An Examination of the Labour Market Status of Youth and Adults in South Africa based on Labour Market Information System Decent Work Indicators, 2021–2025

Contributors:

Department of Employment and Labour

employment & labour
Department:
Employment and Labour
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Statistics South Africa

stats sa
Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

International Labour Organisation

International
Labour
Organization

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1. Introduction

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) initiated the training workshop to carry out a Labour Market Information (LMI) System reporting for South Africa on 18 -19 August 2025 at Birchwood International Hotel in Johannesburg, South Africa. About 21 representatives from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) and the Department of Employment and Labour (including Productivity South Africa) participated in the training.

The training workshop aimed to support DEL, the implementing agency of the national LMI System, in generating a comprehensive report based on LMIS data utilizing the Decent Work Framework of indicators, which underpins the implementation of the LMI System. The resulting detailed report is intended to provide valuable insights for policymakers within the South African Development Community (SADC) region and beyond, facilitating an understanding of Decent Work Indicators (DWI) trends from 2021 to 2025, with particular emphasis on youth and women within the sub-group.

1.1. Decent work - Monitoring decent work

Since the 1995 World Development Summit, many nations have incorporated the decent work agenda into labour market policies and development programs. Efforts continue to turn this agenda into tangible results at the country level through the ILO's *Decent Work Country Programme initiative* (ILO, 2007)[1].

In September 2008, the ILO convened an international Tripartite Meeting of Experts (TME) on the Measurement of Decent Work, and consequently, adopted a framework of Decent Work Indicators that was presented to the 18th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in December 2008.

The Framework on the Measurement of Decent Work covers ten substantive elements which are closely linked to the four strategic pillars of the Decent Work Agenda, that is, (i) International labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work (ii) Employment creation (iii) Social protection and (iv) Social dialogue and tripartism.

These 10 substantive elements represent the structural dimensions of the decent work measurement framework under which both statistical and legal framework indicators on decent work are organized and classified. There is an additional substantive element related to the economic and social context for decent work. There are context indicators within this category, which are contextual indicators meaning they do not measure decent work per se but rather serve to provide data users information that relates to the context of decent work measurement in an economy.

The statistical indicators are quantitative indicators derived from official national data sources. The legal framework indicators are qualitative in nature primarily based on legal texts and other related textual information. While statistical indicators make up most of the indicators in the Framework on the Measurement of Decent Work, the legal framework indicators are equally important. The two sets of indicators are mutually reinforcing and thus both considered essential for monitoring progress towards decent work in each national economy.

The 10 substantive elements are:

- Employment opportunities
- Adequate income and productive work
- Decent working hours
- Reconciliation of work and family life
- Work that should be abolished
- Stability and security at work
- Equality of opportunity and treatment at work

[1] International Labour Organisation (2007). Provisional Record -90 Session, Geneva

- Safe working environment
- Social security
- Social dialogue and representation

There is an additional substantive element related to the economic and social context for decent work called:

- Economic and social context indicators

These dimensions include:

- ***Employment:*** *Access to full and productive employment creation and enterprise development.*

- ***Standards and rights at work:*** *Freedom of expression, association, and social dialogue.*

- ***Social protection:*** *Social security for workers and their families.*

- ***Governance and Social dialogue:*** *Participation in decisions that affect their lives.*

1.2. LMI System Implementation for monitoring decent work

Various reasons have an appeal of LMI System as a tool for designing and evaluating public policies, providing strategic information to agents to reduce incomplete and inaccurate information and guiding decision making through the systematization and dissemination of key labour market indicators and timely information on labour market dynamics.

The LMI System makes it easier to access at a "single point" for designing, monitoring and evaluating employment policies that enhance the capacity of decisionmakers and society in general to act in a timely manner.

Within the national sphere of government, the DEL bears primary responsibility for employment policy and administration, especially as it relates to employers and employees. Therefore, it is important that it monitors and maintains this national LMI System.
In the SADC region, some countries are also in the process of building the "Labour Market Observatories" to facilitate understanding of the regional labour market dynamics.

Implementing the national LMI System for monitoring DWI involves creating a centralized platform to collect, analyse, and disseminate data on key indicators like employment, rights at work, social protection, and social dialogue. A successful implementation requires collaboration between government agencies like the DEL, ILO, and national Statistical Offices (Stats SA).

(i). Key steps for LMI System implementation:

- **Establish a clear framework:**

  Develop a national LMIS strategy, which includes defining objectives, target audiences, and the core set of indicators to monitor.

- **Collaborate and build capacity:**

  Partner with organizations like the ILO and Statistics South Africa to ensure the system aligns with international standards and to build the necessary technical expertise.

- **Integrate data sources:**

  Create an integrated portal that consolidates labour market data from various sources to provide a comprehensive overview. ILO can still provide technical expertise.

- **Select and define indicators:**

Choose a core set of Decent Work Indicators (DWIs) based on conceptual relevance, data availability, and comparability across SADC member states. This initial set will be progressively expanded in line with the data governance in the country. The LMI System Master Plan outlines most of key South African labour market indicators in response to the DWI and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). Data collection methodology and source for each indicator is also specified in line with international standards.

- **Disseminate information:**

  Make the collected data and analysis accessible to policymakers, researchers, and the public to inform decision-making and monitor progress on decent work and other labour-related goals.

- **Monitor and evaluate:**

  Use the LMI System to continuously track progress towards decent work goals and evaluate the impact of policies and programs where required.

- **Conduct national studies:**

  Produce and use data from the LMI System for national assessments and policy analysis, such as the development of national decent work country profiles.

- **Engage stakeholders:**
  Involve national partners, including government bodies, social partners, and other stakeholders, in the identification and use of DWI's to ensure policies are effective.

(ii). LMI System implementation

- South Africa launched its LMI System in September 2024 through a collaboration between the DEL, ILO, and Stats SA. The successful implementation of the LMI System has attracted other countries such as Botswana and Nigeria to conduct a study visit to South Africa for exchanging and sharing experiences.
- Political support and adoption from both the DEL and Stats SA were largely important motivation in the implementation of LMI System to enhance policy formulation in the country.

1.3. Youth-Definition (s)

- In South Africa, the definition of youth is generally considered to be people aged 15-34 years. However, this definition can vary depending on the specific policy or legislation, with some government documents using a broader range of 14-35 years (the National Youth Act of 1996[2]). This broader definition is used to capture the transition period between childhood and adulthood (or to account for people who may have similar life circumstances), though the 15-34 years range is used more frequently for statistics, e.g., the Labour Force because 15 is the minimum age for formal employment.
- For statistical purposes, Stats SA produces data based on two (2) definitions of youth:
  - 15-24 years (to align to global definition of youth)
  - 15-34 years (to align to national definition of youth).
- This report provides statistics results using both definitions of youth.

- **Legal distinction:**
  Legally, a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 in South Africa, according to the Children's Act. The criminal justice system also distinguishes between "child" and "adult youth" for different legal programs.

[2] The NYP's 2009, 2015 and 2030 define young people as those aged between 14-15 years. Although much has changed for young people since the advent of democracy in 1994, the motivation for the age limit of 35 years has not yet changed due to the need to fully address historical imbalances.

1.4. Youth-Policy: Compulsory school age and education system

South Africa has historically held contradictory perceptions and expectations of its youth. This is mirrored in the post-1994 policy environment for youth, in which initiatives and frameworks to address youth development are shaped simultaneously around the 'problem' of youth, and the promise they hold for the country's future.

In South Africa, young people continue to be challenged despite government policies aimed at dealing with the structural impediments in the country. Many young people (15-24 or 15-34 years) experience a high unemployment rate as compared to adults (***25+ years - using international comparison***). In most cases, young people constitute the largest group of individuals who report to be in long-term unemployment rate (more than one year). This delays their transition into employment.

- In other words, policy interventions must facilitate the youth's exit from long-term unemployment. This might require policy responses that deal effectively to the structural and social environments in which young people live. If we are to generate solutions for a more inclusive future, the views of young people themselves must inform policy approaches and interventions[3].

- **Youth Policy Context: The National Youth Policy (NYP)** aims to enhance the capacities of young people through addressing their needs and promoting positive outcomes, with education being a core component of overall youth development strategies.

(i). The BELA Act introduced significant changes:

- **Compulsory Grade R:** Attendance at Grade R is now mandatory. Children must attend school from the year they turn six.

- **Compulsory education duration:** School attendance is now legally required until a learner completes Grade 9 or turns 15, whichever occurs first.

- **Enforcement:** Parents or guardians who fail to ensure their child's school attendance can face penalties, including fines or imprisonment.

The broader education system, which includes basic and post-school education, is designed around the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

(ii). General Education and Training (GET)

- **South Africa's Youth-Policy: Compulsory school age, education system etc.**
  In South Africa, education is compulsory for children aged 7 to 15, or from Grade 1 to Grade 9, under the South African Schools Act of 1996. This policy aims to ensure access to basic education without discrimination. Under the Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) Act, which came into effect in December 2024, compulsory school attendance in South Africa now begins in Grade R, the reception year, and continues until Grade 9 or the learner's 15th birthday, whichever occurs first. This legislation expanded on the previous requirement, which began at age seven in Grade 1.

(iii). New compulsory school age requirements

The BELA Act of 2024 made two major changes to the compulsory schooling requirement under the South African Schools Act of 1996:

[3] MISTRA (2021): Youth in South Africa: Agency, (in) visibility and national development, Policy brief, November 2021

- **Compulsory Grade R:** Attendance at Grade R is now mandatory, starting in the year a child turns six.
- Key aspects of youth policy related to compulsory schooling include:
- **Universal access:** Policies emphasize the need for all children, including those with disabilities, to have access to a quality education.
- **Early Childhood Development (ECD):** The new mandatory Grade R is part of a larger push to ensure universal access to quality ECD and early learning programs, which are seen as crucial for improving outcomes in later grades.
- **Support for diverse learners:** The system aims to cater to the needs of different groups, including those from various geographical locations, educational statuses, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Accountability:** National education policy and the BELA Act ensure that parents are legally responsible for their child's school attendance. Failure to comply can result in penalties, including fines or imprisonment.
- The broader education system, which includes basic and post-school education, is designed around the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
- **Post-Compulsory Education:** Grades 10 to 12 are part of the Further Education and Training (FET) phase and are not compulsory. After completing Grade 9 (or reaching age 16), individuals can choose to continue general schooling or attend a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college.

1.5. Data: Source, periodicity, sub-groups, disaggregation

South Africa has ratified the ILO Convention 160 on Labour Statistics (1985), which requires the regular collection, compilation and publication of basic labour statistics, in different areas of the labour market. In this context, South Africa is relatively fortunate in the availability and reliability of statistics. In particular, the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) provides regular data that give consistent results over time. Therefore, this report focuses on DWI-Employment indicators, including Labour Force Participation (LFPR), Employment-to-population ratio (EPR), Unemployment rate (UR), and those outside the labour force. Other relevant metrics include NEET and combined indicators LU1-LU4 and OLF.

Data Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Q1 2021-Q1 2025)/ ILOSTATS.

Periodicity: Annually

Sub-groups: 15+, 15-24, 25+ and 15-34 years.

Disaggregation: Age, Sex, Occupation, Aggregate Economic Activities

Additionally, administrative data from government departments like DEL and other agencies[4] could serve as a complimentary source for these indicators. This suggests that South Africa has a substantial range of indicators linked to the four pillars of Decent Work Index (DWI): **employment, social protection, workers' rights, and social dialogue.**

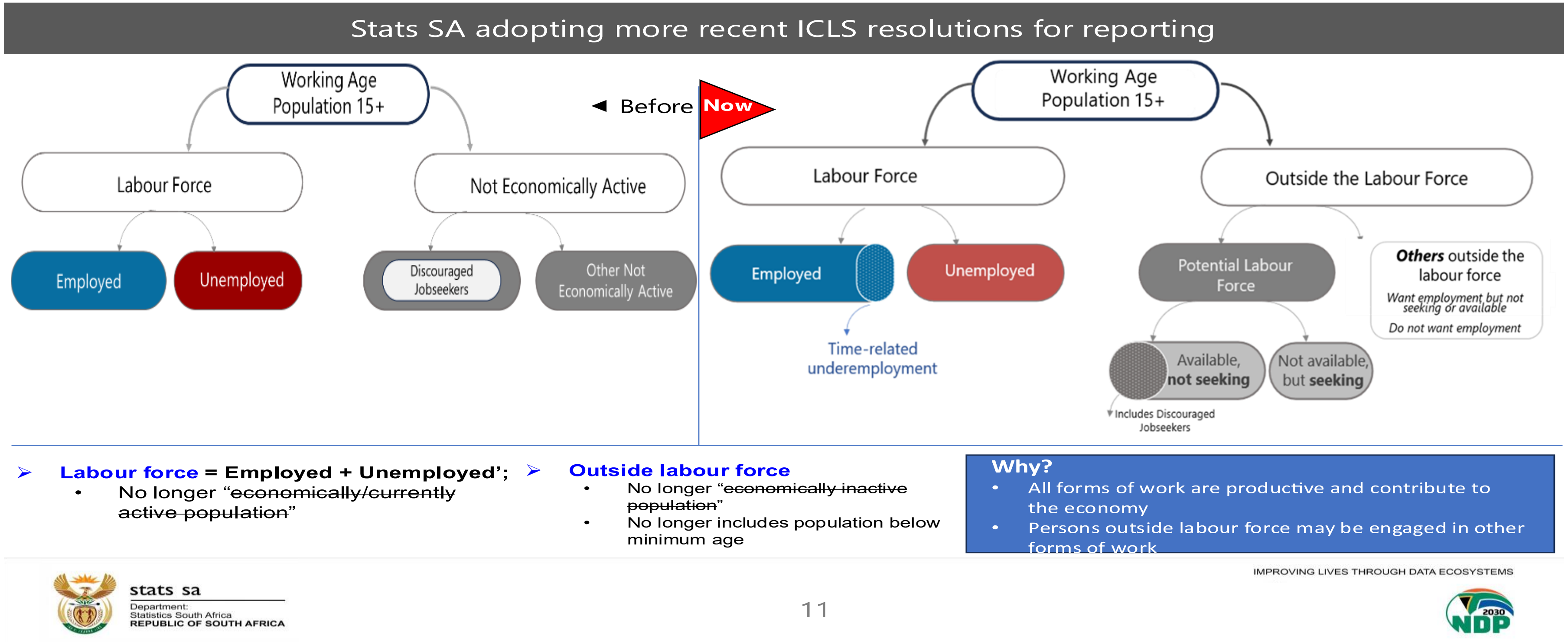
[4] However, such data are not always available and, where they are, the quality is sometimes open to question. The coverage indicators must thus be treated with caution.

1.5.1. Who is in the working-age population

- Persons who are of the minimum age for access to the labour market
- *With the exceptions provided for in national legislation, or the age at which compulsory education ends (19th ICLS, 2013).*

South Africa: Basic Condition of Employment Act
- Maximum age: not recommended.
- International comparison: 15 years and over.

Figure 1: Classification of working- age population



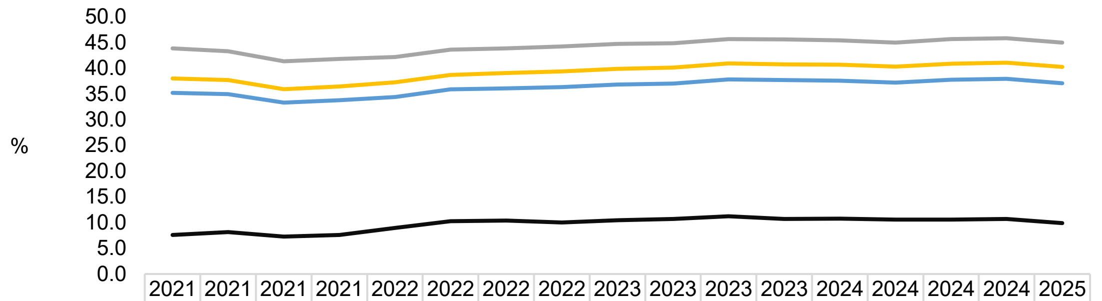
Source: Statistics South Africa, Labour Statistics, Presentation-April 2026

2. Analysis: Youth experience in the South African labour market

2.1. Employment-to-population ratio

Employment to-Population Ratio (EPR) is the proportion of a country's working-age population that is employed.

Figure 2: Quarterly EPR's by age groups



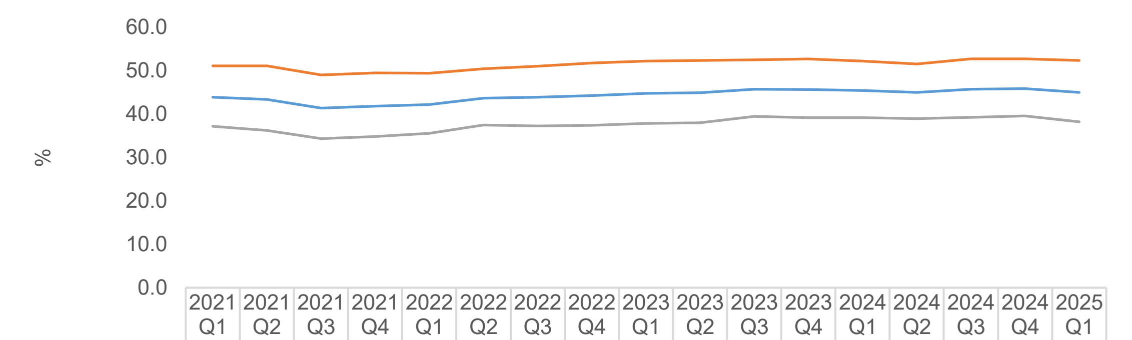
	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15+	35.2	35.0	33.3	33.8	34.4	35.9	36.1	36.4	36.9	37.1	37.8	37.7	37.6	37.2	37.8	38.0	37.1
15-24	7.6	8.1	7.3	7.6	9.0	10.3	10.4	10.0	10.5	10.7	11.2	10.7	10.8	10.6	10.6	10.7	9.9
25+	43.9	43.3	41.4	41.8	42.2	43.6	43.9	44.2	44.7	44.9	45.7	45.6	45.4	45.0	45.7	45.8	45.0
15-64	38.0	37.7	35.9	36.5	37.3	38.7	39.1	39.4	39.9	40.1	41.0	40.8	40.7	40.3	40.9	41.1	40.3

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 2** depicts the employment-to-population ratio (EPR) across various age brackets with the national population aged 15 and older, remaining below 40% from Q1- 2021 to Q1: 2025. Whilst for the youth population aged 15-24 years, the EPR stayed below 12% during this reporting period. The lowest recorded EPR for youth (15-24 years) was in Q3: 2021 at 7,3%, while the highest was in Q3- 2023 at 11,2%. It was further illustrated that the EPR for the adult population aged 25 and over was consistently higher than that of the national population. In fact, the EPR for youth remained significantly lower than that of adults, with the adults (25+ years) EPR exceeding the youth EPR by approximately 4 times each quarter or by approximately 33% throughout the reporting period. There has been a slight improvement in the EPR for youth (15-24 years) in 2022; however, during the earlier quarter of 2025 there was a decline.

- Overall, the EPR's were noticeably lower across all age groups from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2023 compared to the period Q2: 2023 to Q1: 2025. This could indicate a significant number of individuals across all age groups was relatively absorbed in the labour in the later times as the South African economy started its recovery path.

Figure 3: Quarterly EPR of youth (15-24 years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	43.9	43.3	41.4	41.8	42.2	43.6	43.9	44.2	44.7	44.9	45.7	45.6	45.4	45.0	45.7	45.8	45.0
Male	51.1	51.0	49.0	49.5	49.4	50.4	51.0	51.7	52.2	52.4	52.5	52.7	52.2	51.6	52.7	52.7	52.3
Female	37.2	36.2	34.3	34.8	35.5	37.4	37.3	37.4	37.8	38.0	39.5	39.1	39.2	38.9	39.3	39.6	38.2

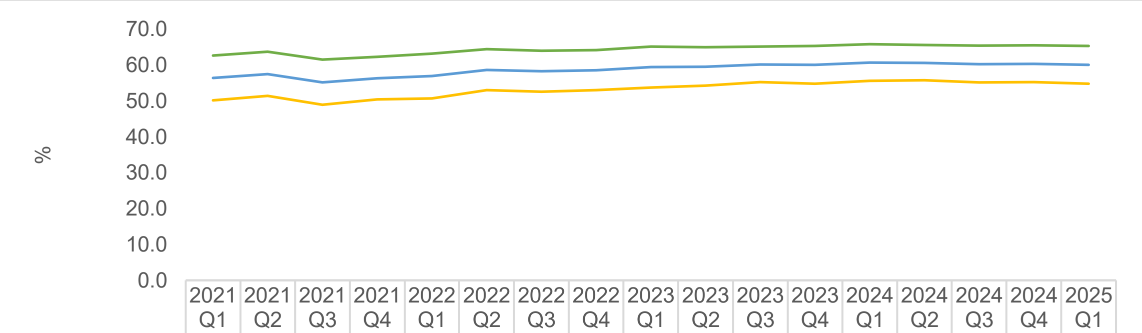
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 3** illustrates the EPRs of the youth (15-24 years), broken down by sex, highlighting that the employment rate of young males has consistently surpassed that of females throughout the reporting period. Young males (15-24 years) showed higher EPRs compared to young females from Q1:2021 to Q1: 2025. Their rates continue to be consistently above the national average throughout the quarters in the same period.

- The gap in the EPRs of the two sexes still highlights a structural problem in economic participation and absorption for youth female (15-24 years). This is illustrated with the low EPRs among female which indicates that the economy is not expanding fast enough to quickly absorb the working-age female population into jobs. This inequality highlights the persistent issues women encounter in the South African job market, as indicated in numerous labour market research studies.

- Overall, the EPRs for youth (15-24 years) increased by 1,1 percentage point from Q1: 2021 to Q1:2025. Interestingly, the percentage changes were almost identical for both sexes, averaging at1percentage point during that period. They have similarly gained higher EPRs from Q2: 2023 to Q1: 2025 compared to the period from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2023 within the same age group (15-24 years).

