

## Official unemployment rises marginally in Q1 2026

The official unemployment rate has risen marginally by some 1.3 percentage points from 31.4% the fourth quarter of 2025 to reach 32.7% in the first quarter of 2026.



Image source: Andriy Pbpov – [123RF.com](https://www.123RF.com)

This, according to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) released by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) on Tuesday, 12 May.

“[There] was a decrease of 345,000 in the number of employed persons to 16.8 million, while there was an increase of 301,000 in the number of unemployed persons to 8.1 million compared with Q4: 2025 results.

“This resulted in a decrease of 44,000 [or -0,2%] in the labour force during the same period,” Stats SA said.

At the same time, the number of people employed in the formal sector decreased by some 189,000 while those in the informal sector also faced a decrease of 127,000 over the same period.

The youth unemployment rate – defined as those between the ages of 15 and 34 – also showed an increase.

“Results for the first quarter of 2026 show that the total number of unemployed youth increased by 181,000 to 4.7 million compared with quarter four of 2025, while employed youth recorded a decrease of 258,000 to 5.6 million.

“As a result, the youth unemployment rate increased by 2.0 percentage points to 45.8% in the first quarter 2026,” Stats SA said.



17 Feb 2026



---

## Industry increases

There were some upshots with some industries recording increases in employment.

“Increases in industry employment were recorded in Manufacturing [38,000], Mining [32,000] and Agriculture [10,000]. The largest decreases in employment were recorded in Community and social service [206,000], Construction [110,000] and Transport [30,000].

## Provincial stats

“KwaZulu-Natal [6,000] is the only province that observed an increase in employment. The largest employment decreases were recorded in North West [80,000], Gauteng [67,000], Mpumalanga [54,000], Eastern Cape [43,000] and Limpopo [43,000] during the same period,” Stats SA added.

During the same period, discouraged job-seekers increased by 178,000 to 3.9 million while available job-seekers increased by 55,000 to 910,000.

“Unavailable job-seekers increased by 6,000 to 49,000, resulting in a total net increase of 240,000 to 4.9 million in the potential labour force population [persons who were available but not seeking or unavailable to seeking].

“Those outside the labour force for other reasons decreased by 75,000 to 12.4 million. Persons outside the labour force, which is the total of those in the potential labour force and others outside the labour force, increased by 164,000 to 17.3 million in the first quarter of 2026,” the statistical agency said.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>