, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force

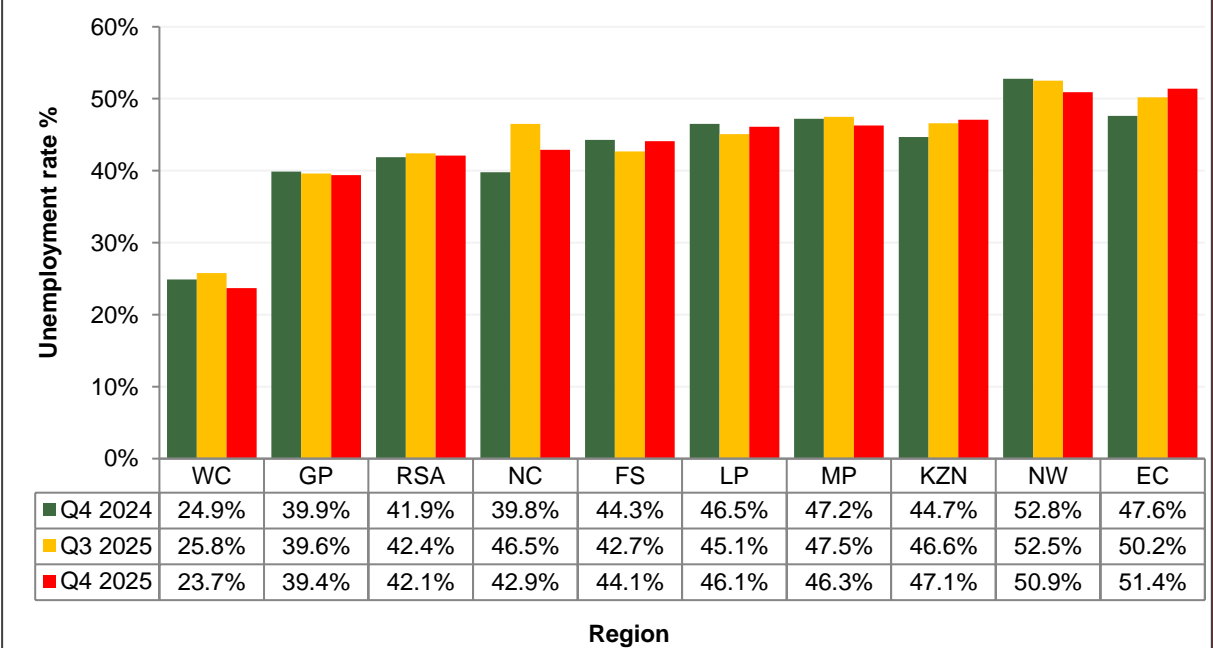
In the Q3 2025 Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) release, the previously used expanded unemployment rate was replaced by the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force. This revised measure provides a broader view of labour market slack by including not only those who are officially unemployed, but also individuals who form part of the potential labour force.

The potential labour force consists of discouraged work-seekers, as well as persons who are available for work but not actively seeking employment, as well as those who are actively seeking work but not immediately available to start. By incorporating these groups, the combined rate offers a more comprehensive indication of unmet labour market demand than the narrow unemployment rate alone.

According to Figure 13, South Africa’s combined unemployment rate increased/deteriorated marginally from 41.9% in Q4 2024 to 42.1% in Q4 2025. Over the same period, the expanded unemployment rate in Mpumalanga declined/improved from 47.2% to 46.3%. On a quarterly basis there was also a decline/improvement, as the rate in Mpumalanga declined by 1.2 percentage points from 47.5% in Q3 2025.

Mpumalanga ranked fourth highest/worst in terms of the combined unemployment rate in Q4 2025. Eastern Cape recorded the highest rate at 51.4%, while Western Cape had the lowest rate of 23.7%. When analysing the annual changes, it is worth noting that Western Cape, Gauteng, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West improved, whereas the other three provinces deteriorated.