Figure 4: Quarterly EPR for persons (15-64 years) by sex



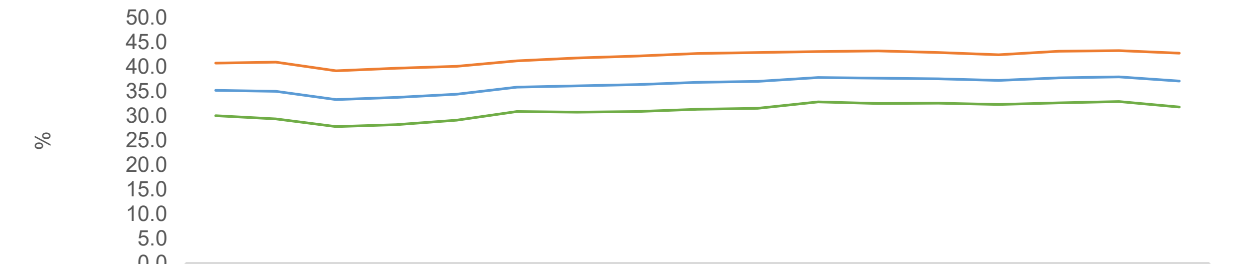
	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	56.4	57.5	55.2	56.3	56.9	58.6	58.3	58.5	59.4	59.6	60.2	60.0	60.7	60.6	60.2	60.3	60.0
Male	62.7	63.7	61.5	62.3	63.2	64.4	64.0	64.1	65.2	64.9	65.2	65.3	65.8	65.6	65.4	65.5	65.3
Female	50.2	51.4	48.9	50.5	50.7	53.0	52.6	53.0	53.8	54.3	55.2	54.8	55.6	55.8	55.2	55.2	54.8

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 4** highlights that during the first quarter of 2021, the national EPR was higher for the working age population (15-64 years) compared to youth. The difference in the experience of women and men in the labour market is again noticeable here, given that the EPR for men (62,7%) is above the national EPR (56,4%) while the EPR for women (50,2%) is below the national EPR. The EPR's remained stable just below 60% from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025 for females (15-64 years) as compared to males (15-64 years). However, the EPR's for females (15-64 years) increased almost two-fold (4,6 percentage point) than for males between Q1: 2021 and Q1: 2025. The lower EPR's for both sexes were recorded in Q3: 2021 at 48,9% among females and 61,5% among males. Despite the increase, EPR for females consistently remained below that of males.

- Over the years, the male EPR's for the working-age population (15-64 years) consistently exceeded that of females by more than 10%, reaching the highest gap of 12,5% in Q1: 2021; whilst the highest EPR's for both the national and male populations were observed in Q1: 2024, at 60,7% and 65,8%, respectively. For the reporting period, the female EPR's reflected an increase during Q2: 2024, reaching 55,8%, although the gap remained insignificant from the first quarter.

Figure 5: Quarterly EPR's for persons (15+ years) by sex



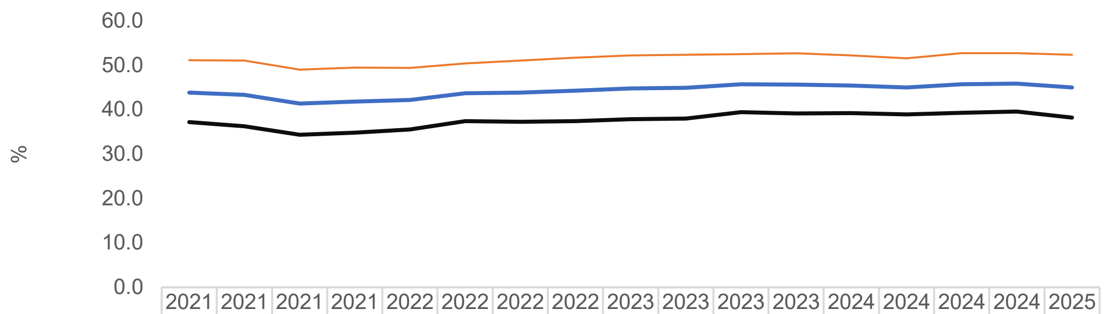
	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	35.2	35.0	33.3	33.8	34.4	35.9	36.1	36.4	36.9	37.1	37.8	37.7	37.6	37.2	37.8	38.0	37.1
Male	40.7	40.9	39.2	39.7	40.1	41.2	41.8	42.2	42.7	42.9	43.1	43.2	42.9	42.4	43.2	43.3	42.8
Female	30.1	29.4	27.8	28.2	29.1	30.9	30.8	30.9	31.4	31.5	32.9	32.5	32.6	32.3	32.7	32.9	31.8

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 5** shows EPR's for individuals in the age group 15+ years in all quarters from 2021-2025. The EPR of the males (15+ years) remains higher than the EPR's of the females and national population. The lowest EPR for people aged 15 and above was recorded in Q3:2021 (33,3%) and the highest EPR was recorded in Q4: 2024 (38,0%). Amongst males (15+ years), the highest EPR was recorded at 43,3% in Q4: 2024 and the lowest was at 39,2% in Q3: 2021. The low EPR amongst female population purports that a relatively small proportion of females of the working-age population gain employment over the same period.

- Between Q1: 2021 and Q1: 2025, the national EPR increased by 1,9 percentage point but not insufficient to absorb many new entrants in the labour market. The lower EPR indicates the difficulty of an economy in creating enough employment for those in the working age population in South Africa.

Figure 6: Quarterly EPR's for persons (25+ years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	43.9	43.3	41.4	41.8	42.2	43.6	43.9	44.2	44.7	44.9	45.7	45.6	45.4	45.0	45.7	45.8	45.0
Male	51.1	51.0	49.0	49.5	49.4	50.4	51.0	51.7	52.2	52.4	52.5	52.7	52.2	51.6	52.7	52.7	52.3
Female	37.2	36.2	34.3	34.8	35.5	37.4	37.3	37.4	37.8	38.0	39.5	39.1	39.2	38.9	39.3	39.6	38.2

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

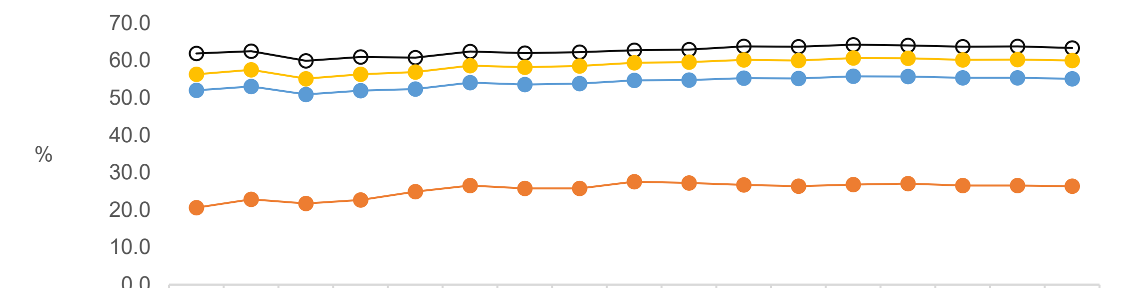
- **Figure 6** reflects the EPR of the adult population (25+ years) remains at or below 50%, each quarter for the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025 as compared to adult male population. The lowest EPR for the adult population was recorded in Q3:2021 at 41,4% and the highest EPR was recorded in Q4: 2024 (45,8%). During the period of four years (Q1: 2021 - Q1: 2025), the EPR of adult female (25+ years) remained lower than that of their adult male counterparts. There have been minimal changes of EPR in both sexes over the period.

- The low EPR among adult female population means that the economy is not growing at a pace that allows the absorption of female population into employment. This indicates that less adult female aged (25+ years) secured jobs as compared to their adult male counterparts over the same period. In general, the EPR of both adult male and female seem to follow the same pattern as the EPR of the overall adult group (25+ years).

2.2. Labour Participation rate (LFPR)

The LFPR reflects the proportion of the working age population that is in the labour force (either employed or unemployed). According to ILO and related research, Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) have determinants that include education, geographical location, household income, marital status, and the burden of unpaid care work, with significant gendered impacts where women are often more affected by household and societal factors like childcare and traditional gender roles.

Figure 7: Quarterly LFPR by age groups



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15+	52.1	53.1	51.0	52.0	52.4	54.1	53.6	53.9	54.7	54.8	55.3	55.2	55.8	55.7	55.4	55.4	55.1
15-24	20.6	22.9	21.8	22.7	24.9	26.6	25.8	25.7	27.6	27.2	26.7	26.4	26.8	27.1	26.6	26.6	26.3
25+	61.9	62.5	60.0	60.9	60.8	62.4	62.0	62.3	62.8	63.0	63.8	63.7	64.3	64.1	63.7	63.8	63.4
15-64	56.4	57.5	55.2	56.3	56.9	58.6	58.3	58.5	59.4	59.6	60.2	60.0	60.7	60.6	60.2	60.3	60.0

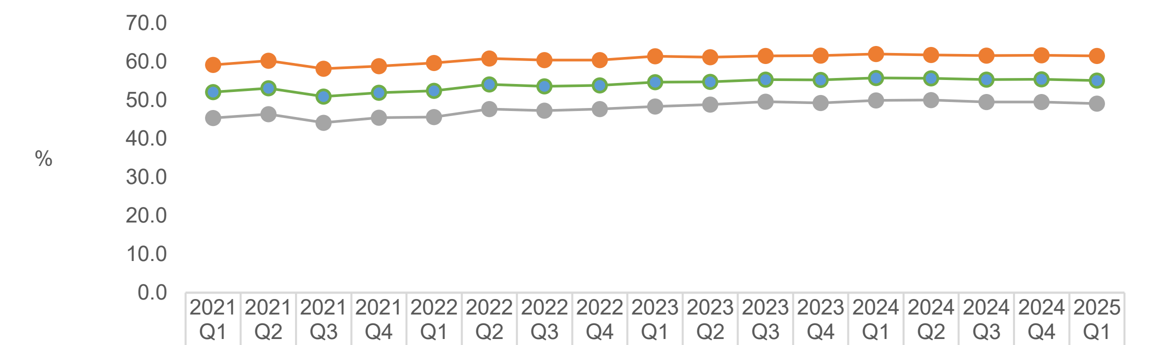
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 7** shows the LFPR by age groups from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. The LFPR of the national population (15+ years) was at 52,1% in Q1 of 2021, fluctuating in between the quarters and ultimately reaching the highest rate at 55,8% during Q1: 2024 and gradually decreased to 55,1% in Q1: 2025. Compared with the national population (15+ years), the LFPR of the youth (15-24 years) increased from 20,6% in Q1: 2021 to the highest at 27,6% in Q1: 2023 then fluctuated in each quarter to reach a declined at 26,3% in 2025.

- Furthermore, the figure shows a stark contrast in the labour supply of youth compared to other groups. This raises the question of whether youth labour supply is low because they are in education, or because they are not in education but also not seeking jobs.

- On the other hand, LFPR of adults aged (25+ years) increased from 61,9% in Q1:2021 to the highest at 64,1% in Q2: 2024 then declined to 63,4% in Q1: 2025. The LFPR of adults working population group (15-64 years) increased by 3,6 percentage point from 56,4% in Q1: 2021 to 60,0% in Q1: 2025. The results indicate that they are more adult (25+ years) than youth (15-25 years) that are actively engaged in the economy, either by working or actively seeking employment. In general, the LFPR of the national population across age groups were more affected from Q1: 2021 to Q4: 2022 as compared to the periods from Q1: 2023 to Q1: 2025. A possible reason is associated with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its remnants that continued to slow the economic recovery trajectory in the country.

Figure 8: Quarterly LFPR of persons (15+ years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15+	52.1	53.1	51.0	52.0	52.4	54.1	53.6	53.9	54.7	54.8	55.3	55.2	55.8	55.7	55.4	55.4	55.1
Male	59.2	60.3	58.2	58.9	59.7	60.9	60.4	60.5	61.4	61.2	61.5	61.6	62.0	61.7	61.6	61.7	61.5
Female	45.4	46.4	44.2	45.5	45.6	47.7	47.3	47.7	48.4	48.8	49.6	49.3	49.9	50.1	49.5	49.5	49.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 8** compares the LFPR of males and females during the reporting period and reflects the LFPR of males was at 59,2% in Q1: 2021 as compared to 45,4% of females during the same period. The improvement in the LFPR of males in Q1: 2024 led to an increase in the LFPR by 2,8 percentage points to 62,0% compared to Q1: 2021. Men recorded the highest participation rates, which are even higher than the national rates. In contrast, the low LFPR's of females are associated with slow employment creation for females in a number of industries which displayed low productivity rates during the period under review.

- In general, the South African labour market has experienced considerably moderate LFPR's of just above 50%, mainly due to slow economic growth and insufficient job opportunities. Furthermore, the statistics shows that LFPR for males were consistently higher in comparison to female counterparts. There is a need for government interventions to address the gender inequalities in the South African labour market[5].

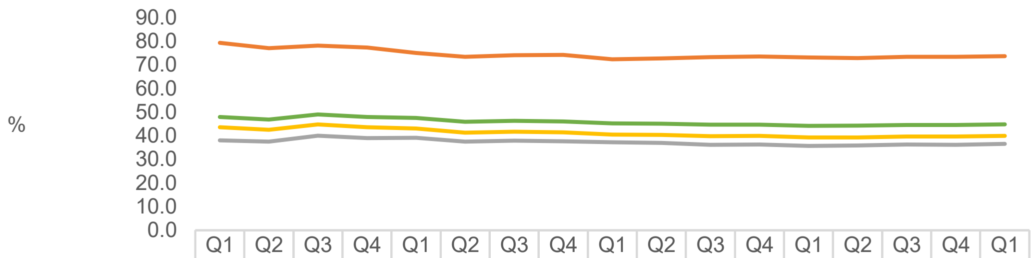
2.3. Rate people outside the labour force

People outside the labour force are those of working age population who were neither in employment nor in unemployment in the short reference period. The ILO framework identifies individuals as being outside the labour force if they are neither employed nor unemployed, including students, retirees, and those with caregiving duties or who are simply not seeking work.

In summary, it consists of those who are not meeting enough criteria to be considered as either employed or unemployed. Some of them want to be outside the labour and some do not want to be outside the labour force but have not taken the necessary steps to be in the labour force.

[5] The most worrying thing for me is the fact that there is such a huge gap in the LFPR between the two sexes. LFPR represents the relative size of the labour supply-it shows how big the labour supply is. Some of these people are already supplying their labour (they are employed), and some want to supply their labour (unemployed). What we are seeing here is that women is still under-represented in labour supply indicating that compared to men, some women are not indicating that they have taken steps to participate in the labour market. Is it because they do no want to? Or they want to but they are not taking the necessary steps to participate (meaning looking for jobs or stating their availability to start working).

Figure 9: Quarterly persons outside the labour force by age groups



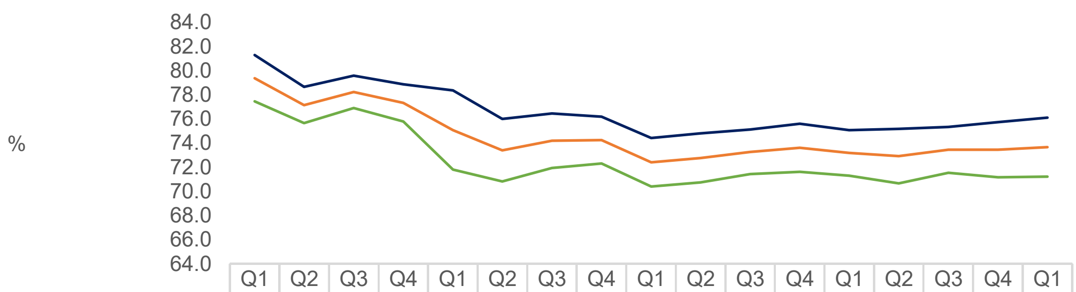
	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total 15+	47.9	46.9	49.0	48.0	47.6	45.9	46.4	46.1	45.3	45.2	44.7	44.8	44.2	44.3	44.6	44.6	44.9
Total 15-24	79.4	77.1	78.2	77.3	75.1	73.4	74.2	74.3	72.4	72.8	73.3	73.6	73.2	72.9	73.4	73.4	73.7
Total 25+	38.1	37.5	40.0	39.1	39.2	37.6	38.0	37.7	37.2	37.0	36.2	36.3	35.7	35.9	36.3	36.2	36.6
Total 15-64	43.6	42.5	44.8	43.7	43.1	41.4	41.7	41.5	40.6	40.4	39.8	40.0	39.3	39.4	39.8	39.7	40.0

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- Accordingly, **Figure 9** reflects youth (15-24 years) outside the labour force appear to face disproportionate threats than adults aged 25 and above from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025[6]. On average, 74,6% of youth (15-24 years) were outside the labour force each quarter, compared to adults (25+ years) at an average of 37,3%The rates among youth (15-24 years) are also associated with the economic condition in the country, e.g., a slow economic growth over the period resulting in limited opportunities, high number of either discouraged individuals or students and reduction in the labour force participation rate. This is because with a good education system, we expect some youth to be outside the labour force as they are expected to be at school. This paragraph here is where we need to mention the education system of South Africa.

- The national rate for persons outside the labour force (15-64 years) peaked at 44,8% in Q3:2021, whilst the lowest ratio was experienced during Q1: 2024 at 39,3% which boded well having more persons seeking means of entry into the labour market. Between Q1: 2021 and Q1: 2025, the national rate for persons outside the labour force (15-64 years) decreased by 3.6 percentage point. This illustrates a share of persons outside the labour force which re-entered the labour force.

Figure 10: Quarterly youth (15-24 years) outside the labour force by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total 15-24 yrs	79.4	77.1	78.2	77.3	75.1	73.4	74.2	74.3	72.4	72.8	73.3	73.6	73.2	72.9	73.4	73.4	73.7
Male	77.5	75.6	76.9	75.8	71.8	70.8	71.9	72.3	70.4	70.7	71.4	71.6	71.3	70.7	71.5	71.2	71.2
Female	81.3	78.7	79.6	78.9	78.4	76.0	76.5	76.2	74.4	74.8	75.1	75.6	75.1	75.2	75.3	75.7	76.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

[6] In this regard, a more detail analysis of the South African educational system is required to close the gap.

- As outlined above, the youth (15-24 years) remained more vulnerable in the South African labour market, as they were largely outside the labour force. In **Figure 10**, the shares of youth (15-24 years) outside the labour force by sex are presented. The shares of female youth (15-24 years) have consistently made up a larger proportion of those outside the labour force compared to their male counterparts over the past five years. The rates for female youth (15-24 years) have remained relatively steady, averaging around 76,6%, while the rates for male youth averaged about 72,5% during the same period.

- The highest rate for female youth (15-24 years) was 81,3% in Q1: 2021, while the lowest was 74,4% in Q1: 2023. Amongst males' youth (15-24 years) outside the labour force, the highest rate was at 77,5% in Q1: 2021 and the lowest was recorded in Q1: 2023 at 70,4%.

- In general, the national rates of youth (15-24 years) outside the labour force declined by 6 percentage point between Q1: 2021 and Q1: 2025. The rates displayed the same patterns as for the males and females' youth over time. The impact of Covid-19 pandemic and some policy interventions put in place were largely felt by the youth (15-24 years) which left them outside the labour force. Other reasons could be due to cultural and religious beliefs, childcare responsibilities, and household duties which relatively maintained a large share of youth outside the labour force.

2.4. Labour underutilization in the South African labour market

The labour underutilization refers to the mismatches between labour supply and demand which translates into an unmet need for employment among the population. The measure of Labour underutilization includes:

- Time-related underemployment
- Unemployment
- Potential Labour Force

The three measures provide a more comprehensive picture of the labour market, when they are used or interpreted together. The following section provides information on the status of each measure separately and also provides an analysis of the labour market by making use of the three measures of labour underutilization, which are converted into four (4) indicators. These indicators are:

*1) Unemployment rate **(LU1)**: It represents the number of persons who are unemployed as a percent of the total number of employed and unemployed persons (i.e., the labour force).*

*2) Combined rate of unemployment and time related underemployment (**LU2**): It represents the share of the labour force that are either in unemployment or time-related underemployment.*

*3) Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (**LU3**): It represents the share of the extended labour force that are in unemployment or the potential labour force.*

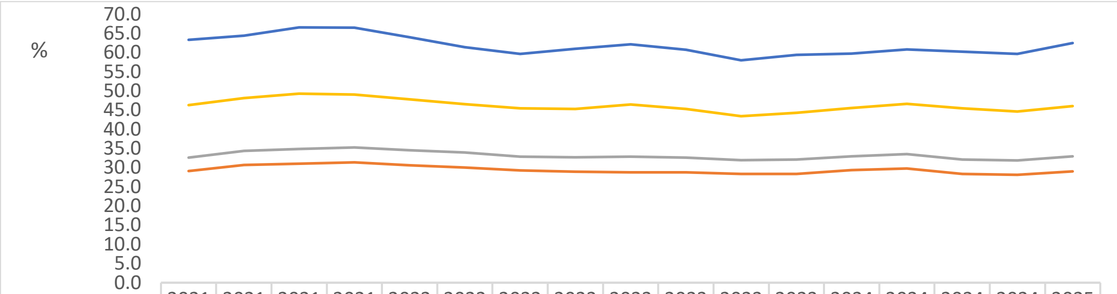
*4) Aggregate measure of labour underutilization (**LU4**): It represents the share of the extended labour force that are in unemployment, time-related underemployment or the potential labour force.*

Persons in underemployment (time-related) are employed persons who were willing and available to work additional hours, whose total number of hours actually worked during the reference period were below 35 hours per week (Stats SA).

2.4.1. *Unemployment rate (LU1)[7] based on the strict definition*

The unemployment rate was defined as the percentage of the labour force that was unemployed. **LU1** is part of a broader set of labour underutilization measures.

Figure 11: Quarterly unemployment rate by age groups



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15-24	63.3	64.4	66.6	66.5	64.0	61.4	59.7	61.0	62.1	60.7	58.0	59.4	59.7	60.8	60.2	59.6	62.5
15-34	46.3	48.1	49.3	49.1	47.8	46.5	45.5	45.3	46.5	45.3	43.4	44.3	45.5	46.6	45.5	44.6	46.1
25+	29.1	30.7	31.0	31.4	30.6	30.1	29.3	29.0	28.8	28.7	28.4	28.4	29.3	29.8	28.3	28.1	29.0
15-64	32.6	34.4	34.9	35.3	34.5	33.9	32.9	32.7	32.9	32.6	31.9	32.1	33.0	33.5	32.1	31.9	32.9

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The unemployment rate provides information on those who are not employed, have been seeking for a job and indicated that they were available to take up work. The national unemployment rate (LU1) for persons aged 15-64 years remained at or below 35% from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as shown in **Figure 11** above.

