

SA's unemployment rate dips in final quarter of 2025

Statistics SA on Tuesday, 17 February, released the Quarterly Labour Force Survey for Q4 of 2025, which has revealed the official unemployment rate for South Africa has dropped marginally from the previous quarter to 31.4%.



Job seekers stand outside a construction site ahead of the release of the unemployment numbers by Statistics South Africa, in Eikenhof, south of Johannesburg, South Africa, 23 June 2020. Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

According to the QLFS Q4: 2025 results, there was an increase of 44,000 in the number of employed persons to 17.1 million, while there was a decrease of 172,000 in the number of unemployed persons to 7.1 million compared with Q3: 2025 results. This resulted in a decrease of 128,000 (or 0.5%) in the labour force in the same period.

The above changes in employment and unemployment resulted in the official unemployment rate (LU1) decreasing by 0.5 of a percentage point from 31.9% in the third quarter of 2025 to 31.4% in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Job seeker stats

The survey showed that during the same period, discouraged job-seekers increased by 233,000 to 3.7 million, other available job-seekers decreased by 110,000 to 855,000, and unavailable job-seekers decreased by 41,000 to 42,000. This resulted in a total net increase of 82,000 to 4.6 million in the potential labour force population (ie. persons who were available but not seeking or unavailable but seeking).

Other outside the labour force increased by 165,000 to 12.5 million. Outside the labour force, which is the total of the potential labour force and other outside the labour force, increased by 248,000 to 17.1 million in Q4 of 2025.

Sector, industry and regional statistics

The number of persons employed in the formal sector increased by 320,000 in Q4: 2025, and informal sector employment decreased by 293,000 over the same period.

The largest increases in industry employment were recorded in community and social service (46,000), construction (35,000), and finance (32,000). Decreases in employment were recorded in trade (98,000), manufacturing (61,000), and mining (5,000).

The results also indicate that increases in employment were observed in Western Cape (93,000), Mpumalanga (37,000), North West (36,000) and Northern Cape (17,000). The largest employment decreases were recorded in Gauteng (54,000), KwaZulu-Natal (41,000), and Eastern Cape (32,000) during the same period.



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Youth still at risk

The youth (15–34 years) remain vulnerable in the labour market. The results for the fourth quarter of 2025 show that the total number of unemployed youth decreased by 84,000 to 4.6 million compared with Q3: 2025, while employed youth recorded a decrease of 113,000 to 5.8 million.

As a result, the youth unemployment rate increased by 0.1 of a percentage point to 43.8% in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Labour underutilisation

Stats SA says that in addition to the unemployment rate (LU1), other measures of labour underutilisation (L) were measured. The combined rate of unemployment and time-related underemployment (LU2) decrease by 0.6 of a percentage point to 34.3%; the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU) decreased by 0.3 of a percentage point to 42.1% in the fourth quarter compared with the third quarter of 2025.

Lastly, the composite measure of labour underutilisation (LU4) (which combines time-related underemployment, unemployment and potential labour force as a proportion of extended labour force) was 44.5% in the fourth quarter of 2025. These labour underutilisation measures highlight people in different situations and with different degrees of attachment to the labour market.