Figure 13: Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force for South Africa and provinces, Q4 2024 – Q4 2025



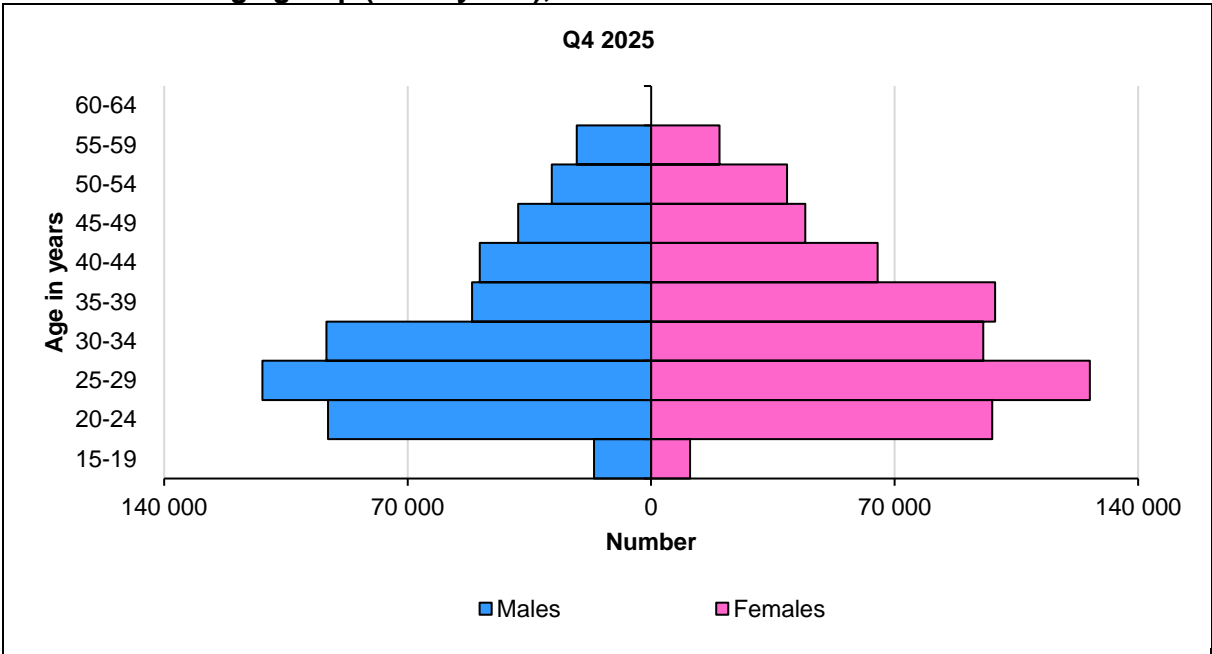
Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Combined unemployed and potential labour force by gender and age

Figure 14 displays the combined unemployed and potential labour force by gender and age for the fourth quarter of 2025. In Q4 2025, females accounted for 54.4% of the total number of combined unemployed and potential labour force and males for 45.6%. The youth segment contributed 57.9% to the overall number in the province.

In Q4 2025, the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force of males stood at 39.9%, which was much lower than the rate among females of 53.4%. The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force of working age youth (15-34 years) was 57.9%, while for adults it was 36.1%. The unemployment rate among female youth in Q4 2025 was significantly higher at 65.0% compared to the male youth unemployment rate of 51.9%. The unemployment rate of the 18-24 year age cohort was 70.9% in Q4 2025 and the 18-24 year-old female unemployment rate was 76.2%.

Figure 14: Mpumalanga’s combined unemployed and potential labour force by gender and age group (15-64 years), Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