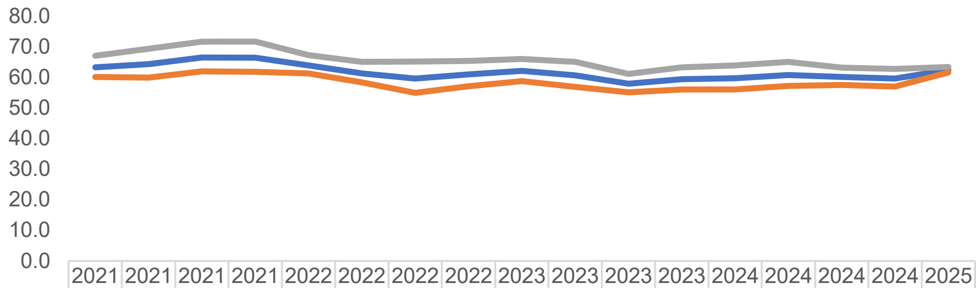
- Youth unemployment 15-24 years consistently remained higher than the national, 15-34, and adult 25+ years and above unemployment rate over the reporting period. Individuals aged 15-34 years also experienced higher unemployment compared to adults 25+ years and above but consistently lower than the 15-24 youth category.

- The lowest youth unemployment rate (LU1) 15-24 years was recorded in Q3:2023 at 58,0%, while the highest was observed in Q3: 2021 at 66,6%. Among individuals aged 15-34 years, the lowest unemployment rate was recorded in Q3: 2023 43,4%, while the highest was observed in Q3: 2021 at 49,3%. The adult unemployment rate 25+ years and above remained consistently lower than the national rates of youth aged 15-24, and 15-34 years.

- Overall, the unemployment rate (LU1) shows a gradual decline across all age groups 15-24, 15-34, 25+ years and above, and national between Q1: 2021 and Q1: 2025.

[7] LU: Refers to mismatches between labour supply and demand, which translate into an unmet need for employment among the population, (ILO).

Figure 12: Quarterly youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) by sex

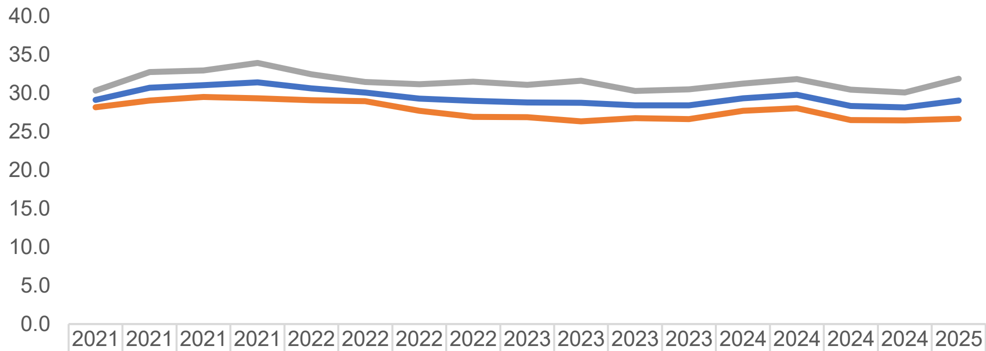


	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	63.3	64.4	66.6	66.5	64.0	61.4	59.7	61.0	62.1	60.7	58.0	59.4	59.7	60.8	60.2	59.6	62.5
Male	60.2	60.0	62.0	61.9	61.4	58.4	55.0	57.1	58.8	56.9	55.2	56.1	56.1	57.3	57.6	57.0	61.7
Female	67.1	69.5	71.7	71.8	67.4	65.1	65.2	65.5	66.0	65.1	61.2	63.3	64.0	65.1	63.2	62.8	63.5

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- In **Figure 12**, the youth (15-25 years) unemployment rate (LU1), disaggregated by sex shows that female youth unemployment rate (LU1) consistently remained higher than that of male youth throughout the reporting period from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025.
- In general, the unemployment trend for both youth male and female (15-24 years) closely follow the same pattern as the overall youth unemployment rate (LU1).

Figure 13: Quarterly adult (24+ years) unemployment rate by sex

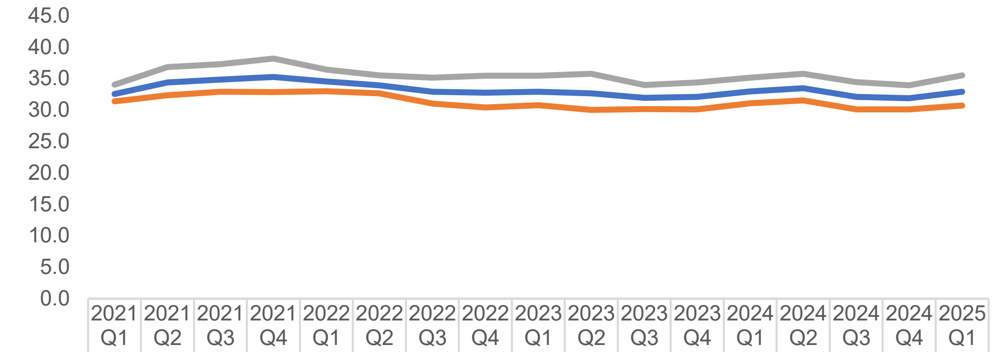


	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	29.1	30.7	31.0	31.4	30.6	30.1	29.3	29.0	28.8	28.7	28.4	28.4	29.3	29.8	28.3	28.1	29.0
Male	28.2	29.0	29.5	29.3	29.1	28.9	27.7	26.9	26.8	26.3	26.7	26.6	27.7	28.0	26.5	26.5	26.6
Female	30.3	32.7	32.9	33.9	32.4	31.4	31.2	31.5	31.0	31.6	30.3	30.5	31.2	31.8	30.5	30.1	31.8

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The female adult (24+ years) unemployment rate (LU1) consistently remained higher than male unemployment rate throughout the reporting period from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as shown in **Figure 13**. The highest male unemployment rate was at 29,5% in Q3: 2021, while the highest female unemployment rate was at 33,9% in Q4: 2021. In contrast, the lowest male unemployment rate was at 26.3% in Q2: 2023, while the lowest female unemployment rate was at 30,1% in Q4: 2024.
- Interestingly, the adult (24+ years) unemployment rate has also remained lower the average unemployment rate of female adult and country for the period under review.

Figure 14: Quarterly unemployment rate of persons (15-64 years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	32.6	34.4	34.9	35.3	34.5	33.9	32.9	32.7	32.9	32.6	31.9	32.1	33.0	33.5	32.1	31.9	32.9
Male	31.4	32.4	32.9	32.8	33.0	32.6	31.0	30.4	30.7	30.0	30.2	30.1	31.1	31.5	30.1	30.1	30.7
Female	34.0	36.9	37.3	38.2	36.4	35.5	35.1	35.5	35.5	35.7	34.0	34.4	35.2	35.8	34.4	33.9	35.5

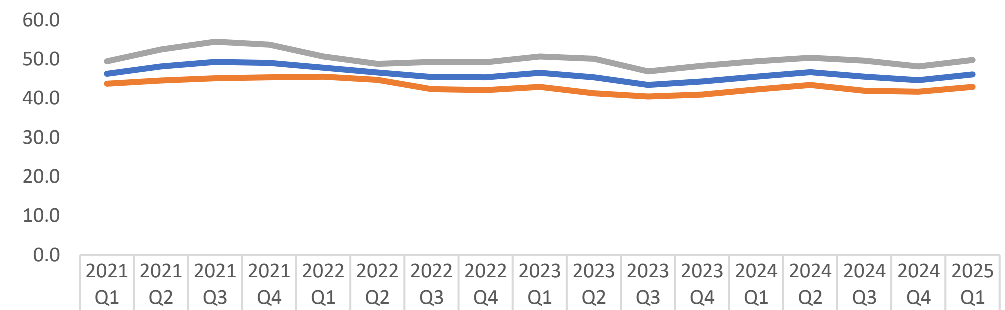
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- In **Figure 14**, the national unemployment rate (LU1) of 15-64 years fluctuated between 31,9% and 35,3% during the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. Female unemployment rate consistently remained higher than male unemployment rate throughout the reporting period.

- The highest overall unemployment rate was recorded in Q4: 2021 at 35,3%, while the lowest unemployment rate was observed in Q4: 2024 at 31,9%. Female unemployment rate peaked at 38,2% in Q4: 2021 and reached its lowest at 33,9% in Q4: 2024. The lowest male unemployment rate was recorded in Q2: 2023 at 30,0% while the highest was recorded at 32,9% in Q3: 2021.

- The unemployment rate for both sexes followed a similar trend to the overall rate rising in 2021 and steadily declining from 2022 to 2024, showing slight increase again in early 2025. A persistent gender gap was observed, with female unemployment averaging about 3 to 4 percentage points higher than that of males across the entire period.

Figure 15: Quarterly youth (15-34 years[8]) unemployment rate by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	46.3	48.1	49.3	49.1	47.8	46.5	45.5	45.3	46.5	45.3	43.4	44.3	45.5	46.6	45.5	44.6	46.1
Male	43.8	44.5	45.1	45.3	45.5	44.7	42.3	42.1	42.9	41.3	40.5	40.9	42.2	43.4	41.9	41.6	42.9
Female	49.4	52.4	54.4	53.7	50.7	48.8	49.3	49.2	50.7	50.1	46.9	48.3	49.4	50.3	49.6	48.2	49.8

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

[8] Based on SA definition, the youth categories include all those aged 15-34 years, e.g., 15-24 and 25-34 years.

- **Figure 15** illustrates the unemployment rate for the youth aged 15-34 years fluctuated between 43,4% and 49,3% during the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. Female youth (15-34 years) unemployment consistently remained higher than male unemployment across all quarters.

- The highest overall youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) was recorded in Q3: 2021 at 49,3%, while the lowest was observed in Q3: 2023 at 43,4%. Female youth unemployment rated peaked at 54,4% in Q3: 2021 and reached its lowest at 46,9% in Q3: 2023.

- The lowest male youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) was recorded in Q3: 2023 at 40,5% while the highest unemployment was recorded at 45,3% in Q4:2021.

- The youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) for both sexes followed a similar trend to the overall rate rising in 2021 and steadily declining from 2022-2023, fluctuating slightly from 2024 onwards. A persistent gender gap was evident, with female youth unemployment higher than male youth unemployment throughout the reporting period.

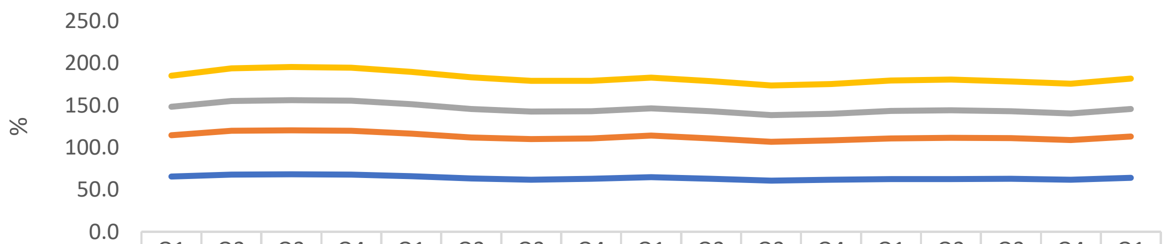
2.4.2. Combined indicators

2.4.2.1. Combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2)[9]

Combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) is defined as the share of the labour force that was either unemployed or in time-related underemployed.
It is calculated as follows:

[(persons in time-related underemployment + persons in unemployment) / labour force] x 100

Figure 16: Quarterly combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment by age groups (LU2)



	Q1 2021	Q2 2021	Q3 2021	Q4 2021	Q1 2022	Q2 2022	Q3 2022	Q4 2022	Q1 2023	Q2 2023	Q3 2023	Q4 2023	Q1 2024	Q2 2024	Q3 2024	Q4 2024	Q1 2025
15-64	36.9	38.9	39.3	39.3	38.4	37.4	36.3	35.9	36.5	36.0	35.2	35.2	36.1	36.5	35.5	35.2	36.3
25+	33.7	35.3	35.8	35.7	34.6	33.7	32.8	32.3	32.5	32.2	31.7	31.5	32.5	32.9	31.8	31.7	32.7
15-34	49.0	51.9	52.1	51.8	50.5	48.8	48.0	47.8	49.4	47.8	46.1	46.5	48.2	48.7	48.2	47.0	48.7
15-24	65.7	67.9	68.2	67.8	66.0	63.1	61.9	62.9	64.6	62.8	60.6	61.9	62.7	62.6	63.0	61.7	64.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

[9] This metric is used internationally to get a more complete picture of labour market issues, especially in countries where many people may have part-time work but want more hours. **Four indicators: to assess the nature of LU throughout the business cycle:**

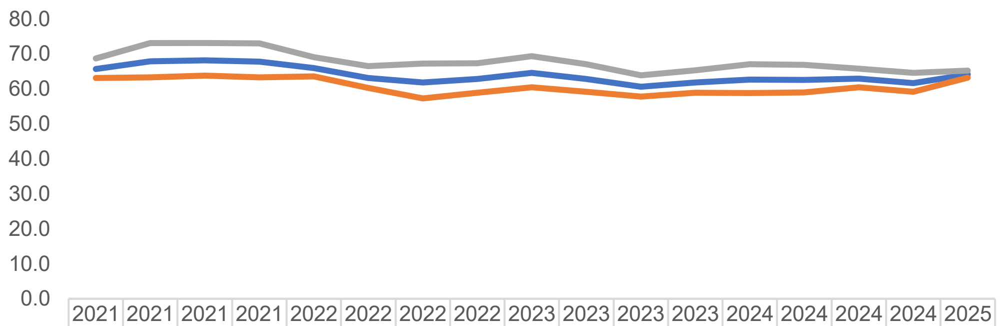
1. **LU1:** refers to the strict definition of unemployment in South Africa. LU1 (Unemployment rate) = [persons in unemployment / labour force] x 100 (The proportion of the labour force that was unemployed but actively seeking and available.
2. **LU2:** Combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment: [(persons in time-related underemployment + persons in unemployment) / labour force] x 100 (A broader unemployment rate that includes discouraged jobseekers.
3. **LU3:** Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force: [(persons in unemployment + potential labour force) / (extended labour force)] x 100 (The percentage of people who want to work but are not actively looking for jobs because they believe no jobs are available for them).
4. **LU4:** Composite measure of labour underutilization: [(persons in time-related underemployment + persons in unemployment + potential labour force) / (extended labour force)] x 100 (It was underutilisation rate which was a composite indicator that includes unemployed, underemployment and discouraged work-seekers).

- The combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) for the national population aged between 15-64 years remained at an average of 34,5% from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as shown in **Figure 16** above. The LU2 rate for youth unemployment aged between 15-24 years was consistently higher than the national, 15-34, and adult 25+ years and above rates throughout the reporting period.
- The lowest youth 15-24 years (LU2) was recorded in Q3: 2023 at 60,6%, while the highest was observed in Q3: 2021 at 68,2%. The lowest LU2 rate for youth aged between15-34 years 46,1% in Q3: 2023, while the highest was recorded in Q3: 2021 at 52,1%.

- Among adults aged 25+years and older, the lowest combined rate was observed in Q4: 2023 at 31,5%, and the highest was recorded in Q3; 2021 at 35,8%. The LU2 rate for adults 25+ years and above remained consistently lower than the national, youth 15-24, and 15-34 years rates across the reporting period.

- Over time, LU2 showed a gradual decline across all age groups 15-24, 15-34, 25+ years and above, and national, indicating an overall improvement in the labour market situation despite persistent age-related disparities. There are more youth 15-24 years that were working in parttime work, but they would like to work for more hours in the South African labour market.

Figure 17: Quarterly combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment of youth (15-24 years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	65.7	67.9	68.2	67.8	66.0	63.1	61.9	62.9	64.6	62.8	60.6	61.9	62.7	62.6	63.0	61.7	64.1
Male	63.1	63.3	63.8	63.3	63.6	60.3	57.3	59.0	60.5	59.2	57.8	58.9	58.8	59.1	60.5	59.2	63.2
Female	68.7	73.1	73.2	73.0	69.1	66.6	67.3	67.4	69.4	67.1	63.9	65.4	67.1	66.9	65.8	64.6	65.2

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

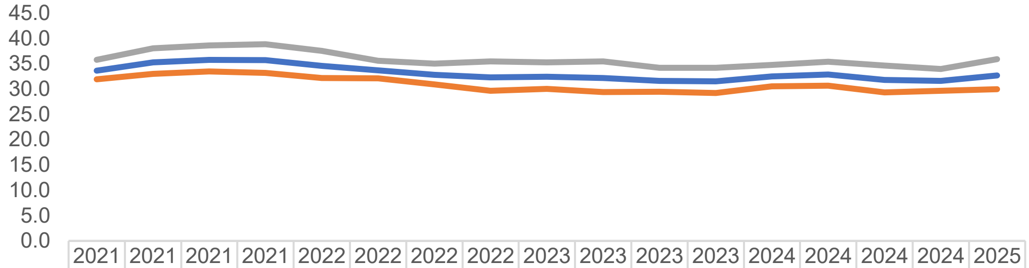
- **Figure 17** illustrates the combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) for youth aged 15-24 years fluctuated between 60,6% and 68,2% from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. The lowest combined rate for youth was recorded in Q3: 2023 at 60,6%, while the highest was observed in Q3: 2021 at 68,2%.

- Female youth (15-24 years) consistently experienced higher LU2 rates than male youth throughout the entire period. Female youth aged 15-24 years experienced a lowest LU2 rate of 63, 9% in Q3: 2023 and peak of 73,2% in Q3: 2021, highlighting persistent vulnerability among young women. In contrast, male youth aged 15-24 years recorded the lowest LU2 rate at 57,3% in Q3: 2022 and the highest at 63,8% in Q3: 2021.

- Over time, the LU2 rate declined gradually for both sexes, suggesting some improvement in labour market conditions, though females consistently remained more affected than males. Overall, the data highlights a persistent gap among the youth, with LU2 rate for female youth aged between 15-

34 years averaging 5 to 10 percentage points higher than those of their male counterparts over the reporting period.

Figure 18: Quarterly combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment of adults (25+ years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	33.7	35.3	35.8	35.7	34.6	33.7	32.8	32.3	32.5	32.2	31.7	31.5	32.5	32.9	31.8	31.7	32.7
Male	32.0	33.0	33.5	33.2	32.2	32.1	31.0	29.7	30.1	29.4	29.5	29.2	30.6	30.7	29.3	29.7	30.0
Female	35.8	38.0	38.6	38.9	37.6	35.6	35.0	35.5	35.3	35.5	34.2	34.2	34.8	35.4	34.7	34.0	35.9

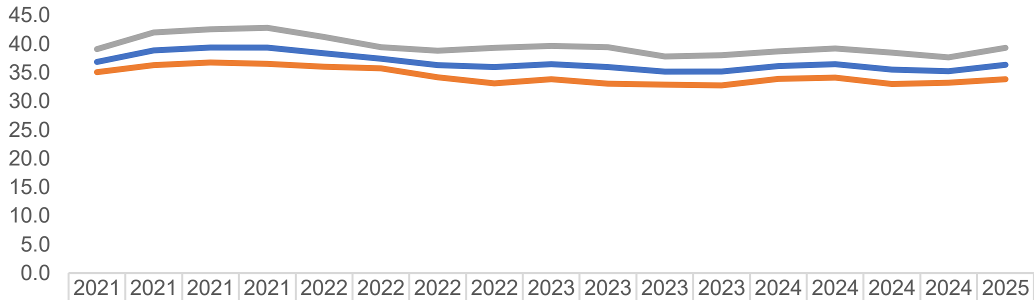
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- As observed, the combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) for adults aged 25+ years fluctuated between 31,5% and 35,8% from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as presented in **Figure 18** above.

- Female adults consistently experienced higher LU2 rates than adult male throughout the reporting period. The LU2 rates for adult female (25+ years) was lowest at 34,0% in Q4: 2024, and the highest was 38,9% in Q4: 2021, indicating persistent vulnerability in the South African labour market amongst women. In contrast, LU2 rates for adult male was lowest at 29,2% in Q4: 2023 and the highest was at 33,5% in Q3: 2021.

- Over time, the LU2 rates declined gradually for both sexes, suggesting an improvement in labour market conditions for adults, although women consistently remain more affected than men. Overall, the data highlights a persistent gender gap among adults, with female LU2 rate averaging higher than male throughout the reporting period.

Figure 19: Quarterly combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment of the working-population age (15-64 years) by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	36.9	38.9	39.3	39.3	38.4	37.4	36.3	35.9	36.5	36.0	35.2	35.2	36.1	36.5	35.5	35.2	36.3
Male	35.1	36.3	36.8	36.5	36.0	35.7	34.2	33.1	33.8	33.0	32.9	32.8	33.9	34.1	33.0	33.2	33.9
Female	39.1	42.0	42.6	42.8	41.2	39.4	38.8	39.3	39.6	39.4	37.8	38.0	38.7	39.2	38.5	37.6	39.3

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

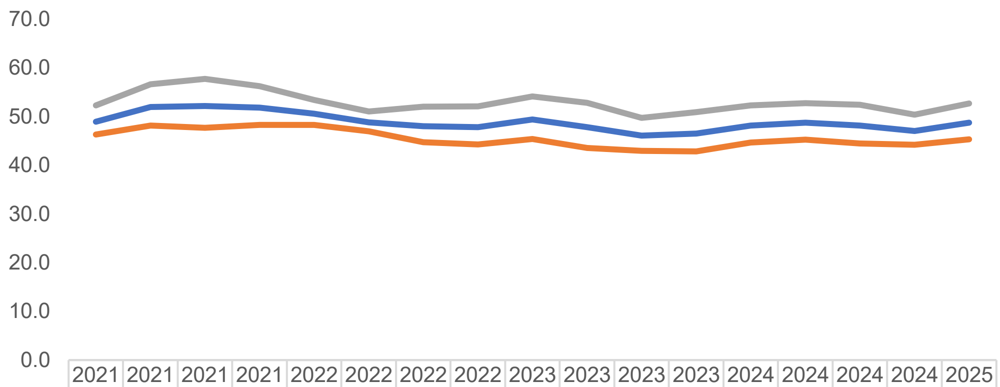
- The combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) for the national working-age population aged 15-64 years fluctuated between 35,2% and 39,3% during the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as shown in **Figure 19**. The lowest overall LU2 rates was recorded in Q3 and Q4: 2023 at 35,2%, while the highest was observed in Q3 and Q4: 2021 at 39,3%.

- Female working-age population (15-64 years) consistently experienced higher LU2 rates than males throughout the reporting period. The lowest LU2 rates for female was 37,6% in Q4: 2024 and the highest was 42,8% in Q4: 2021, highlighting persistent higher underemployment and unemployment amongst women.

- The lowest LU2 rates for male working age population (15-64 years) was 32,8% in Q4: 2023 and the highest was 36,8% in Q3: 2021.

- The LU2 trends for both sexes (15-64 years) showed a gradual decline from late 2021 to 2023, followed by minor fluctuations into 2025. Overall, the data highlights a persistent gender gap in the working-age population (15-64 years), with female LU2 rates averaging about 5 to 6 percentage points higher than males, despite gradual improvements over time.

Figure 20: Quarterly combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment by youth (15-34 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	49.0	51.9	52.1	51.8	50.5	48.8	48.0	47.8	49.4	47.8	46.1	46.5	48.2	48.7	48.2	47.0	48.7
Male	46.3	48.2	47.7	48.3	48.3	46.9	44.7	44.3	45.4	43.6	42.9	42.8	44.7	45.3	44.5	44.2	45.3
Female	52.3	56.6	57.7	56.2	53.4	51.0	52.0	52.1	54.1	52.8	49.7	50.9	52.3	52.7	52.4	50.4	52.7

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 20** shows that the combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment (LU2) for youth aged 15-34 in the country recorded the highest rate in Q3: 2021 and the lowest in Q3: 2023 at 52,1% and 46,1%, respectively.

- By sex, the female youth (15-34 years) consistently recorded higher LU2 rates than male youth throughout the reporting period. The lowest LU2 rate for female youth (15-34 years) was 49,7% in Q3: 2023 and the highest was 57,7% in Q3: 2021, highlighting persistent labour market vulnerability. In contrast, the lowest LU2 rate for male youth (15-34 years) was 42,8% in Q4: 2023 and the highest was 48,3% in Q2 and Q4: 2021.

- The LU2 trends for both sexes followed the same overall pattern- peaking in 2021, showing a gradual decline through 2022-2023, and fluctuating slightly thereafter. Overall, the data reveals a persistent gender gap in the youth population 15-34 years, with female LU2 rate averaging higher than male LU2 rate across the reporting period.

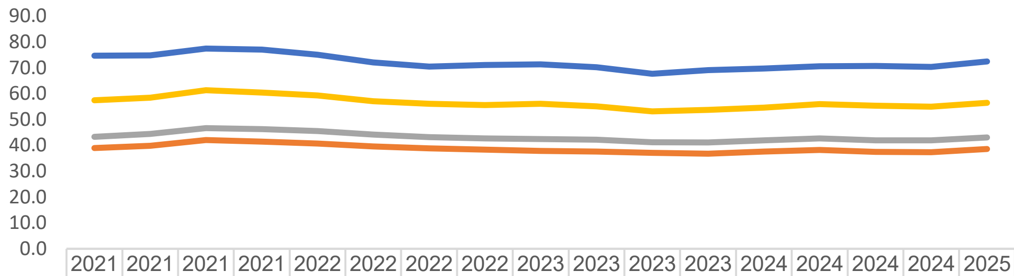
2.4.2.2. Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3)[10]

The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) represent the share of the extended labour force that was in unemployment and the potential labour force (Refer to the formula).

According to the 23rd International Conference for Labour Statisticians (ICLS) resolutions, this measure is used because of the following reasons:

- ✓ The traditional unemployment rate only considers those who are currently in the labour force and does not account for those who are not actively looking for work but would take a job if offered (the potential labour force).
- ✓ By combining unemployment with the potential labour force, this rate provides a more comprehensive measure of underutilization in the labour market. *It is also an international comparative indicator that provides a broader picture of the labour market slack beyond the traditional unemployment rate.*

Figure 21: Quarterly combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force by age groups



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15-24	74.7	74.8	77.4	77.1	75.1	72.1	70.5	71.1	71.3	70.2	67.7	69.2	69.7	70.6	70.7	70.3	72.5
15-34	57.5	58.5	61.3	60.4	59.3	57.1	56.1	55.6	56.0	55.2	53.1	53.7	54.6	56.0	55.4	55.0	56.4
25+	38.9	39.9	42.1	41.5	40.7	39.6	38.8	38.3	37.8	37.6	37.1	36.8	37.6	38.3	37.5	37.4	38.5
15-64	43.3	44.4	46.7	46.2	45.5	44.2	43.1	42.7	42.5	42.1	41.2	41.1	42.0	42.7	42.0	41.9	43.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The trends in **Figure 21** illustrates that the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force was consistently highest among the youth aged 15-24 years, followed by those aged 15-34 years, while adults aged 25+years and above recorded the lowest rates across the reporting period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. The implications are that there still more youth aged (15-24 years) who want to take a job if offered but there were not actively looking for job in the labour market. Effective monitoring of policies that aimed at addressing these trends could be useful and recommended.

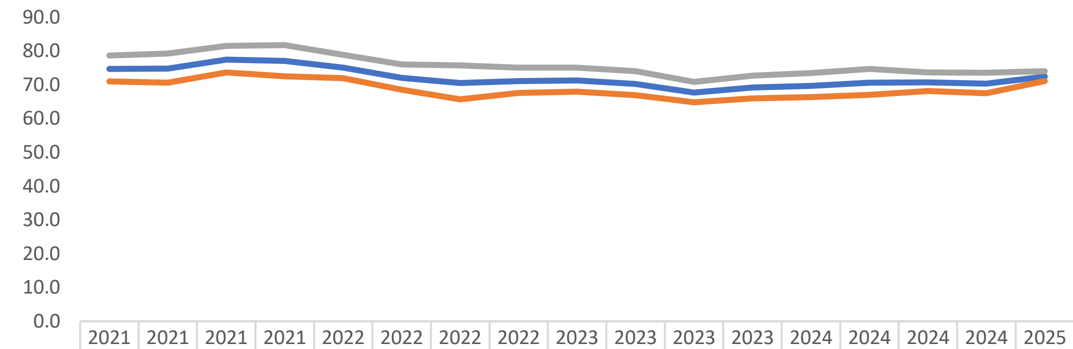
- The LU3 rate for youth aged 15-24 years fluctuated between 67,7% in Q3: 2023 and 77,4% in Q3:2021, indicating extreme labour market vulnerability for this age group who expect to be offered a job but not actively seeking for job. Among the broader youth group 15-34 years, LU3 ranged between 53,1% in Q3:2023 and 61,3% in Q3: 2021. In contrast, adults aged 25+ years recorded

[10] Potential labour force: Individuals of working age who are not in employment but are either available for work or have sought employment during the refence week.

much lower LU3 rates, ranging between 36,8% in Q4: 2023 and 42,1% in Q3: 2021. A persistent gap of around 30 percentage points between the youth cohorts and the adult population was evident throughout the reporting period.

- The LU3 rate for the working-age population 15-64 years fluctuated between 41,1% in Q4:2023 and 46,7% in Q3: 2021, closely mirroring the overall youth trend. A clear cyclical trend was evident in LU3 rates which peaked in 2021, declined gradually through 2022 to 2023, showed slight increases in 2024 to 2025. The data indicates that labour market vulnerability was disproportionately higher among youth particularly aged 15-24 years compared to adults (25+ years).

Figure 22: Quarterly combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force by youth (15-24 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	74.7	74.8	77.4	77.1	75.1	72.1	70.5	71.1	71.3	70.2	67.7	69.2	69.7	70.6	70.7	70.3	72.5
Male	71.0	70.7	73.6	72.6	71.9	68.5	65.7	67.6	67.9	66.9	64.8	65.9	66.3	67.0	68.1	67.4	71.1
Female	78.7	79.2	81.5	81.7	78.8	76.0	75.8	75.1	75.0	74.0	70.9	72.7	73.4	74.7	73.6	73.5	74.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

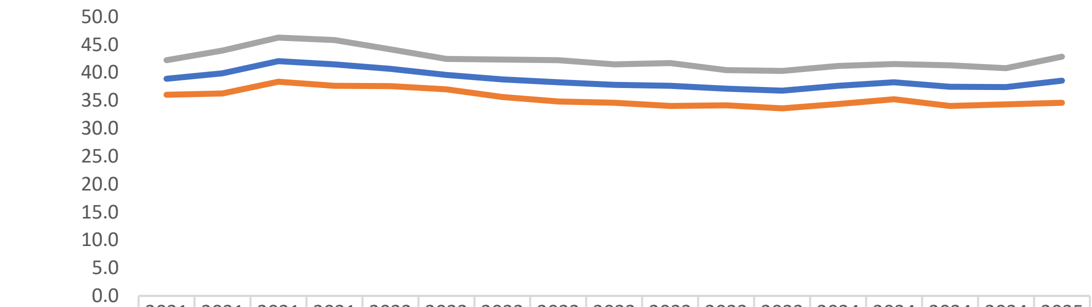
- **Figure 22** illustrates the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) among youth aged 15-24 years by sex. The trend remained consistently high, with levels above 67,7% in both sexes throughout the reporting period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025.

- Female youth (15-24 years) consistently recorded higher LU3 rates compared to their male counterparts, reflecting a persistent gender gap in labour market vulnerability where female youth (15-24 years) are not actively seeking for job, but they will take a job if offered as compared to their male youth counterparts. The results indicate female youth LU3 peaked at 81,7% in Q4: 2021, while the lowest rate was 70,9% in Q3: 2023. Male youth (15-24 years) LU3 peaked at 73,6% in Q3: 2021, with the lowest recorded rate at 64,8% in Q3: 2023.

- Overall, youth (total) LU3 ranged between 67,7% in Q3: 2023 and 77,4% in Q3: 2021, closely following the female youth (15-24 years) trend. A clear cyclical trend was again evident where LU3 rates were highest in 2021, showed gradual declines through 2022 and 2023, but increased slightly again in 2024 to 2025.The gender gap between male and female youth (15-24 years) averaged 4 to 6 percentage points, with females consistently disadvantaged.

These patterns highlight that both youth male and female aged 15-24 years face the greatest barriers in securing employment or labour market participation, underscoring the need for targeted gender-responsive interventions.

Figure 23: Quarterly combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force by adults (25+ years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	38.9	39.9	42.1	41.5	40.7	39.6	38.8	38.3	37.8	37.6	37.1	36.8	37.6	38.3	37.5	37.4	38.5
Male	36.0	36.3	38.4	37.7	37.6	37.0	35.7	34.8	34.6	34.0	34.2	33.6	34.4	35.2	34.0	34.3	34.6
Female	42.2	44.0	46.3	45.9	44.2	42.5	42.3	42.2	41.5	41.7	40.4	40.3	41.2	41.6	41.3	40.8	42.9

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

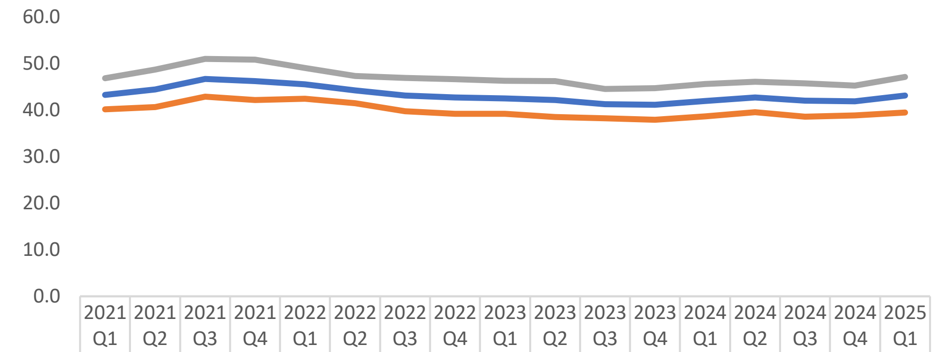
- The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) among adults aged 25+ years remained relatively stable and lower than youth (15-24 years) rates, fluctuating between 36,8% in Q4: 2023 and 42,1% in Q3: 2021 over the reporting period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, as shown in **Figure 23** above.

- Female adults consistently recorded higher LU3 rates than their male counterparts. Female adult (25+ years) LU3 peaked at 46,3% in Q3: 2021, while the lowest rate was at 40,3% in Q3. In contrast, male adult (25+ years) LU3 peaked at 38,4% in Q3: 2021 and dropped to a low of 33,6% in Q4: 2023.

- The overall adult LU3 rate followed a similar trajectory to both male and female trends: higher in 2021, declining gradually through 2022-2023, with a mild uptick again in 2024 to 2025.The gender gap averaged 4-6 percentage points, with female adult (25+ years) persistently disadvantaged in terms of not actively seeking for job and not offered enough job then they remained vulnerable and excluded in the labour market over the period under review.

- Unlike youth 15-24 years, whose LU3 rates exceeded 70% (see Figure 28), the adult population's rates were significantly lower, highlighting that labour market detachment was a much greater challenge for youth than for adults, though women in both groups remain disproportionately affected.

Figure 24: Quarterly combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force by working-age population (15-64 years) and sex



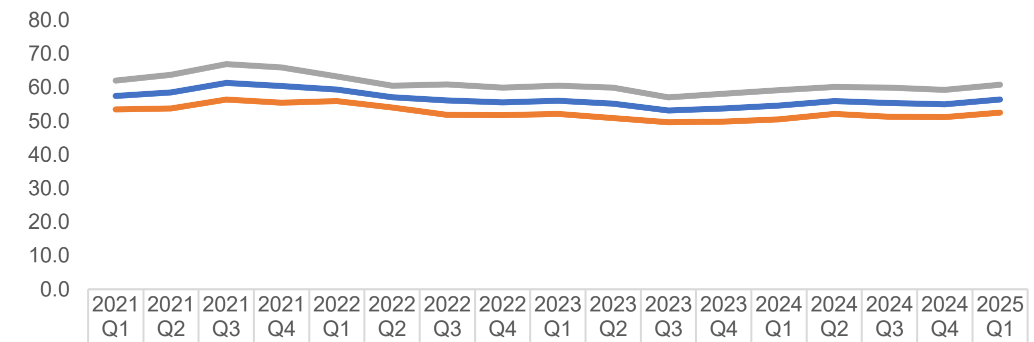
	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	43.3	44.4	46.7	46.2	45.5	44.2	43.1	42.7	42.5	42.1	41.2	41.1	42.0	42.7	42.0	41.9	43.1
Male	40.2	40.6	42.9	42.1	42.5	41.5	39.8	39.2	39.2	38.5	38.2	37.9	38.7	39.6	38.6	38.8	39.5
Female	46.8	48.7	51.0	50.8	49.0	47.3	46.9	46.6	46.3	46.2	44.5	44.7	45.6	46.1	45.8	45.3	47.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 24** highlights that the burden of combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force for persons aged 15-64 years falls disproportionately on female for the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. The female (15-64 years) LU3 rate was highest in Q3: 2021 at 51,0% and lowest was in Q3: 2023 at 44,5%. Furthermore, the female (15-64 years) LU3 rates remained somewhat higher than among male (15-64 years) and the average rates in the country over the same period.

- The LU3 trends for the working-age population (15-64 years) reflected the difficulties that female working age population (15-64 years) face to enter the labour market while they are not actively seeking for job although they would take job, if offered.

Figure 25: Quarterly combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force by youth (15-34 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	57.5	58.5	61.3	60.4	59.3	57.1	56.1	55.6	56.0	55.2	53.1	53.7	54.6	56.0	55.4	55.0	56.4
Male	53.4	53.7	56.4	55.5	56.0	54.0	51.8	51.7	52.1	50.9	49.6	49.8	50.5	52.2	51.3	51.2	52.5
Female	62.0	63.8	66.9	65.9	63.2	60.5	60.9	60.0	60.5	60.0	57.1	58.1	59.2	60.2	59.9	59.3	60.8

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 25** presents the LU3 rates for the youth (15-34 years) in the working-age population by sex. Over the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, the LU3 rates among the youth aged 15-34 years ranged from a high of 61,3% in Q3: 2021 to a low of 53,1% in Q3: 2023. This is probably coinciding with broader labour market disruptions, while the lowest rate signalling temporary improvements in the labour absorption (Refer to EPR trends).

- Female youth LU3 rates consistently exceeded the male rates throughout the period, reflecting persistent gender disparities. Female youth LU3 rate peaked at 66,9% in Q3: 2021 and fell to its lowest at 57,1% in Q3: 2023. On the other hand, male youth LU3 rate peaked at 56,4% in Q3: 2021 and dropped to a low of 49,6% in Q3: 2023. The gender gap ranged between 6 and 10 percentage points, with female youth (15-34 years) consistently more vulnerable to unemployment and labour force detachment than men.

- Between 2021 and 2023, the LU3 rate followed a gradual downward trend across both sexes, reaching its lowest levels in late 2023, before showing slight increases again in 2024 to 2025.

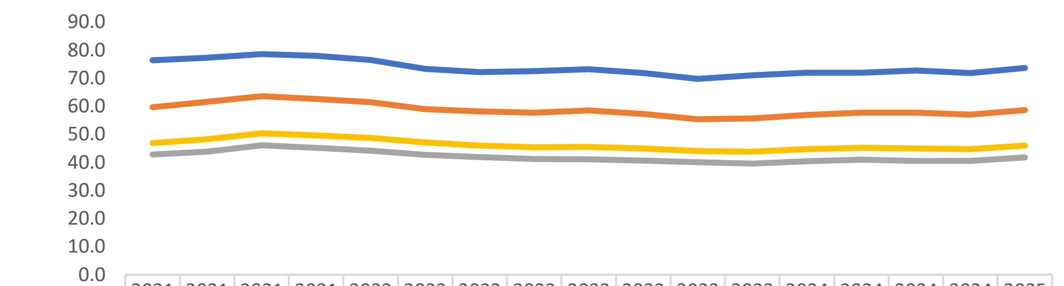
- Despite improvements over time, youth (15-34 years) remain more vulnerable than adults and the overall working-age population aged 15-64 years, with LU3 rates consistently above 50%, underlining structural barriers to the majority of youth labour market participation.

2.4.2.3. Composite measure of labour underutilization (LU4)

It (LU4) provides a more comprehensive view of the available labour supply that is not being fully utilized. The total shortfall in the utilization of labour in an economy by including multiple forms of underemployment and unemployment that are not captured by traditional unemployment rates (Refer to the formula). It offers a deep understanding for policy development in the country.

In South Africa, the labour market policies should target low LU4 rate that is associated with high economic growth in the country. In other words, a high LU4 rate means a significant portion of the workforce is not contributing to the economy as fully as they could, leading to lower overall productivity and Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Figure 26: Aggregate measure of labour underutilization by age groups



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
15-24	76.3	77.3	78.6	78.0	76.5	73.3	72.1	72.5	73.2	71.8	69.7	71.0	71.9	72.0	72.8	71.8	73.7
15-34	59.6	61.6	63.6	62.6	61.5	59.0	58.2	57.7	58.5	57.3	55.4	55.6	56.8	57.7	57.7	57.0	58.6
25+	42.8	43.9	46.1	45.2	44.1	42.7	41.8	41.2	41.1	40.7	40.0	39.6	40.5	41.0	40.5	40.5	41.7
15-64	46.9	48.2	50.3	49.6	48.7	47.1	46.0	45.4	45.6	45.0	44.0	43.8	44.7	45.2	44.9	44.8	46.0

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- Based on the results in **Figure 26,** the aggregates labour underutilisation rate (LU4) by age group are alarming for the youths (15-24 or 15-34 years) every quarter over the period 2021-2025. It is alarming because it signals an economic growth inefficiency to pull out many youths supply into decent work employment. For adults (25+ years) and persons aged (15-64 years) had somewhat lower LU4 rates than among those in the youngest groups. Furthermore, adults (25+ years) had also shown the lowest LU4 rates across all age groups in every quarter.

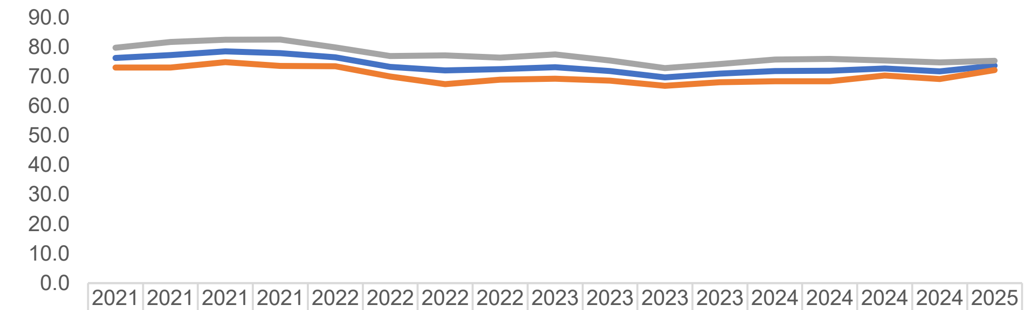
- The LU4 rates for the national working-age population 15-64 years ranged between 43,8% in Q4: 2023 and 50,3% Q3: 2021 over the period Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025.

- Among youth aged 15-24 years, the LU4 rates remained extremely high, fluctuating between 69,7% in Q3: 2023 and 78,6% in Q3: 2021, consistently making them an abundant supply underutilised and most vulnerable group in the labour market. Youth aged 15-34 years, the LU4 rates followed a similar trend, peaking at 63,6% in Q3:2021 and dropping to a low of 55,4% in Q3: 2023. Adults aged 25+ years, on the other hand, displayed the LU4 rates that consistently lower relative to other age groups, ranging between 39,6% in Q4: 2023 and 46,1% in Q3: 2021, highlighting stronger labour market attachment among this age group.

- Across the reporting period, the LU4 rate showed a gradual decline from 2021 to 2023 across all age groups, with the sharpest improvements occurring among youth 15-24 and 15-34 years. However, a slight upward shift was observed in 2024 to 2025, suggesting renewed challenges in labour absorption.

- Overall, the LU4 rates measure confirms that the younger groups face disproportionately higher levels of labour underutilisation compared to adults (25+ years), with the gap between those aged 15-24 and adults aged 25+ years consistently exceeding 30 percentage points throughout the period.