4.1. Potential labour force

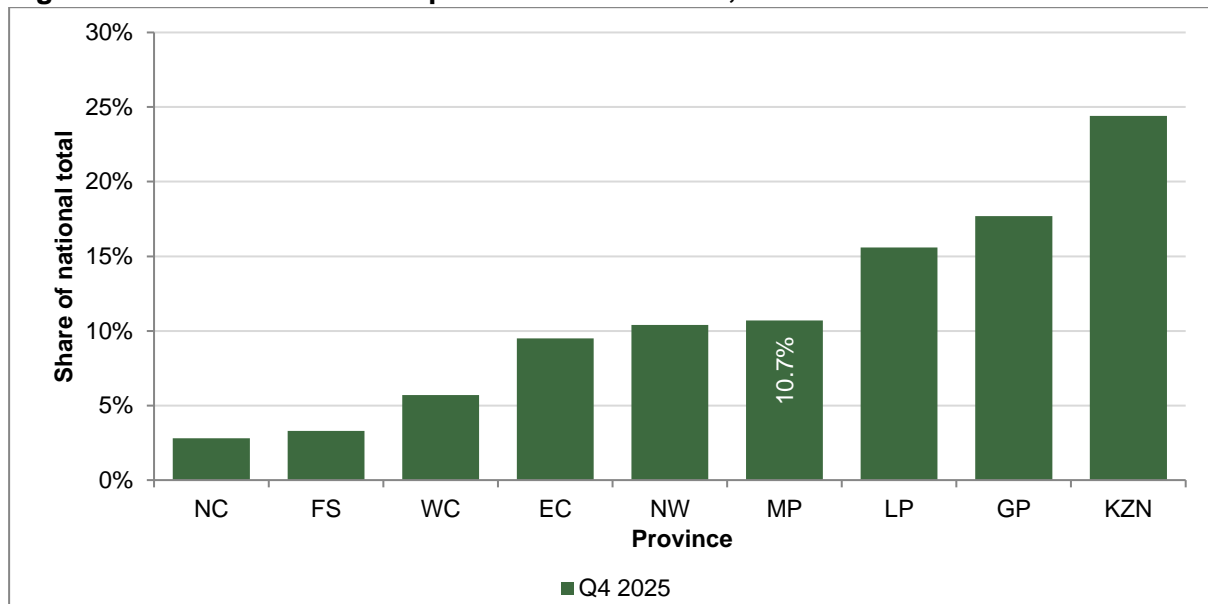
After adopting the ICLS resolutions, Stats SA now report on a greater variety of labour indicators. Those outside the labour force (previously the non-economically active population) are divided between the potential labour force and others outside the labour force. Others outside the labour force includes those that want employment, but which are neither seeking nor available, and those that do not want employment. The potential labour force includes those that are available but not seeking, which includes the discouraged job-seekers, and those not available but seeking.

According to Figure 15, Mpumalanga accounted for 10.7% of South Africa’s potential labour force in Q4 2025. When comparing Mpumalanga to other provinces, it ranked fourth highest/sixth lowest in terms of the share of potential labour force.

The data presented in Figure 16 shows the proportion of potential labour force relative to the working age population (15-64 years) within the same region in the fourth quarter of 2025. In Q4 2025, the share of potential labour force in relation to the working age population in

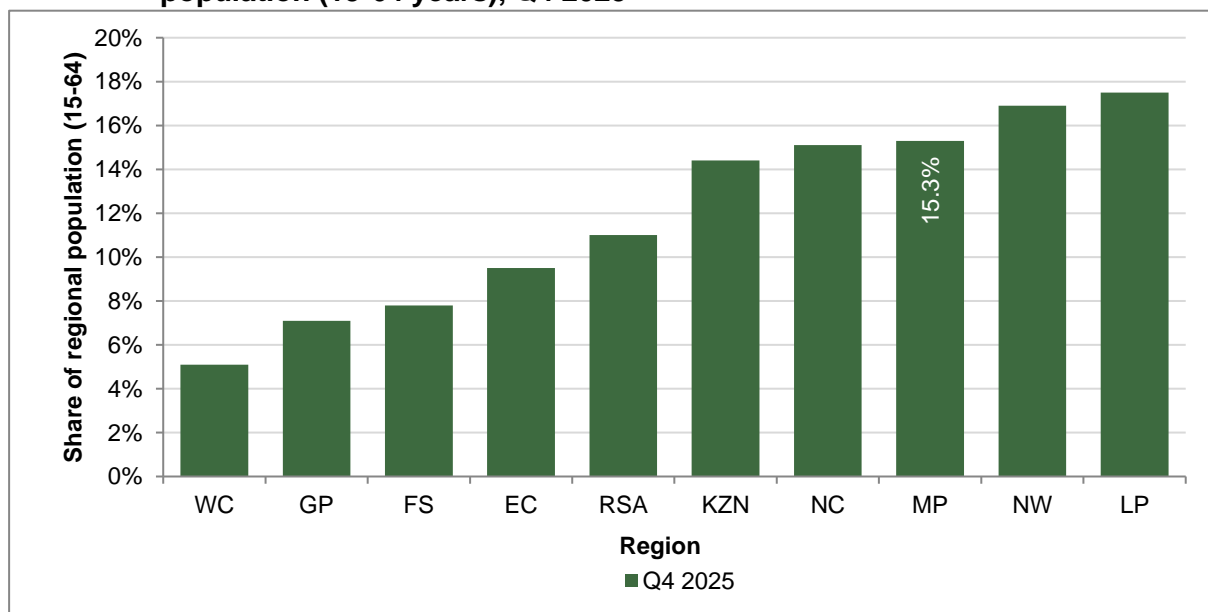
Mpumalanga was 15.3%, which was higher than the national average of 11.0%. In Q4 2025, Mpumalanga recorded the third highest/seventh lowest share of potential labour force in relation to its working age population.