Figure 27: Aggregate measure of labour underutilization by youth (15-24 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	76.3	77.3	78.6	78.0	76.5	73.3	72.1	72.5	73.2	71.8	69.7	71.0	71.9	72.0	72.8	71.8	73.7
Male	73.1	73.1	74.9	73.6	73.6	70.0	67.5	68.9	69.3	68.6	66.9	68.1	68.4	68.4	70.3	69.1	72.2
Female	79.8	81.7	82.5	82.6	79.9	77.0	77.2	76.5	77.5	75.5	72.9	74.3	75.7	76.0	75.4	74.8	75.3

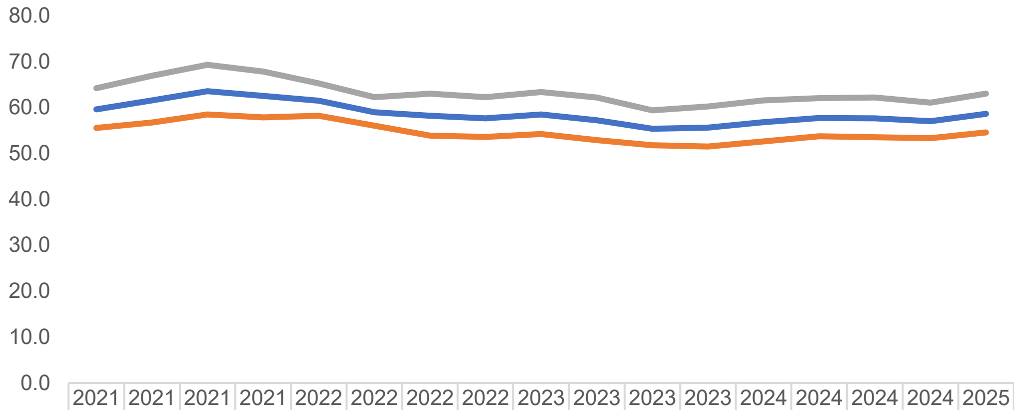
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- As outlined above, South Africa has excess in the labour supply (LU4) in the particular for the youngest group. In **Figure 27**, youth (15-24 years) LU4 rates are presented by sex. An interesting aspect of the quarterly distribution of youth (15-24 years) LU4 is that unlike high average LU4 rates in the country, the youth LU4 rates for female have substantially remained high throughout the reporting period, declining from a peak 82,6% in Q4: 2021 to 72,9% in Q3: 2023. In contrast, the male youth (15-24 years) LU4 rates ranged between 66,9% in Q3: 2023 and 74,9% in Q3: 2021, while the female youth LU4 rate varied between 72,9% in Q3: 2023 and 82,6% in Q4: 2021. Both male and female youth (15-24 years) followed a similar downward trend from 2021 to 2023, showing gradual improvements in labour absorption and participation.

- However, from 2024 onwards, the LU4 rates for both sexes stabilised at higher levels, with slight increases again noted in Q1: 2025. The average LU4 rates stood at 73,7% in Q1: 2025 with 72,2% for males and 75,3% for females in Q1: 2025.

- Overall, the data highlights that youth female face greater structural labour underutilisation challenges than youth male, underscoring the gendered dimension of youth labour market vulnerability.

Figure 28: Aggregate measure of labour underutilization by youth (15-34 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	59.6	61.6	63.6	62.6	61.5	59.0	58.2	57.7	58.5	57.3	55.4	55.6	56.8	57.7	57.7	57.0	58.6
Male	55.6	56.7	58.5	57.9	58.2	56.1	53.9	53.6	54.2	52.9	51.8	51.5	52.6	53.8	53.5	53.4	54.6
Female	64.2	66.9	69.3	67.8	65.3	62.3	63.0	62.3	63.4	62.2	59.4	60.2	61.5	62.1	62.2	61.1	63.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- As expected, for youth (15-34 years), the aggregate labour underutilization rate (LU4) remained persistently high throughout the reporting period, reaching a high of 63,6% in Q3: 2021 and a low of 55,4% in Q3: 2023, as shown in **Figure 28**. This still means that there are small percentage changes the youth labour supply (LU4 rate) due to slow productivity growth in the in the economy since Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025.

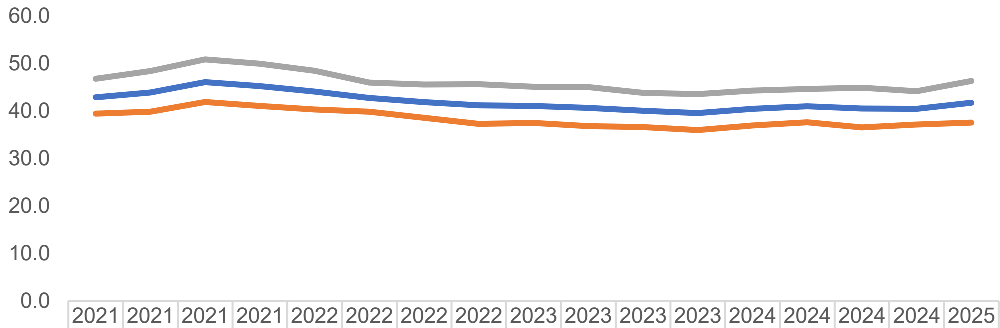
- There is insufficient capacity to absorb and reduce the labour supply of youth (15-34 years) in the labour market. Many factors could contribute to this trend such as the required skills, experience, historical inequalities, fiscal and macro-economic and other exogenous factors.

- Both male and female youth followed a similar trajectory, peaking in 2021, then gradually declining through 2022 to 2023, before stabilising at elevated levels in 2024 and slightly rising again in Q1: 2025. Female youth (15-34 years) consistently recorded higher LU4 rates than male youth, with gaps ranging from 4 to 7 percentage points. For example, in Q3: 2021, the LU4 rate for females was 69,3% compared to 58,5% for males. The male youth (15-34 years) LU4 rates ranged between 51,5% in Q4: 2023 and 58,5% in Q3: 2021, while the female youth rates ranged between 59,4% in Q3: 2023 and 69,3% in Q3: 2021.

- Despite overall improvements since 2021, the LU4 rate among female youth (15-34 years) LU4 rates have remained stubbornly higher, highlighting continued gender-based inequalities in labour absorption and participation.

- Overall, the data underscores that labour underutilisation was structural challenge for the youngest group, but female youth remain the most vulnerable group in terms of access to productive and stable employment opportunities.

Figure 29: Aggregate measure of labour underutilization by adults (24+ years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	42.8	43.9	46.1	45.2	44.1	42.7	41.8	41.2	41.1	40.7	40.0	39.6	40.5	41.0	40.5	40.5	41.7
Male	39.4	39.9	41.9	41.1	40.3	39.8	38.5	37.3	37.5	36.8	36.6	36.0	37.0	37.6	36.6	37.2	37.5
Female	46.8	48.4	50.9	49.9	48.5	46.0	45.6	45.6	45.1	45.0	43.8	43.5	44.3	44.6	44.9	44.1	46.3

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The lower LU4 rates shown among adult male (24+ years) could suggest that industrial sectors were relatively attractive to adults male than their adult female counterparts for the period under review, as shown in **Figure 29** above. Adult female (24+ years) LU4 rates were consistently higher LU4 rates than adult male, with gender gaps averaging between 5 and 7 percentage points. For example, in Q3: 2021, the LU4 rate for adult female (24+ years) reached 50,9%, compared to 41,9% for males.

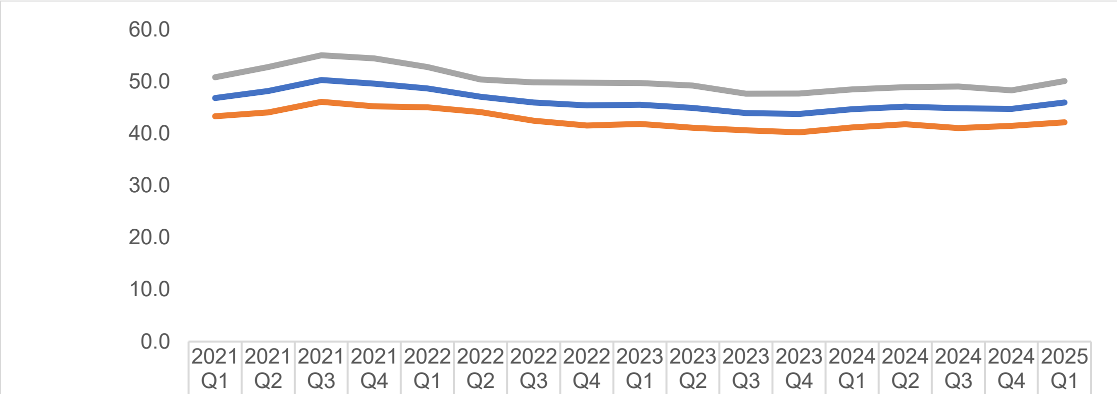
- The male adult (24+ years) rates (LU4) ranged from 36,0% in Q4: 2023 to 41,9% in Q3: 2021, while the adult female (24+ years) rates (LU4) ranged from 43,5% in Q4: 2023 to 50,9% in Q3: 2021.

- Both adults male and female (LU4) displayed a similar trend: beginning with increase in 2021, followed by gradual decline through 2022 and 2023 and stabilising from 2023 onwards at around LU4 of 40-42% for males and LU4 for 44-46% for females.

- Despite some improvements over time, adult female (25+ years) remained more affected with an abundant labour supply underutilised, with the gap relative to males persisting across all quarters.

- Overall, the LU4 rates highlight that labour underutilization was not only a youth phenomenon but also a persistent challenge among adults, especially women, who face systematic barriers to full labour market participation.

Figure 30: Aggregate measure of labour underutilization by working-age population (15-64 years) and sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Total	46.9	48.2	50.3	49.6	48.7	47.1	46.0	45.4	45.6	45.0	44.0	43.8	44.7	45.2	44.9	44.8	46.0
Male	43.4	44.1	46.1	45.3	45.1	44.2	42.5	41.6	41.9	41.2	40.7	40.3	41.2	41.8	41.1	41.5	42.2
Female	50.9	52.9	55.1	54.5	52.9	50.5	49.9	49.8	49.8	49.3	47.7	47.7	48.6	49.0	49.1	48.3	50.2

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- In **Figure 30**, the LU4 rates for the working-age population aged 15-64 years ranged from a high of 50,3% in Q3: 2021 to a low of 43,8% in Q4: 2023 over the reporting period from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025.

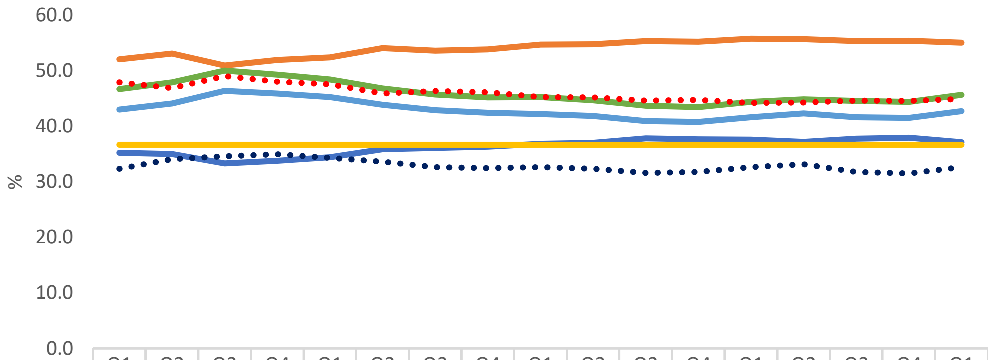
- Female aged 15-64 consistently experienced higher LU4 rates than males. Female (15-64 years) LU4 rates peaked at 55,1% in Q3: 2021 and recorded its lowest at 47,7% in Q3-Q4 2023. In contrast, the male (15-64 years) LU4 rates ranged between 40,3% in Q4: 2023 and 46,1% in Q3: 2021.

- The overall LU4 trends for persons aged (15-64 years) showed a gradual decline from 2021 through 2023, followed by slight increases in 2024 and 2025, reflecting ongoing challenges in labour market absorption and participation. The gender gap persisted across all quarters, averaging 5 to 7 percentage points, with female (15-64 years) consistently more affected by labour underutilisation than male (15-64 years).

2.4.2.4. Combined rates (EPR, LFPR, LU1, LU2, LU3 and LU4) for national, youth and adult working-age population

Both the youth unemployment rate and NEET rate need to be juxtaposed with other indicators to give a more holistic picture of the state of youth in the South African labour market. Therefore, leads us to the next section of this report, which discusses the combined indicators.

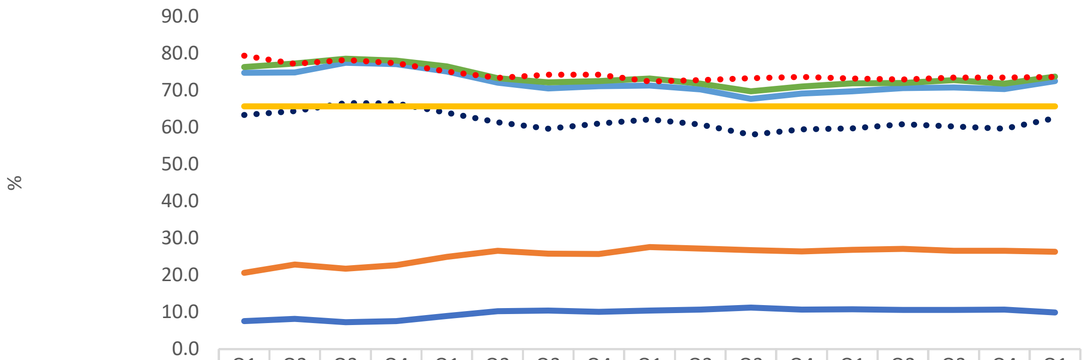
Figure 31: Combines rates at national level (15+ years)



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
EPR-15+	35.2	35.0	33.3	33.8	34.4	35.9	36.1	36.4	36.9	37.1	37.8	37.7	37.6	37.2	37.8	38.0	37.1
LFPR-15+	52.1	53.1	51.0	52.0	52.4	54.1	53.6	53.9	54.7	54.8	55.3	55.2	55.8	55.7	55.4	55.4	55.1
LU1-15+	32.3	34.1	34.6	35.0	34.3	33.6	32.7	32.5	32.6	32.4	31.6	31.8	32.6	33.2	31.8	31.5	32.6
LU2-15+	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7	36.7
LU3-15+	43.0	44.1	46.4	45.9	45.3	43.9	42.9	42.5	42.2	41.9	40.9	40.8	41.7	42.3	41.7	41.5	42.7
LU4-15+	46.7	47.9	50.0	49.3	48.5	46.8	45.8	45.2	45.3	44.7	43.7	43.5	44.4	44.9	44.6	44.4	45.7
OLF-15+	47.9	46.9	49.0	48.0	47.6	45.9	46.4	46.1	45.3	45.2	44.7	44.8	44.2	44.3	44.6	44.6	44.9

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

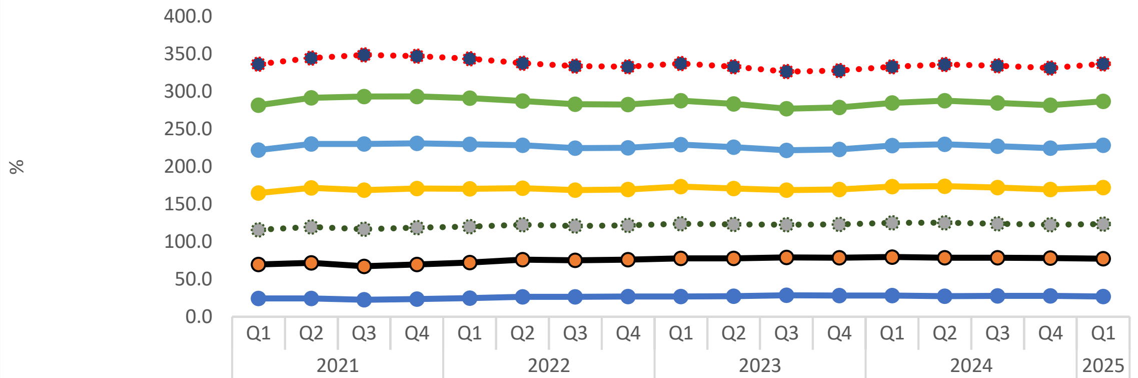
Figure 32: Combined rates for youth (15-24 years)



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
EPR-15-24	7.6	8.1	7.3	7.6	9.0	10.3	10.4	10.0	10.5	10.7	11.2	10.7	10.8	10.6	10.6	10.7	9.9
LFPR-15-24	20.6	22.9	21.8	22.7	24.9	26.6	25.8	25.7	27.6	27.2	26.7	26.4	26.8	27.1	26.6	26.6	26.3
LU1-15-24	63.3	64.4	66.6	66.5	64.0	61.4	59.7	61.0	62.1	60.7	58.0	59.4	59.7	60.8	60.2	59.6	62.5
LU2-15-24	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7	65.7
LU3-15-24	74.7	74.8	77.4	77.1	75.1	72.1	70.5	71.1	71.3	70.2	67.7	69.2	69.7	70.6	70.7	70.3	72.5
LU4-15-24	76.3	77.3	78.6	78.0	76.5	73.3	72.1	72.5	73.2	71.8	69.7	71.0	71.9	72.0	72.8	71.8	73.7
OLF-15-24	79.4	77.1	78.2	77.3	75.1	73.4	74.2	74.3	72.4	72.8	73.3	73.6	73.2	72.9	73.4	73.4	73.7

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

Figure 33: Combined rates for youth (15-34 years)

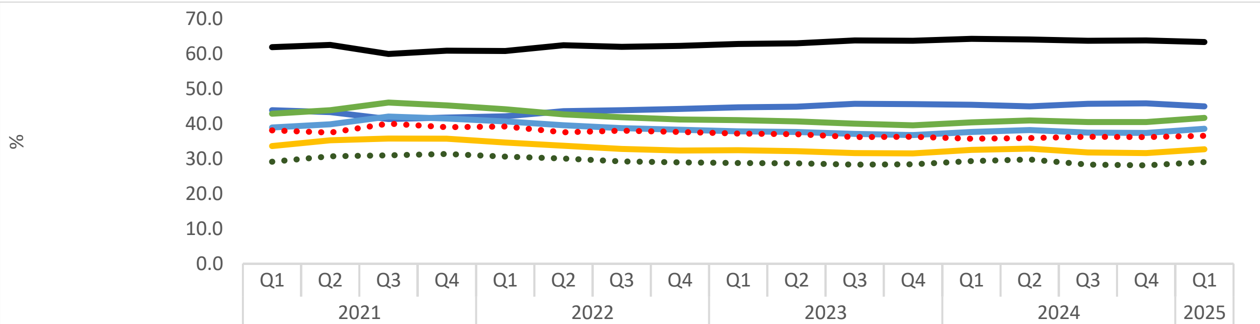


	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
OLF (15-34)	54.7	52.7	55.3	53.7	52.6	50.4	51.2	50.7	49.4	49.6	49.4	49.5	48.4	48.6	49.2	49.7	49.7
LU4 (15-34)	59.6	61.6	63.6	62.6	61.5	59.0	58.2	57.7	58.5	57.3	55.4	55.6	56.8	57.7	57.7	57.0	58.6
LU3 (15-34)	57.5	58.5	61.3	60.4	59.3	57.1	56.1	55.6	56.0	55.2	53.1	53.7	54.6	56.0	55.4	55.0	56.4
LU2 (15-34)	49.0	51.9	52.1	51.8	50.5	48.8	48.0	47.8	49.4	47.8	46.1	46.5	48.2	48.7	48.2	47.0	48.7
LU1 (15-34)	46.3	48.1	49.3	49.1	47.8	46.5	45.5	45.3	46.5	45.3	43.4	44.3	45.5	46.6	45.5	44.6	46.1
LFPR (15-34)	45.3	47.3	44.7	46.3	47.4	49.6	48.8	49.3	50.6	50.4	50.6	50.5	51.6	51.4	50.8	50.3	50.3
EPR(15-34)	24.4	24.5	22.7	23.6	24.7	26.5	26.6	27.0	27.1	27.6	28.7	28.2	28.1	27.4	27.7	27.9	27.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The LU4 was highest across all the quarters in the reporting period, followed by LU3 which has consistently been the second highest, as shown in **Figure 33** above. In the reporting period the lowest EPR recorded was 22,7% in in Q1: 2021 and the highest recorded was 28,7% in Q3: 2023. The OLF was 54,7% in Q1: 2021, from Q4: 2022 it has been on a downward trend and stabilised at 49,7% in the last two quarters.

Figure 34:Combined rates for adults (25+ years)



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
EPR(25+)	43.9	43.3	41.4	41.8	42.2	43.6	43.9	44.2	44.7	44.9	45.7	45.6	45.4	45.0	45.7	45.8	45.0
LFPR(25+)	61.9	62.5	60.0	60.9	60.8	62.4	62.0	62.3	62.8	63.0	63.8	63.7	64.3	64.1	63.7	63.8	63.4
LU1(25+)	29.1	30.7	31.0	31.4	30.6	30.1	29.3	29.0	28.8	28.7	28.4	28.4	29.3	29.8	28.3	28.1	29.0
LU2 (25+)	33.7	35.3	35.8	35.7	34.6	33.7	32.8	32.3	32.5	32.2	31.7	31.5	32.5	32.9	31.8	31.7	32.7
LU3 (25+)	38.9	39.9	42.1	41.5	40.7	39.6	38.8	38.3	37.8	37.6	37.1	36.8	37.6	38.3	37.5	37.4	38.5
LU4(25+)	42.8	43.9	46.1	45.2	44.1	42.7	41.8	41.2	41.1	40.7	40.0	39.6	40.5	41.0	40.5	40.5	41.7
OLF(25+)	38.1	37.5	40.0	39.1	39.2	37.6	38.0	37.7	37.2	37.0	36.2	36.3	35.7	35.9	36.3	36.2	36.6

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

Key highlights from the combined rates, as illustrated in the above **Figures: 32-34**:

1. **National rates**

- The EPR recorded its highest rate in Q4: 2024 at 38,0%, while LFPR was the highest in Q1: 2024 at roughly 55,8%. **LU1 to LU4**, including outside the labour force recorded their highest rates in the same period, in Q3: 2021 (34,6%, 39,0%, 46,4%, 50,0% and 49,0%, respectively).

- In terms of the lowest rates, both EPR and LFPR recorded their lowest rates in Q3: 2021 at 33,3% and 51,0%, respectively. LU1 reached its lowest point in Q4:2024 at 31,5%, while OLF was at 44,2% in Q1 of the same year. In terms of LU2 to LU4, their lowest points were recorded in Q4: 2024 (34,8%, 40,8% and 43,5%, respectively).

2. **Youth rates**

- The EPR reached its peak at 11,2% in Q3: 2023, while LFPR recorded the highest rate at 27,2% in Q2: 2023. **LU1, LU2, LU3 and LU4** recorded the highest peak in the same period, Q3 of 2021 at 66,6%, 68,2%, 77,4% and 78,6%, respectively. OLF recorded the highest rate in the first quarter of 2021.

- **LU1, LU2, LU3 and LU4** recorded their lowest points in Q3: 2023 at 58,0%, 60,6%, 67,7% and 69,7%, respectively. EPR reached the lowest point in Q3: 2021 at 7,3% and LFPR recorded its lowest at 20,6% in Q1 of 2021. OLF reached the lowest point in Q1: 2023, estimated at 72,4%.

2.5. Comparison of youth unemployment and not in employment, education or training (NEET) rates

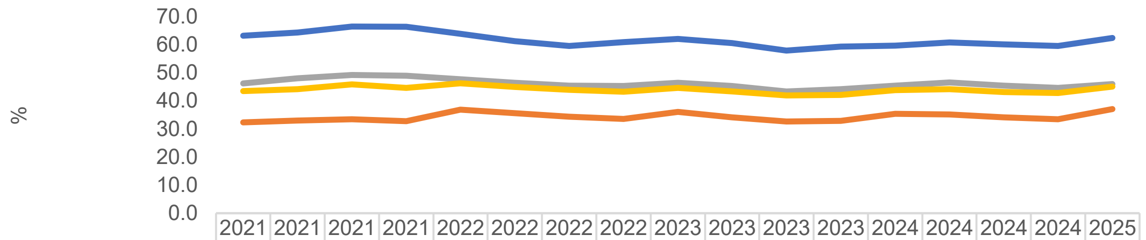
The following definitions can be noted:

- ✓ The youth unemployment rate refers to the proportion of the youth labour force that was unemployed; and,

- ✓ The NEET rate refers to the proportion of young persons aged 15-24 years that was not in employment, education or training.

2.5.1. Comparison of rates for national, youth and adult population (comparison between YUR and NEET rate)

Figure 35: Youth unemployment and NEET rates



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
YUR (15-24)	63.3	64.4	66.6	66.5	64.0	61.4	59.7	61.0	62.1	60.7	58.0	59.4	59.7	60.8	60.2	59.6	62.5
NEET(15-24)	32.4	33.0	33.5	32.8	37.0	35.7	34.5	33.6	36.1	34.2	32.7	33.0	35.5	35.2	34.2	33.5	37.1
YUR (15-34)	46.3	48.1	49.3	49.1	47.8	46.5	45.5	45.3	46.5	45.3	43.4	44.3	45.5	46.6	45.5	44.6	46.1
NEET(15-34)	43.6	44.2	46.0	44.7	46.3	45.0	44.0	43.4	44.7	43.4	42.0	42.2	43.8	44.2	43.2	42.9	45.1

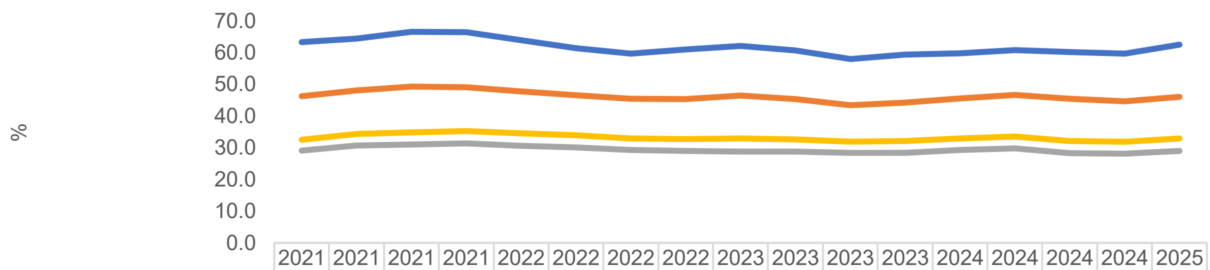
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The NEET (15-24 years) rate was the lowest compared to the NEET (15-34 years) rate, YUR (15-24 years) and the YUR (15-34 years) throughout the reporting period, as illustrated in **Figure 35** above. The NEET (15-24 years) rate recorded the lowest rate in Q1: 2021, while the YUR (15-24 years), NEET (15-34 years) rate, and the YUR (15-34 years) reached the lowest point in Q3: 2023.

- The YUR (15-24 years) was consistently the highest compared to the YUR (15-34 years), NEET (15-34 years) rate, and NEET (15-34 years) rate throughout the reporting period. The NEET (15-24 years) rate reached its peak in Q1: 2021 at 37,1%. The YUR (15-24 years) rate attained the highest point in Q3: 2021 at 66,6% of the labour force that was unemployed. The NEET (15-34 years) rate recorded the highest point in the first quarter of 2022 at 46,3%, while the YUR (15-34 years) was the highest in the third quarter 2021 at 49,3%.

- The data shows that from the second quarter of 2024 until the fourth quarter of 2024; there was a gradual decrease in NEET and YUR. Both the NEET and YUR increased in Q1: 2025.

Figure 36: Unemployment rate by age groups (national, youth vs adults (25+ years))*



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
YUR (15-24)	63.3	64.4	66.6	66.5	64.0	61.4	59.7	61.0	62.1	60.7	58.0	59.4	59.7	60.8	60.2	59.6	62.5
YUR (15-34)	46.3	48.1	49.3	49.1	47.8	46.5	45.5	45.3	46.5	45.3	43.4	44.3	45.5	46.6	45.5	44.6	46.1
Adult UR (25+)	29.1	30.7	31.0	31.4	30.6	30.1	29.3	29.0	28.8	28.7	28.4	28.4	29.3	29.8	28.3	28.1	29.0
National UR(15-64)	32.6	34.4	34.9	35.3	34.5	33.9	32.9	32.7	32.9	32.6	31.9	32.1	33.0	33.5	32.1	31.9	32.9

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025. *Note: NEET rate was removed from the second chart due to non-availability of NEET rate for adults. Therefore, the comparison for national, youth and adult population was only possible with unemployment rate (UR).

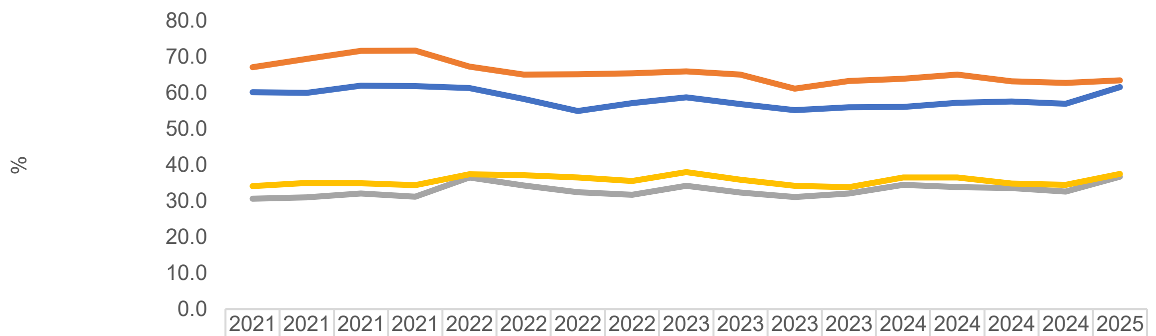
- In **Figure 36**, the unemployment rate for adults was also the lowest unemployment rate compared to both youth (15-24 and 15-34 years) and the national average. The youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) was consistently the highest rate compared to youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) as well as both the national average and the unemployment rate for adults.

- The youth unemployment rates (15-24 and 15-34 years) both reached the lowest point in Q3: 2023. Compared to the youth unemployment rates, the national unemployment rate and the unemployment rate for adults reached their lowest points both in Q4: 2024.

- Both youth unemployment rates attained the highest point in Q3: 2021 at 66,6% (15-24 years) and 49,3% (15-34 years) of the labour force that was unemployed, while both the national unemployment rate and unemployment rate for adults were at their highest in the fourth quarter of 2021.

- Generally, the 15 to 24 years old youth unemployment rate was on the decreasing trend, given the fact that its peak was observed in Q3:2021 (66,6%) and in Q1:2025 was sitting at 62,5%. Although they appear being constant, both the unemployment rate for adults and the national rate increased at a decreasing rate and portrayed similar trends. It could mean that the percentage-point change was decreasing over time or losing momentum from one quarter to another.

Figure 37:Youth (15-24 years) unemployment rate and NEET rate by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Male-YUR	60.2	60.0	62.0	61.9	61.4	58.4	55.0	57.1	58.8	56.9	55.2	56.1	56.1	57.3	57.6	57.0	61.7
Female-YUR	67.1	69.5	71.7	71.8	67.4	65.1	65.2	65.5	66.0	65.1	61.2	63.3	64.0	65.1	63.2	62.8	63.5
Male-NEET	30.6	31.1	32.1	31.2	36.5	34.3	32.4	31.7	34.3	32.4	31.1	32.1	34.4	33.9	33.6	32.6	36.7
Female-NEET	34.1	35.0	34.9	34.4	37.4	37.1	36.5	35.6	38.0	36.0	34.2	33.8	36.5	36.6	34.8	34.5	37.5

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

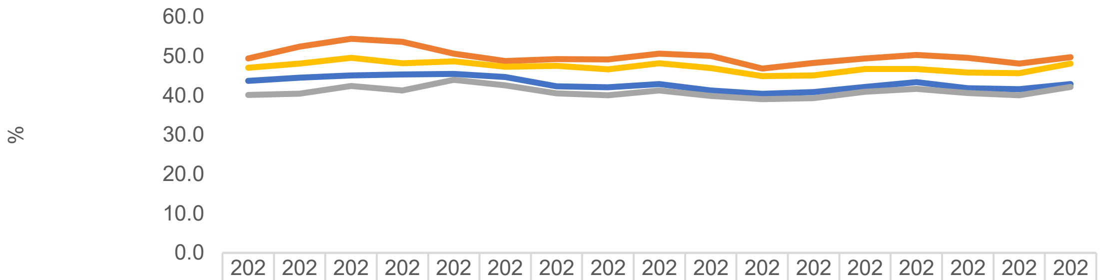
- The results in **Figure 37** indicate that the YUR (15-24 years) was higher than the NEET rate for both sexes (male and female), while the female unemployment rate was high for both youth and NEET. The female youth unemployment rate was higher than the male youth unemployment rate. The female NEET rate was also higher than the male NEET rate.

- The highest male youth unemployment rate was in Q3: 2021 at 62,0% and the lowest was 55,0% in Q3: 2022. Amongst female, the highest female NEET rate (15-24 years) was 38% in Q1: 2023, and the lowest was 33,8% in Q4: 2023. The female youth unemployment rate (15-24 years) trends show fluctuation from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, the highest rate of 71,8% was in

Q4: 2021, and the lowest was 61,2% in Q3: 2023, while the male trends reported the same fluctuation.

- The NEET rate for both male and female (15-24 years) were fluctuating at the descending rate in 2021 before the male NEET recorded the highest rate of 36,7% in Q1: 2025, and the second highest rate was 36,5% in Q1: 2022. While the youth female highest NEET rate was recorded at 38% in Q1: 2023, the second was in Q1: 2025.

Figure 38: Youth (15-34 years) unemployment rate and NEET rate by sex



	2021Q1	2021Q2	2021Q3	2021Q4	2022Q1	2022Q2	2022Q3	2022Q4	2023Q1	2023Q2	2023Q3	2023Q4	2024Q1	2024Q2	2024Q3	2024Q4	2025Q1
Male-YUR	43.8	44.5	45.1	45.3	45.5	44.7	42.3	42.1	42.9	41.3	40.5	40.9	42.2	43.4	41.9	41.6	42.9
Female-YUR	49.4	52.4	54.4	53.7	50.7	48.8	49.3	49.2	50.7	50.1	46.9	48.3	49.4	50.3	49.6	48.2	49.8
Male-NEET	40.2	40.5	42.5	41.3	44.0	42.6	40.6	40.1	41.3	39.9	39.1	39.4	41.0	41.7	40.7	40.1	42.2
Female-NEET	47.1	48.1	49.6	48.2	48.7	47.4	47.5	46.7	48.2	47.0	44.9	45.1	46.7	46.7	45.9	45.7	48.1

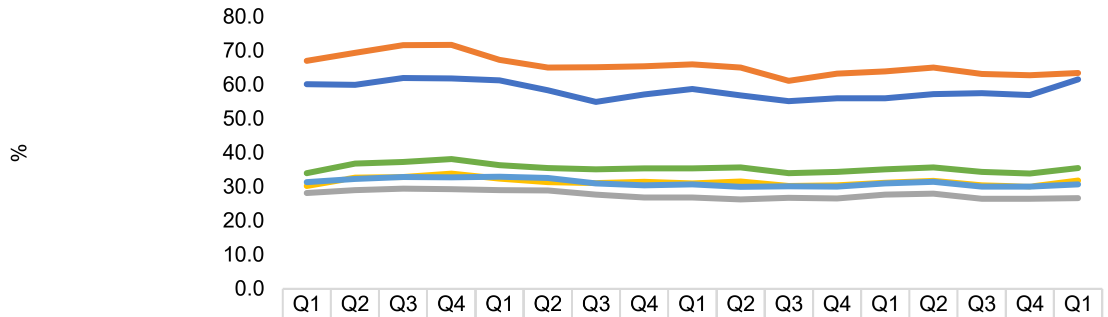
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- The YUR and NEET rates for males and females aged 15-34 years across quarterly intervals from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025 are presented in **Figure 38** above. A general trend emerges where both YUR and NEET rates are consistently higher for females compared to males. In 2021, YUR for females (15-34 years) increased steadily from 49,4% in Q1 to 53,7% in Q4, while males followed a similar upward trend, peaking at 45,3% in Q4. NEET rates also reflect the pattern, with females starting at 47,1% in Q1: 2021 and peaking at 49,6% in Q3, whereas males hovered around 40-42,5% during the same year.

- Throughout 2022 and 2023, the YUR and NEET rates show some fluctuations but remain elevated, particularly among females. The YUR for females (15-34 years) remained above 48% in most quarters, while for males, it dipped slightly to around 42% by late 2022. NEET rates during this period also reflect modest decreases, although the gender gap remains persistent. For instance, in Q3: 2023, NEET among males dropped to 39,1%, while for females, it was 44,9%. Despite small reductions, consistent gap highlights ongoing gender disparities in employment and education engagement among youth.

- In 2024 and early 2025, both male and female YUR and NEET rates (15-34 years) show mild volatility but with signs of stabilization. For males, the YUR fluctuated between 41,6% and 43,4%, and NEET stayed close to 40-42%. Female rates stayed higher, with YUR reaching up to 50,3% in Q2: 2024 and NEET rising to 48,1% in Q1: 2025.

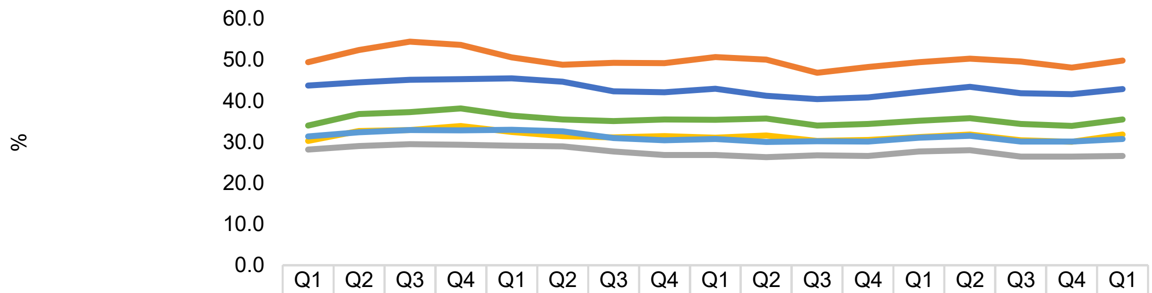
Figure 39: Comparison between national, youth (15-24 years) and adults (25+ years) unemployment rates by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Male-YUR(15-24)	60.2	60.0	62.0	61.9	61.4	58.4	55.0	57.1	58.8	56.9	55.2	56.1	56.1	57.3	57.6	57.0	61.7
Female-YUR(15-24)	67.1	69.5	71.7	71.8	67.4	65.1	65.2	65.5	66.0	65.1	61.2	63.3	64.0	65.1	63.2	62.8	63.5
Adult-Male (25+)	28.2	29.0	29.5	29.3	29.1	28.9	27.7	26.9	26.8	26.3	26.7	26.6	27.7	28.0	26.5	26.5	26.6
Adult-Female (25+)	30.3	32.7	32.9	33.9	32.4	31.4	31.2	31.5	31.0	31.6	30.3	30.5	31.2	31.8	30.5	30.1	31.8
Nat-Male(15-64)	31.4	32.4	32.9	32.8	33.0	32.6	31.0	30.4	30.7	30.0	30.2	30.1	31.1	31.5	30.1	30.1	30.7
Nat-Female(15-64)	34.0	36.9	37.3	38.2	36.4	35.5	35.1	35.5	35.5	35.7	34.0	34.4	35.2	35.8	34.4	33.9	35.5

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025 (*Note: Nat= National)

Figure 40: Comparison between national, youth (15-34 years) and adults (25+ years) unemployment rates by sex



	2021 Q1	2021 Q2	2021 Q3	2021 Q4	2022 Q1	2022 Q2	2022 Q3	2022 Q4	2023 Q1	2023 Q2	2023 Q3	2023 Q4	2024 Q1	2024 Q2	2024 Q3	2024 Q4	2025 Q1
Male-YUR(15-34)	43.8	44.5	45.1	45.3	45.5	44.7	42.3	42.1	42.9	41.3	40.5	40.9	42.2	43.4	41.9	41.6	42.9
Female-YUR(15-34)	49.4	52.4	54.4	53.7	50.7	48.8	49.3	49.2	50.7	50.1	46.9	48.3	49.4	50.3	49.6	48.2	49.8
Adult-Male (25+)	28.2	29.0	29.5	29.3	29.1	28.9	27.7	26.9	26.8	26.3	26.7	26.6	27.7	28.0	26.5	26.5	26.6
Adult-Female (25+)	30.3	32.7	32.9	33.9	32.4	31.4	31.2	31.5	31.0	31.6	30.3	30.5	31.2	31.8	30.5	30.1	31.8
Nat-Male(15-64)	31.4	32.4	32.9	32.8	33.0	32.6	31.0	30.4	30.7	30.0	30.2	30.1	31.1	31.5	30.1	30.1	30.7
Nat-Female(15-64)	34.0	36.9	37.3	38.2	36.4	35.5	35.1	35.5	35.5	35.7	34.0	34.4	35.2	35.8	34.4	33.9	35.5

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025 (*Note: Nat= National)

In Figure 39-40, the trends in the youth unemployment rates (15-24; 15-34 years) display similar patterns. There remain higher as compared to adults (25+ years) and the average national rates (15-64 years) for both sexes from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. For example, the youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) for both male and female were higher than the total male and female unemployment rate and adult male and female across the period of Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025. The national unemployment rate for male (15-64 years) was highest almost at 33,0% from Q3: 2021 to Q1: 2022. In contrast, the national unemployment rate for female (15-64 years) was highest at 38,2% in Q4: 2021 and lowest at 33,9% in Q4: 2024.

- The highest male youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) was recorded in Q1: 2022, at 45,5%. The lowest was 40,5% in Q3: 2023. The highest adult male unemployment rate was recorded in Q3: 2021 at 29,5% while it realised the lowest in Q2: 2023 at 26,3%, as shown in **Figure 40** above. Furthermore, the female youth unemployment rate (15-34 years) trends show fluctuation from Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025, the highest rate of 54,4% was in Q3: 2021, and the lowest was 48,2% in Q4: 2024. In contrast, the highest adult female unemployment rate was recorded in Q4:2021 at 33,9% while the lowest was realised in Q4: 2024 at 30,1%.

2.6. Employment by occupation

Occupation refers to the kind of work performed in a job. The classification is used by government and companies in activities such as matching job seekers with job vacancies, educational training etc.

Table 1: Youth (15-34 years) employment by occupation ('000)

Occupation	2021_Q1	2022_Q1	2023_Q1	2024_Q1	2025_Q1
Manager	279	256	290	281	276
Professional	293	319	441	400	334
Technician	460	470	500	566	496
Clerk	640	621	717	788	764
Sales and services	978	1 013	1 065	1 047	1 132
Skilled agriculture	12	24	24	33	13
Craft and related trade	584	549	563	611	633
Plant and machine operator	428	385	406	523	444
Elementary	1 176	1 329	1 459	1 444	1 434
Domestic worker	142	142	155	165	143
Other	14	2	0		
Total	**5 005**	**5 111**	**5 619**	**5 856**	**5 668**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025 (Excl. Not specified)

- The youth (15-34 years) employment levels by occupation categories from Q1-2021 to Q1-2025 are presented in **Table 1**. Notably, the youth employment level has consistently increased from Q1-2021 to Q1-2024 but decreased in Q1-2025. Nevertheless, approximately 663 000 additional youth (15-34 years) people gained employment between Q1-2025 and Q1-2021. This represents an increase of 13% in employment gains for youth (15-34 years) over the same period.

- Interestingly, most of occupational categories except in the manager occupation recorded employment gains for youth (15-34 years). In other words, youth (15-34 years) employment gains were mainly recorded in Elementary (258 000), followed by sales and services (154 000) and clerk (124 000). The losses in youth (15-34 years) employment were recorded in the manager occupation with 3 000 between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025.

- Youth (15-34 years) employment gains were recorded in eight out ten occupational categories between Q1-2021 and Q1-2023. These losses were driven by Plant and machine operators (22 000) and Craft and related trade (21 000). In contrast, the employment losses for the youth (15-34 years) were recorded in six out ten occupational categories between Q1-2025 and Q1-2023. In this context, the youth (15-34 years) employment gains were recorded in Craft and related trade (70 000), Sales and services (66 000), Clerk (47 000), and Plant and machine operator (38 000) over the same period.

- In the top three occupational categories, youth (15-34 years) employment increased by 13.9% in Professionals and 7.8% in Technician occupational categories between Q1-2021 and Q1-

2025. However, it decreased by almost 1.1% in Manager occupational category during the same period. decreased managers recorded a decrease of had This trend may indicate a labour market that was dominated by lower and mid-level occupational categories, with gradual increase into skilled occupational categories for youth (15-34 years).

- While the patterns seem significant, more skills advancement in the science fields for youth (15-34 years) are required to enhance employment in the top three occupational categories.