Figure 15: Provincial share of potential labour force, Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

Figure 16: Comparison of potential labour force as a ratio of regional working age population (15-64 years), Q4 2025



Source: Stats SA – QLFS, 2026

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Net job gains (job gains minus job losses) of 37 420 were recorded in Mpumalanga in Q4 2025 according to the latest QLFS of Stats SA, that was released on 17 February 2026. The industries that experienced the greatest gains over the quarter were trade, construction, private households and mining.

The province recorded net job gains in the second, third and fourth quarters of 2025 and despite the job losses in the first quarter of 2025 the province gained 28 717 jobs in 2025. It is worth noting that Mpumalanga has now recorded job gains in five of the last six quarters.

Four of the provinces recorded net job gains in Q4 2025, and the net job gains for South Africa were only 44 085. On a national level there were job gains in agriculture, utilities, construction, transport, finance, community services and private households. Mpumalanga had the second highest net job gains. Western Cape had job gains of just more than 93 000 followed by Mpumalanga with 37 420. South Africa's unemployment rate declined/improved by 0.5 of a percentage point in Q4 2025 and six of the provinces experienced an improvement in their unemployment rates, including Mpumalanga.

The mining and manufacturing industries in South Africa, including Mpumalanga, faces a challenging environment. The growth rates of the provincial mining and manufacturing industries are relatively low. Mining recorded job losses in five of the last eight quarters and manufacturing in four of the last eight. The Mpumalanga Investment and Mining Conference, held in October 2025, brought together the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, the national Department of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, private companies and other social partners to address key challenges facing the economy. A key outcome of the conference was the announcement of investment pledges amounting to approximately R240 billion, underscoring strong investor interest in the province.

Agriculture is a champion industry and an important economic and job driver in the province, despite the annual loss in 2025. If one analyses the labour data over time, agriculture was an important job creator among the provincial employment industries over the last 10 years.

Around 27% of the total employment in Mpumalanga, are people in the informal economy. The Mpumalanga Department of Economic Development and Tourism developed a provincial informal sector policy and is busy finalising the policy for implementation to protect jobs in the informal economy.

The high combined rate unemployment and potential labour force in Mpumalanga is a serious concern, especially as it ranks the fourth highest among provinces despite the official unemployment rate being the joint fourth lowest. This gap highlights the growing number of discouraged work-seekers who have lost hope of finding employment and no longer actively search for work. Their increasing numbers not only inflate the expanded unemployment rate but also reflect deep structural challenges in the provincial labour market, pointing to limited opportunities and a weakening of confidence in the economy's ability to absorb job-seekers.

The Mpumalanga Provincial Government through the Department of Economic Development and Tourism and also its Entities, will continue with its catalytic economic projects and plans to stimulate the economy and contribute to the much needed jobs for our people. The Medium

Term Development Plan (MTDP) job creation target for Mpumalanga is 60 000 new and sustainable jobs per annum and an unemployment rate of 25% in 2029/2030. It is possible to achieve this if the economic growth rate can be increased to 3% per annum.

All the economic plans should promote inclusive economic growth and job creation, which will impact positively on the high poverty and inequality of Mpumalanga. It must also be ensured that addressing the high youth unemployment, remains a top priority of Government and Business. Young people should be assisted to have the right qualifications and skills, in line with the needs of the economy. They should be employable at all times.

Industries with high potential for job creation (due to relatively high economic growth, high labour intensity and projects implemented), include agriculture & agro-processing, manufacturing (roll-out of the Mpumalanga Industrial Development Plan - MIDP), construction (infrastructure projects), the trade industry (tourism, MSME's, including the informal sector) and finance.

It should be highlighted, that job creation is a co-responsibility between the public and private sector. It is an issue that must tackled together as partners. Public and private sector infrastructure investment for example, is crucial to stimulate the economy and create jobs on a large scale. Infrastructure investment has high GDP and employment multipliers. Huge infrastructure investment and projects are central to the economic success of the high economic growth countries in the world. This should be an example for and message to South Africa and the province.