Table 2: Youth (15-34 years) employment by occupation and sex ('000)

	Manager	Professional	Technician	Clerk	Sales and services	Skilled agriculture	Craft and related trade	Plant and machine operator	Elementary	Domestic worker	Other	**Total**
2021_Q1	**279**	**293**	**460**	**640**	**978**	**12**	**584**	**428**	**1 176**	**142**	**14**	**5 005**
Male	183	140	202	183	523	11	507	372	765	4	13	2 903
Female	95	152	258	457	455	1	77	56	411	138	1	2 102
2023_Q1	**290**	**441**	**500**	**717**	**1 065**	**24**	**563**	**406**	**1 459**	**155**	**0**	**5 619**
Male	191	221	238	216	565	20	492	350	956	12		3 260
Female	99	220	262	502	500	4	71	56	503	143	0	2 359
2025_Q1	**276**	**334**	**496**	**764**	**1 132**	**13**	**633**	**444**	**1 434**	**143**		**5 668**
Male	168	144	269	244	568	11	533	370	928	6		3 241
Female	107	190	227	519	564	1	100	75	506	138		2 427
Total	**845**	**1 067**	**1 456**	**2121**	**3 175**	**49**	**1 780**	**1 279**	**4 069**	**440**	**15**	**16 293**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, 2023 and 2025 (excl. Not specified)

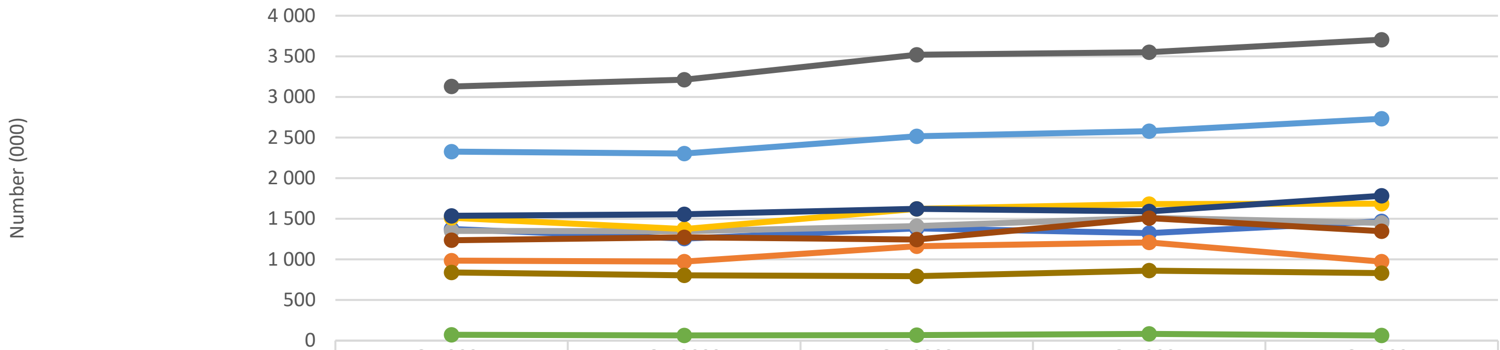
- **Table 2** illustrates the youth (15-34 years) employment distribution by occupation and sex for three periods: Q1: 2021; Q1: 2023, and Q1: 2025. Overall, the youth (15-34 years) employment gains were almost at the same proportion for male (51%) and female (49%) between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025. The same patterns appear in the Clerk and Craft and related trade occupational categories. While the male youth (15-34 years) employment gains were driven by Elementary (163 000), followed by Technician occupation (66 000) and Sales and services (45 000), there were mainly in Sales and services (109 000), followed by Elementary (95 000) and Professional (37 000) occupational categories. Notably, an additional 34 000 female youth (15-34 years) than 4 000 male youth (15-34 years) were absorbed in Professional occupation over the same period.

- Interesting results on year on year changes are as follows: Between Q1-2021 to Q1-2023: Male youth employment gains were largely recorded in Elementary (190 000), Professional (81 000) and Sales and services (42 000), while Elementary (92 000), professional (67 000), Sales and Services and Clerk at 46000 and 45 000 additional job gains for female (youth (15-34 years), On the other hand, more employment for male youth (15-34 years) were observed in Craft and related trade (41 000), followed by Technician (31 000) and Clerk (29 000) between Q1-2023 and Q1-2025. For female youth (15-34 years), employment gains were counted in Sales and services (64 000), Craft (29 000), Plant and machine operator and Clerk at 19 000 and 18 000, respectively.

- Female numbers were higher in professionals and grow steadily from 152 000 in 2021 to 220 000 in 2022 before decreasing to 190 000 in 2025. Males fluctuate slightly from 140 000 in 2021 to 220 000 in 2022 showing a decline to 144 000 in 2025 in the same occupational category.

- Despite a general progress in employment of youth (15-34 years) across occupational categories over time, the results indicate employment losses of 15 000 male youth (15-34 years) in manager and 30 000 female youth (15-34 years) in Technician occupation between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025. Overall, the highest increases were observed among Elementary (258 000), Service workers (154 000) and clerks (124 000) occupations. By sex, male youth (15-34 years) employment increases in Elementary, Technician and Clerk, while female youth (15-34 years) recorded employment gains in Services and services, followed by Elementary and Clerk occupations.

Figure 41: Adults (25+ years) employment by occupation ('000)



	Q1-2021	Q1-2022	Q1-2023	Q1-2024	Q1-2025
Manager	1 374	1 256	1 382	1 323	1 469
Professional	985	973	1 162	1 209	972
Technician	1 349	1 347	1 411	1 512	1 448
Clerk	1 512	1 374	1 623	1 680	1 686
Sales and services	2 325	2 303	2 516	2 578	2 731
Skilled Agriculture	70	66	68	83	63
Craft and related trade	1 537	1 554	1 622	1 591	1 783
Plant and machine operator	1 236	1 271	1 244	1 509	1 348
Elementary	3 128	3 213	3 520	3 550	3 705
Domestic worker	841	806	794	861	831

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021 to Q1: 2025 (Excl. Not specified)

- **Figure 41** illustrates employment for adults (25+ years) increase across most occupations from 2021 to 2025, indicating steady job growth over the five-year period. The only exceptions are minor fluctuations in some professional and occupational categories. Elementary occupation dominates employment, increasing from 3 128 000 (Q1: 2021) to 3 705 000 (Q1: 2025), an increase of about 18.4% over the period, followed by Sales and services, increasing from 2 325 000 to 2 731 000over the same period. These two categories represented the bulk of adults (25+ years) employment gains.

- Trend in the Craft workers occupational category shows a steady increase from 1 537 000 in (2021) to 1 783 000in 2025. While Clerks rose from 1 512 000to 1 686 000 showing consistent moderate employment growth. Technicians: Increased modestly from 1 349 000 to 1 448 000, suggesting relative employment stability. Plant and machine operators: from 1 236 000 to 1 348 000, also showing small but steady employment growth.

- Employment in management occupational category increased from 1 374 000 in Q1: 2021 to 1 469 in Q1: 2025 with a moderate but consistent growth. Professionals had slightly fluctuated from 985 000 in 2021 to 1 209 000 in 2024 before decreasing to 972 000in 2025. This small drop in 2025 suggests possible job restructuring or slower demand in professional fields.

Table 3: Adults (25+ years) employment by occupation and sex ('000)

	Manager	Professional	Technician	Clerk	Sales and services	Skilled Agriculture	Craft and related trade	Plant and machine operator	Elementary	Domestic worker	Other	**Total**
Q1-2021	**1 374**	**985**	**1 349**	**1 512**	**2 325**	**70**	**1 537**	**1 236**	**3 128**	**841**	**43**	**14 400**
Male	953	504	558	422	1 280	58	1 379	1 083	1 736	32	34	8 038
Female	421	481	791	1 090	1 045	13	158	152	1 392	809	9	6 362
Q1-2023	**1 382**	**1 162**	**1 411**	**1 623**	**2 516**	**68**	**1 622**	**1 244**	**3 520**	**794**	**2**	**15 342**
Male	940	633	595	470	1 320	58	1 411	1 085	2 025	46		8 584
Female	441	529	817	1 153	1 196	10	210	159	1 495	747	2	6 759
Q1-2025	**1 469**	**972**	**1 448**	**1 686**	**2 731**	**63**	**1 783**	**1 348**	**3 705**	**831**		**16 039**
Male	974	461	712	485	1 371	49	1 551	1 167	2 135	38		8 944
Female	495	511	736	1 201	1 360	15	232	182	1 570	794		7 095
Total	**4 224**	**3 119**	**4 209**	**4 821**	**7 573**	**202**	**4 942**	**3 828**	**1 0353**	**2 466**	**45**	**4 5781**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, Q1-2023 and Q1: 2025 (Excl. Not specified)

- In **Table 3**, the distribution of adults (25+ years) employment by occupation and sex is presented. Overall, an additional 1 638 000 adults (15-34 years) were absorbed into employment between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025. For the same age group, employment gains were mainly driven by Elementary (577 000), followed by Sales and services (406 000), Craft and related trade (246 000) and Clerk (174 000). In contrast, adults (25+ years) employment losses were recorded by Professional (13 000) followed by Domestic (9 000) and Skilled and agriculture (7 000) occupational categories.

- By sex, while male adults (25+ years) were mostly absorbed in Elementary (399 000), Craft and related trade (172 000) and Technician (154 000), female adults (15-34 years) employment gains were recorded in Sales and services (315 000), followed with Elementary (178 000) and Clerk (111 000) occupational categories between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025.

- Adults (25+ years) employment decreased for both male (42 000) in Professional and female (55 000) in Technician occupational categories during the same period. On the other hand, the results show an accelerated employment with female adults (25+ years) than male adults in Manager occupational category at 74 000 and 22 000, respectively.

- Overall, the highest increases were observed among Elementary, Service workers, Craft and Clerks for adults (25+ years). Employment for male adults (25+ years) among managers decreased from 953 000 in Q1-2021 to 940 000 in Q1-2023, then increased to 974 000 in Q1-2025. On the other hand, modest growth, with female adults (25+ years) consistently holding more Sales and services, and Clerk positions.

2.7. Employment by economic activity

The figures below follow the aggregate economic categories outlined below:

Economic activity (Aggregate): Total
Economic activity (Aggregate): Agriculture
Economic activity (Aggregate): Manufacturing
Economic activity (Aggregate): Construction
Economic activity (Aggregate): Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas and water supply
Economic activity (Aggregate): Trade, Transportation, Accommodation and Food, and Business and Administrative Services
Economic activity (Aggregate): Public Administration, Community, Social and other Services and Activities
Economic activity (Aggregate): Not classified

Table 4: Employment by sex and economic activity for persons aged 15+ years ('000)

Industry	Male Q1_2021	Female Q1_2021	Male Q1_2023	Female Q1_2023	Male Q1_2025	Female Q1_2025
Agriculture	579	231	602	303	663	283
Manufacturing	961	557	1 101	567	1 097	594
Construction	967	123	1 041	171	1 113	143
Mining and utilities	408	104	436	113	440	137
Trade, Transport and Finance	3 882	2 596	4 178	2 864	4 443	3 057
Services and Pvt households	1 700	3 055	1 843	3 177	1 753	3 328
Other	2	12	8	7	5	2
Total	**8 499**	**6 677**	**9 209**	**7 202**	**9 513**	**7 543**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, 2023 and 2025 (exc. Not specified)

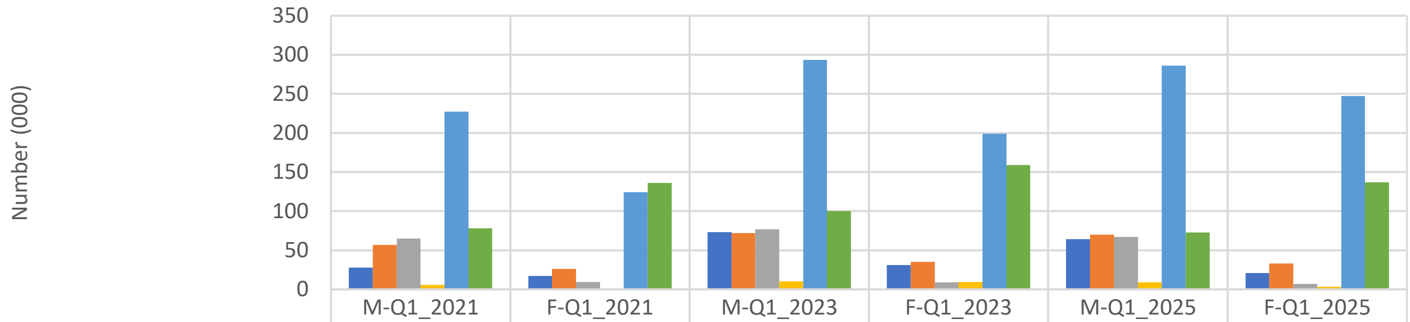
- **Table 4** presents male and female (15+ years) employment numbers across the aggregate economic categories for three time periods: Q1-2021, Q1-2023, and Q1-2025. Overall, the trend shows that employment across most industries constantly increased from 2021 to 2025, especially among managers and professionals. Males (15+ years) tend to dominate in almost all occupations except in clerks and service workers occupations. Females (15+ years) were more prominent in clerical and service workers occupations.

- Between the first quarters of 2021 and 2025, female (15+ years) employment in the economy increased from 6 677 000 to 7 543 000, representing a proportional growth of 13%. This growth, however, was unevenly distributed across industries. The most significant contributor was the Trade, Transport, and Finance industries, which added 461 000 female employees (15+ years), accounting for over 50% of total female employment growth. Services and Private Households followed, with an increase of 273 000 female employees, indicating continued feminization of service-oriented occupations.

- By contrast, the industries such as Manufacturing, Construction, and Mining experienced relatively modest increases in female (15+ years) participation (ranging from 20 to 37 additional employees per industry), while Agriculture industry and the “Other” category showed minor growth or decline. This pattern highlights persistent occupational segregation: female (15+years) remains concentrated in commerce and service roles, whereas male-dominated sectors such as Construction and Mining see minimal female representation gains.

- Overall, the data reflects a structural trend toward female (15+ years) employment growth in service and trade-related activities, consistent with broader global patterns of economic feminization in service-dominated labour markets. Despite the growth, gender disparities remain pronounced in industrial and manual occupations, indicating limited penetration of female (15+ years) into historically male-dominated industries such as mining, manufacturing and construction.

Figure 42: Youth (15-24 years) employment by sex and economic activity ('000)



	M-Q1_2021	F-Q1_2021	M-Q1_2023	F-Q1_2023	M-Q1_2025	F-Q1_2025
Agriculture	28	17	73	31	64	21
Manufacturing	57	26	72	35	70	33
Construction	65	10	77	9	67	7
Mining and utilities	6	1	10	9	9	3
Trade,Transport and Finance	227	124	294	199	286	247
Services and Pvt households	78	136	100	159	73	137

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, 2023 and 2025 (exc. Not specified)

- **Figure 42** illustrates the youth (15-24 years) employment by sex and the aggregate economic categories in three different periods: Q1-2021 to Q1-2025. Overall, the youth (15-24 years) employment grew by 242 000 between Q1-2021 and Q1-2025. These employment gains for youth (15-24 years) were mainly driven by Trade, Transport and Finance industries (together: with 182 000), followed by agriculture (40 000) and Manufacturing (20 000) over the same period. Employment losses in the same age group were recorded in the Services and Private households (5 000) and Construction (1 000) industries.

- While male youth (15-24 years) employment gains were mostly recorded in the Trade, Transport and Finance industries (together with 59 000), and Agriculture industry (36 000), female youth (15-24 years) were largely absorbed in the Trade, Transport and Finance (together with 123 000) and Manufacturing industry (7 000) between Q1-2023 and Q1-2025. In contrast, employment losses for male youth (15-24 years) were dominated in the Service and Private households (5 000) and female youth (15-24 years) in the Construction industry (3 000) during the same period.

Table 5: Adult (25+ years) employment by sex and economic activity (‘000)

	Q-2021		Q1-2023		Q1-2025	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture	551	214	529	272	599	262
Manufacturing	904	531	1 029	532	1 026	561
Construction	902	113	965	161	1 046	136
Mining and utilities	403	103	426	103	431	133
Trade, Transport and Finance	3 655	2 471	3 884	2 665	4 157	2 810
Services and Pvt households	1 622	2 919	1 743	3 018	1 680	3 191
Other	2	12	8	7	5	2
Total	**8 038**	**6 362**	**8 584**	**6 759**	**8 944**	**7 095**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, 2023 and 2025 (exc. Not specified)

- In **Table 5**, adult (25+) employment increased by 11,4% from 2021 to 2025, with male and female growth rates nearly equal at 11,3% and 11,5%, respectively.
- In Q1: 2025, Agriculture employed half of adults; Services and Community sectors accounted for 36%. Community, Services, and Agriculture are female-dominated, while Construction, Mining, and Manufacturing are male-dominated.
- Mining and Construction consistently had the highest proportion of male workers, while Community work saw mostly females. Agriculture maintained a balanced gender split.
- Between 2021 and 2025, Mining & Utilities grew the most at 16,6%, while Community industry grew the least at 7,1%. All industries experienced steady growth.

Table 6: Youth (15-34 years) employment by sex and economic activity (‘000)

	Q1-2021		Q1-2023		Q1-2025	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture	184	75	253	113	257	100
Manufacturing	334	179	375	172	400	195
Construction	345	43	367	66	360	47
Mining and utilities	100	37	103	33	111	43
Trade, Transport and Finance	1 443	938	1 597	1 075	1 629	1 191
Services and Pvt households	498	830	566	898	484	851
Other				1		
Grand Total	**2 903**	**2 102**	**3 260**	**2 359**	**3 241**	**2 427**

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), Q1: 2021, 2023 and 2025 (exc. Not specified)

- Overall, the total youth (15-34 years) employment rose from 5 006 to 5 668 translating to 13,2% between 2021 and 2025, as illustrated in **Table 6.** Growth slowed slightly after 2023, suggesting stabilization. Male youth (15-34 years) employment grew 11,6%, while female youth (15-34 years) employment grew 15,5% that means women gained ground. The gender gap narrowed from 802 000 (2021) to 814 (2025) (almost stable). The distribution by industry during Q1:2025 shows that Trade dominates youth employment, nearly half (50%) of all jobs. Services are second (24%), followed by manufacturing industry (10%). Agriculture, construction, and mining industries play small roles because they are less than 8% each).

- When looking at the gender composition by sector for the whole period, Trade industry is relatively balanced, slightly male leaning. Services are strongly female dominated, the main source of jobs for young women. The construction industry remains almost exclusively male.

- Sectoral growth from 2021 to 2025, shows that Agriculture industry shows the strongest relative growth among youth - possibly due to new agricultural initiatives or rural youth engagement. Trade industry also expanded significantly, keeping its dominance. Services industry growth has plateaued - youth employment there stagnated since 2023. The Construction and Mining industries remain small but steady.

2.8. Share of employment outside formal sector

According to Stats SA, unemployment remains the leading reason people start informal businesses, with women being the most disproportionately affected. Geographically, the informal sector is most concentrated in three provinces: Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. South Africa's informal sector has long been dominated by the trade industry, but other industries are gradually expanding in the sector, such as the Services, finance, construction, transport, and agriculture industries etc.

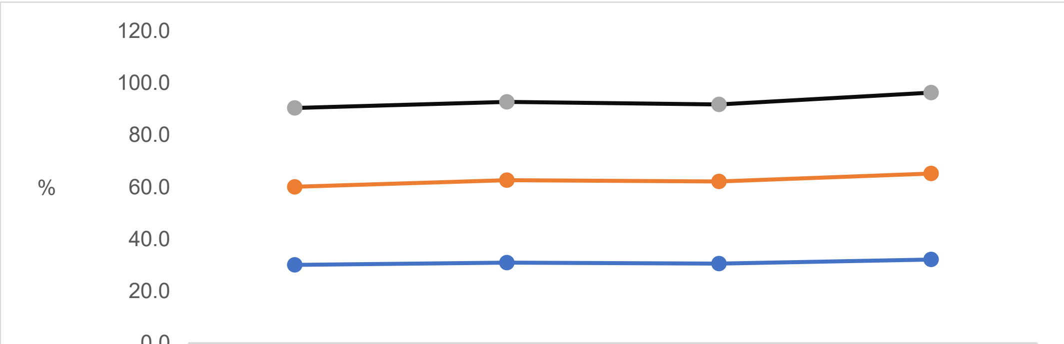
2.8.1. Informal employment rate
2.8.1.1. Informal sector

According to Stats SA, the informal sector has the following two components:

i. Employees working in establishments that employ less than five employees, who do not deduct income tax from their salaries/wages;

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.

Figure 43: Proportion of persons aged (15+ years)[11] employed in informal sector by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Female	30.3	30.1	29.7	31.1
Male	30.0	31.7	31.5	33.1
Total	30.1	31.0	30.7	32.2

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

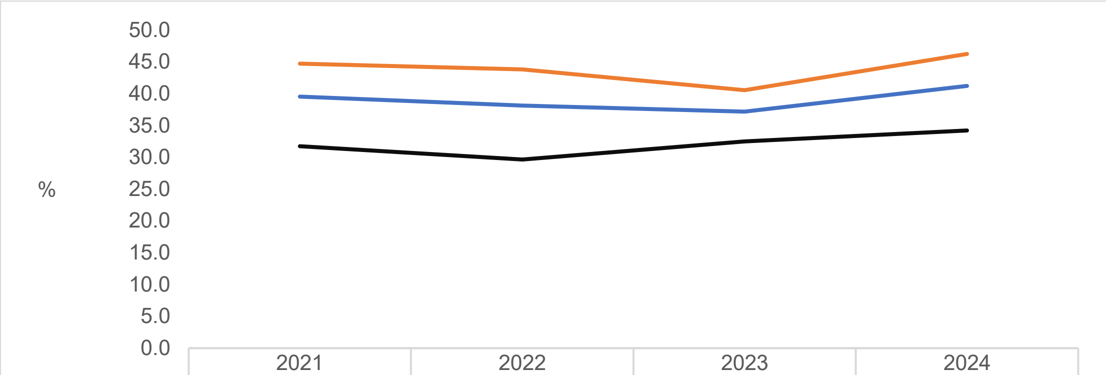
- **Figure 43** illustrates a gradual upward trend, though with some fluctuations for both sexes. In 2021, the rates for both males and females (15+ years) employed in the informal sector were closely aligned to the national rate at an average of 30%. However, the gender gap has relatively widened from 2022 to 2024. In 2023, for example, the proportion of males (15+ years) employed in the informal sector rose sharply to 31,5%, while females remained lower than the national rate at approximately 29,7%.

[11] *For the purpose of international comparison, age group 15-24 years refer to youth and 25+ years applies to adults. South Africa youth include age groups 15-34 years, but it can be disaggregated to 15-24 and 25-34-years age groups.*

- Furthermore, the results highlighted that the share for males (15+ years) who were employed in the informal sector increased from 30,0% in 2021 to 33,1% in 2024 and the share for females increased from 30,3% in 2021 to 31,1% in 2024.

- Overall, the share for males (15+ years) employed in the informal sector was consistently higher over the period 2021-2024 relative to females, pointing to persistent gender disparities. These could reflect persistent structural barriers faced by young women, such as limited access to capital.

Figure 44: Proportion of persons aged (15-24 years) employed in the informal sector by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total	39.5	38.2	37.2	41.2
Male	44.7	43.8	40.6	46.2
Female	31.7	29.7	32.5	34.2

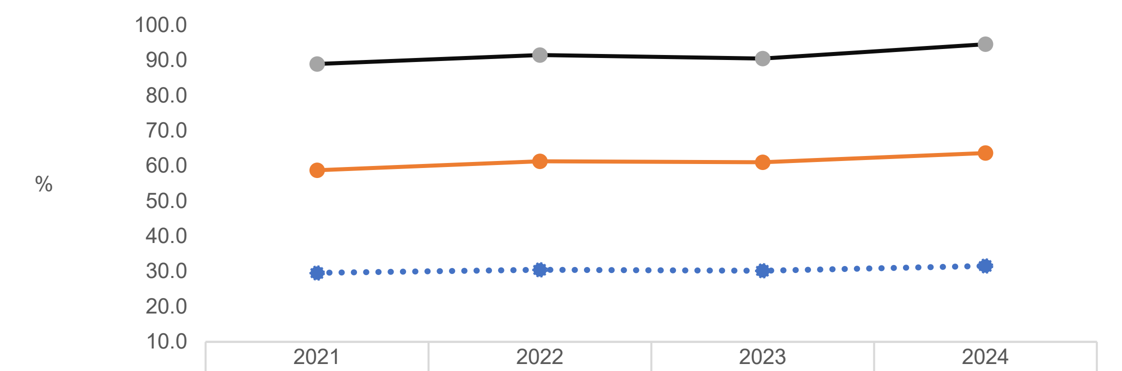
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 44** illustrates the share of young people (15-24 years) engaged in the informal sector by sex from 2021 to 2024. The youth share of employment (15-24 years) in the informal sector reached the highest of 41,2% in 2024 from 39.5% in 2021 while it declined to 38,2% in 2022 and 37, 2% in 2023.

- Males consistently represented the highest share, starting at 44,7% in 2021, dipping to 40,6% in 2023, and then increasing to 46,2% in 2024. In contrast, the proportion of young females (15-24 years) was lower than that of their male counterparts, averaging between 30% to 35% compared to over 40% for males during the same period. Females began at 31,7% in 2021, decreasing to 29,7% in 2022, and then gradually climbing back to 34,2% by 2024.

- Overall, participation in the informal sector experienced a slight decline for both males and females from 2021 to 2023, before rising again in 2024.

Figure 45: Proportion of persons aged (25+ years) employed in the informal sector by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Female	30.2	30.1	29.5	30.9
Male	29.2	30.8	30.8	32.1
Total	29.6	30.5	30.2	31.6

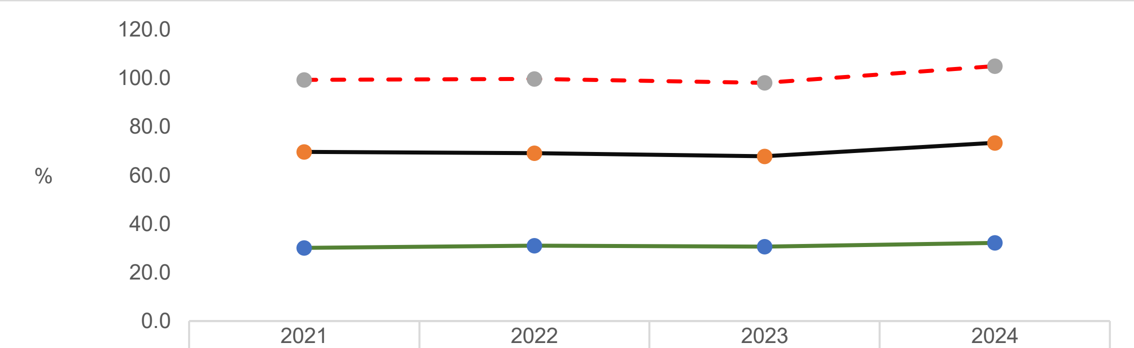
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 45** illustrates the proportion of individuals aged 25+ years participating in the informal sector from 2021 to 2024, with data disaggregated by sex. By 2022, there was a notable surge in males (25+ years) participation, which rose to 30,8%. This figure remained relatively stable through 2023, before experiencing a further increase to 32,1% by 2024. In contrast, females (25+ years) participation declined marginally between 2021 and 2023, reaching a low of 29,5%, before recovering to 30,9% in 2024. The national share in the same age group followed a similar path, with a gradual rise from 29.6% in 2021 to 31,6% in 2024.

- Several factors may account for these trends, including structural unemployment and limited access to formal job opportunities for older workers. These challenges appear to have prompted a greater reliance on informal activities as a means of generating income. Additionally, the increase in males (25+ years) participation may be indicative of heightened engagement in specific informal sectors that are traditionally male dominated.

- Overall, there has been a modest increase in informal sector participation of persons aged 25 + years throughout this period from 2021 to 2024. In 2021, males (25+ years) representation in the informal sector accounted for 29,2%, marking the lowest point, while female participation was just slightly higher at 30,2%.

Figure 46: Proportion of persons employed in the informal sector by age groups



	2021	2022	2023	2024
25+	29.6	30.5	30.2	31.6
15-24	39.5	38.2	37.2	41.2
15+	30.1	31.0	30.7	32.2

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 46** illustrates the share of employment in the informal sector by three main age groups for international comparative purpose in the period from 2021-2024. A greater proportion of youth (15-24 years) were employed in the informal sector compared to their adult counterparts (25+ years) over the last four years. The employment rate for youth (15-24 years) in the informal sector remained persistently high, with the highest level recorded in 2024 at 41,2% and the lowest in 2023 at 37,2%.

- On the other hand, the share of employment for those individuals (25+years) in the informal sector increased from 29,6% in 2021 to 31,6% in 2024. This represented an increase of 2.0 percentage point as compared for males with an increase of 1,7 percentage point over the same period. The national proportion of all working persons (15+ years) in the informal sector increased from 30,1% in 2021 to 32,2% in 2024, representing an overall rise of 2 percentage points.

- Several factors may account for these patterns. Among youth, the consistently higher participation rates in informal employment could reflect barriers to entry into formal jobs, such as limited work experience, mismatches between skills and labour market demand, and high competition for scarce formal opportunities. The rebound in 2024 may be linked to heightened economic pressures, including rising living costs and insufficient job creation in the formal economy, which pushed more young people into informal activities as a survival strategy. For adults, the slower but steady increase in informal sector participation could be associated with prolonged unemployment, retrenchments in certain formal industries.

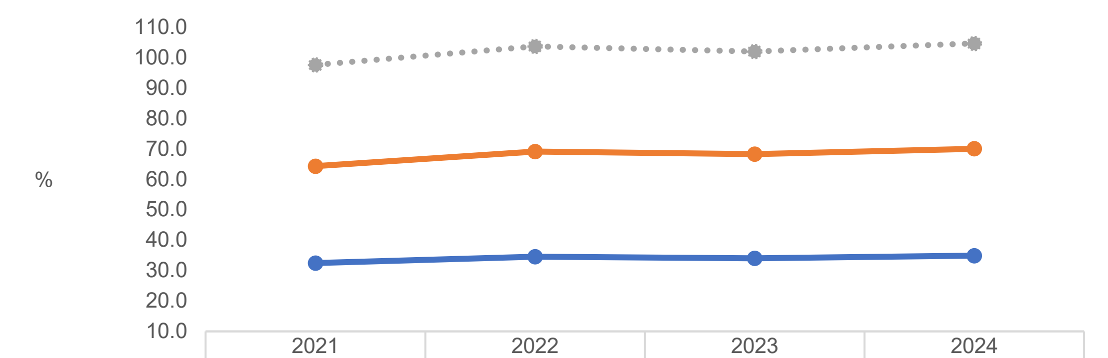
2.8.1.2. Informal employment

Informal employment is a job-based concept, and it is defined in terms of the employment relationship and protections associated to the job of the worker. Persons in informal employment, therefore, comprise all persons in the informal sector, employees in the formal sector, and persons working in private households who are not entitled to or receive basic benefits such as pension or medical aid contributions from their employer, and who do not have a written contract of employment.

i. Informal employment identifies persons who are in precarious employment situations irrespective of whether the entity for which they work is in the formal or informal sector.

ii. For employers, own-account workers and Cooperative producers, they are in informal employment if they are working in the informal sector. While all contributing family workers are considered as in informal employment, the informal employment can be found in informal sector, formal sector and in household.

Figure 47: Proportion of persons aged (15+ years) in the informal employment by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Female	33.3	34.6	33.7	34.6
Male	31.9	34.5	34.3	35.1
Total	32.5	34.5	34.0	34.9

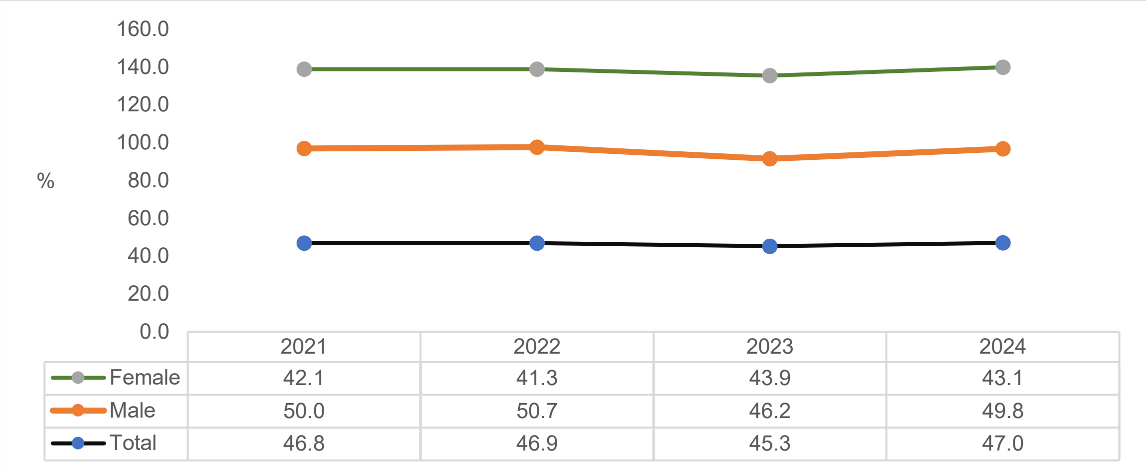
Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 47** illustrates the overall share of informal employment for those who are 15+ years and above from 2021 to 2024. The overall share started relatively low in 2021 at 32,5%, increased to 34,5% in 2022, declined in 2023 at 34,0%, and then increased again in 2024 to 34,9%. In 2021, males (15+ years) recorded the lowest share of informal employment at 31,9% and females share was at 33,3%. The national average for both males and females (15+ years) in the informal employment increased by 2,4 percentage point from 32,5% in 2021 to 34,9% in 2024.

- Although all sex groups experienced a decline in the informal employment in 2023, males (34,3%) had a slightly higher share than females (33,7%) from persons aged 15+years and above. In 2024, the males (15+ years) in the informal employment reached 35,1%, the highest overall share recorded in the period under review. This shift reflects a reversal of earlier trends - females initially dominated informal employment in 2021, but it was predominantly males in 2024.

- The higher rates of informal employment among females in 2021 may have been driven by survivalist activities during the Covid-19 pandemic recovery phase, such as domestic work, informal retail, and small-scale food services. From 2023 onwards, however, males (15+ years) began to overtake females in informal employment, likely due to their re-entry into sectors such as construction, transport, and casual labour, which rebounded more quickly than female-dominated activities.

Figure 48: Proportion of youth (15-24 years) in the informal employment by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Female	42.1	41.3	43.9	43.1
Male	50.0	50.7	46.2	49.8
Total	46.8	46.9	45.3	47.0

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

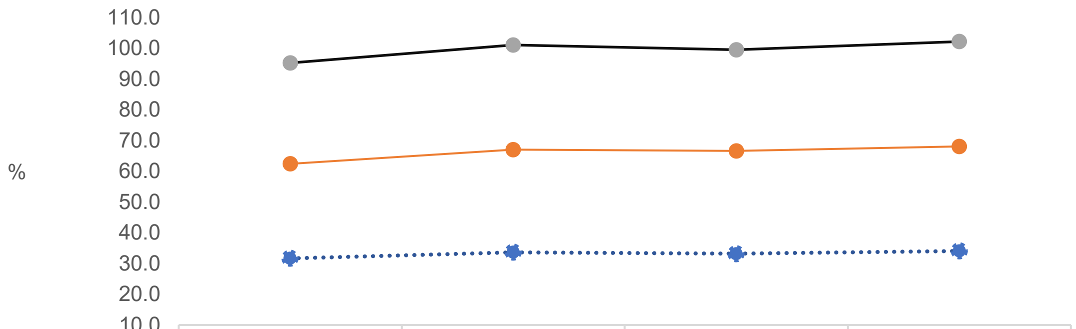
- **Figure 48** illustrates the share of informal employment among youth (15-24 years) from 2021 to 2024. The overall pattern shows the male youth (15-24 years) recording the highest share across all years as compared to their female's youth (15-24 years) counterparts. However, it decreased by 0,2 percentage point from 2021 to 2024.

- In 2022, the gap persisted, with males' youth (15-24 years) share in the informal employment rising slightly above 50%, while females share declined marginally but remained just above 41%. A notable shift occurred in 2023 where the share of males' youth (15-24 years) in the informal employment declined to 46,2%, converging more closely with the national average at 45,3%, while females' share in the informal employment increased to 43,9%. This resulted in a significant narrowing of the gender gap compared to 2022.

- By 2024, the gender gap widened again, with the share of male's youth (15-24 years) regaining a higher share relative to the share of female's youth. This pattern highlights the consistent dominance of males' youth in informal employment, while the temporary decrease in 2023 could indicate their vulnerability to short-term economic shocks.

- The persistently lower shares among females' youth could still suggest limited access to informal employment opportunities, which may be linked to factors such as safety concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and gendered constraints in sectors like construction and transport that are largely male dominated with limited protection.

Figure 49: Proportion of persons aged 25+years in the informal employment by sex



	2021	2022	2023	2024
Female	32.8	34.1	33.0	34.1
Male	30.8	33.3	33.4	34.0
Total	31.7	33.7	33.2	34.1

Source: Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), 2021 to 2025

- **Figure 49** illustrates the share of informal employment among workers aged 25 and older from 2021 to 2024. Throughout this period, the rates of informal employment for individuals aged 25 and above remained relatively stable, fluctuating within a narrow range of approximately 31% to 34%. The lowest rate was recorded in 2021, with male workers (25+ years) accounting for the smallest share at 30,8%, while the female workers had the highest share, showing a 2-percentage point gap compared to their male counterparts.

- Between 2021 and 2022, there was a noticeable increase of about 2.5 percentage point for males (25+ years), 1,3 percentage point for females and 2,0 percentage point for national rates, likely due to the lingering effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Many adult workers (25+ years) were absorbed into informal employment as formal employment offers declined. In 2023, the share for the national informal employment saw a slight decline to around 33%, which may indicate modest improvements in the formal labour market absorption and economic stabilization.

- By 2024, the rates had risen again, converging to approximately 34% for both adult sexes (25+ years). This convergence suggests that the gender differences for adults (25+ years) in the informal employment participation have narrowed over time.

3. *Conclusion*

- ✓ This report presents a review of the labour market situation experienced by the youth, compared to that of the adult and national population, over the period Q1-2021 to Q1-2025. The report also highlights the difference in experiences between males and females of the various groups.

- ✓ Data trends were stable over the period under review that provided consistency in terms of the results. These numbers reveal the scale of SA's economy and labour market from 2021-2025. Policy directives, limited investments, savings and infrastructure and other regulations have made the environment as fragile to fast employment growth in the country.

- ✓ A nation that consistently allows high unemployment rate is a nation neglecting its future workforce participation. The responsibility for all this lies squarely with all players such as the government, policy making and other stakeholders.

- ✓ The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted the labour market, with labour absorption rates, leading to a sharp initial decline and subsequent recovery in many countries including South Africa. Employment contracted due to nationwide lockdowns and restrictions effected resulting in many employed persons losing their jobs, either through retrenchments, closure of businesses etc. Many individuals who remained employed were laid off, worked less hours or none, further impacting active employment-to-population ratios as well as participation rates. However, from the start of 2022, restrictions were relaxed, and somehow labour markets began to make concerted efforts of recovery with people looking for employment and although the pace and extent of recovery varied across sectors.

- ✓ Noteworthy is that not everyone who had a job before Covid-19 pandemic was able to re-enter the labour market post-Covid-19 pandemic and this was displayed in the data as there is minimal growth in the labour market rates over time. In other words, the transition rate into employment from other labour market status was more likely to be from those who were seeking work compared to those outside to the labour force such as the discouraged, and other not economically active.

- ✓ The youth (15-24 years) face the disproportionate threats in the labour market when compared to the adults. Between 2021 and 2025, all labour market indicators among the youth (15-34 years) were consistently higher than that of the adults, while the youth EPR's and LFPR's were lower compared to that of their adult counterparts. To help young workers prepare for the labour market and support inclusive growth, the South African government could coordinate all Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMP) currently dispersed across institutions that require strong coordination to enhance high employment creation rates.

- ✓ The lower labour market rates for females from 2021 to 2025 highlight the challenges in access to employment opportunities and economic participation in the South African labour market as compared to males. Inequality is high and persistent as illustrated and reported by the Gini coefficient over the same period.

Key aspects of the results highlighted in the report

- ✓ Recovery remains fragile with employment growth uneven across sectors. It has not been sustained for longer periods. Ahead, the outlook is complicated by the evolving impact of US tariffs in the labour market, with the low EPR's and LFPR's among youth.

- ✓ To help young workers prepare for the labour market and support inclusive growth, the South African government could coordinate all Active Labour Market Programmes (ALMP) currently dispersed across institutions that require strong coordination to enhance high employment creation rates.

- ✓ There is a strong need for labour market interventions to specifically address the trend of discouragement amongst young work-seekers, and to assist young people to navigate between education and employment. These interventions should ensure that youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) are also engaged with social and economic structures.
    - Further concerted efforts are needed to ensure that interventions to address youth unemployment are well coordinated so that the support available to youth is clear and accessible.
    - Collaboration between online jobseeker support platforms could maximise the possibility of connecting people to opportunities, e.g., Employment Services for South Africa (ESSA)[12] at the DEL.

- ✓ More must be done to target the underlying causes of gender inequality in employment. This includes facilitating access to affordable, quality early childhood development centres; expanding the work of child and youth care workers; and family policies. Despite some interventions, men continued to face substantially better than men in the labour market.

- ✓ Public employment programmes are valuable mechanisms to create entry-level work for young people. The Basic Education Employment Initiative (within the Presidential Employment Stimulus) is a welcome initiative.

- ✓ Initiatives such as the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI) to increase skills and guide young people into sustainable livelihoods must be cultivated. Crucial components are the involvement of nongovernmental stakeholders, and the strengthening of young people's abilities to navigate online systems. Accountability, transparency and real-time monitoring of the PYEI's outcomes will be key to understanding the intervention's success and/or shortcomings.

Four indicators to assess the nature of Labour Underutilization (LU) throughout the business cycle:

1. ***LU1:*** *refers to the strict definition of unemployment in South Africa. LU1 (Unemployment rate) = [persons in unemployment / labour force] x 100 (The proportion of the labour force that was unemployed but actively seeking and available.*
2. ***LU2:*** *Combined rate of time-related underemployment and unemployment: [(persons in time-related underemployment + persons in unemployment) / labour force] x 100* ***(****A broader unemployment rate that includes discouraged jobseekers.*
3. ***LU3:*** *Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force: [(persons in unemployment + potential labour force) / (extended labour force)] x 100 (The percentage of people who want to work but are not actively looking for jobs because they believe no jobs are available for them).*
4. ***LU4:*** *Composite measure of labour underutilization: [(persons in time-related underemployment + persons in unemployment + potential labour force) / (extended labour force)] x 100 (It was underutilisation rate which was a composite indicator that includes unemployed, underemployment and discouraged work-seekers).*

[12] Online jobseeker support platforms assisting youth to find work must be responsive to the lived realities and contexts that shape the job search. This requires designing platforms that enable feedback and minimise emotional stress and discouragement.

4. Bibliography

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II. MISTRA (2021): Youth in South Africa: Agency, (in) visibility and national development, Policy brief, November 2021

ILO- TRAINEES: 2025 @ Birchwood Hotel & OR Tambo Conference Centre

5. Annexure A: List of Training Participants

INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH AFRICN LABOUR INFORMATION SYSTEMS 18-19 AUGUST 2025

BIRCHWOOD HOTEL, JOHANNESBURG

ATTENDANCE REGISTER

NO	Name & Surname	Gender	Designation & Organisation	Email	Signature Day 1	Signature Day 2
1	Phetolo Shilwane	M	Principal Survey Statistician StatsSA	phetolos@statssa.gov.za		
2	Phanuel Monoe	M	Assistant Director	phanuel.munoe@labour.gov.za		
3	Nokuthula Ngangile	F	Assistant Director Dept Employment & Labour	Nokuthula.Ngangile @labour.gov.za		
4	Thami Bikitsha	M	Deputy Director Dept Employment & Labour	Thami.Bikitsha@labour.gov.za		
5	Juliet Mashabela	F	ProductivitySA Economist	Julietm@productivitysa.co.za		
6	Fulufhelo Matshivha	F	Senior Practitioner Labour	Fulufhelo.Matshivha@labour.gov.za		
7	Kitso Katlego	M	Assistant Director; Employment + labour	katlego.moloi.e labour.gov.za		
8	Lephina Mayekiso	F	Deputy Director DEL	lephina.mayekiso@labour.gov.za		
9	Abrahams Mutedi	M	DEL	abrahams.mutedi@labour.gov.za		

1

NO	Name & Surname	Gender	Designation & Organisation	Email	Signature Day 1	Signature Day 2
11	Millicent Semono	Female	Deputy Director DEL	millicent.semono@labour.gov.za		
12	Mahlangu Lucky	Female	Deputy Director DEL	Lucky.Mahlangu@labour.gov.za		
13	LEBO MOLOABI	MALE	EMPLOYMENT & LABOUR	LEBO.MOLOABI@LABOUR.GOV.ZA		
14	DUDUZILE SOODI	Female	ASD : LABOUR	duduzile.soodi@labour.gov.za		
15	Desiree Maramela	F	CO: Stats SA	desireem@statssa.gov.za		
16	Ndivhuwo Gangazha	M	Stats SA	Ndivhuwog@statssa.gov.za	N Gangazha	N Gangazha
17	Rofhiwa Mulaudzi	M.	ASD: LMIS	Rofhiwa.Mulaudzi@labour.gov.za		
18	Wasnaar Mokoena	M	ASD LMIS	Wasnaarmokoena@labour.gov.za		
19	Irene Maminze	F	ILO	maminze@ilo.org		
20	Sphetho Siyengo	M	CDPO_NW	Sphetho.Siyengo@labour.gov.za		

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NO	Name & Surname	Gender	Designation & Organisation	Email	Signature Day 1	Signature Day 2
21	SAMSON MUTHETHWA	MALE	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR	samson.muthethwa@labour.gov.za		
22	Joseph Ledwaba	Male	Director: DEL-CF	joseph.ledwaba@labour.gov.za		
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
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