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## First Quarter 2025 Labour Survey: Key Insights on Youth, Gender, and Sectoral Trends



The data released earlier this week in the Quarterly Labour Force [Survey](#) (QLFS) for Q1 2025 highlights the compounded vulnerabilities faced by South Africa's youth - particularly young women - within an increasingly constrained labour market. Among those aged 15-24, a staggering 37.1% are classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training), reflecting a generation struggling to access pathways to work or education. This burden falls disproportionately on young women, 37.5% of whom are NEET, compared to 36.7% of their male counterparts - underscoring the persistent gendered barriers to economic participation at the earliest stages of working life.

Among 15-34-year-olds, nearly half (48.1%) of women are NEET, compared to 42.2% of men. **Black African women continue to bear the brunt of labour market exclusion**, recording an unemployment [rate](#) of 39.8%. This rate is 4.3 percentage points higher than the national average for women, which stands at 35.5%. This gap highlights the structural inequalities that continue to marginalise women in the labour market, even with the ongoing national efforts to address unemployment.

### Enduring Burden of Unemployment

Furthermore, **the official unemployment rate now stands at 32.9%**, an increase from 31.9%

The cycle of unemployment is further

in the previous quarter. The expanded unemployment rate - which includes discouraged work-seekers - has also climbed to 43.1%.

Particularly alarming is the **youth unemployment rate**, which stands at **62.4% for those aged 15–24, and 40.4% for those aged 25–34**.

For young people who are NEETs, these numbers represent more than statistics - they reflect a widening inequality gap. The urgency to shift this trajectory has never been greater.

exacerbated by the lack of work experience among the youth. Approximately **58.7% of unemployed young people have never worked before**, and are locked out of the economy by structural barriers and a lack of meaningful pathways to employment.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires comprehensive strategies that include targeted skills development programs, mentorship opportunities, and policies that specifically support young women and marginalised communities.



### Provincial Disparities & Sectoral Shifts

The biggest quarterly employment losses were seen in KwaZulu-Natal (-104,000 jobs), Eastern Cape (-83,000 jobs), North West (-57,000 jobs), Limpopo (-55 000 jobs), Mpumalanga (-43 000 jobs) and Northern Cape (-12 000 jobs) pointing to weakening provincial labour markets. Employment increases were recorded in Western Cape (+49 000 jobs), Gauteng (+9 000 jobs) and Free State (+4 000 jobs) during the same period.

Formal sector employment declined notably in several key industries compared to the fourth quarter of 2024. The largest losses were recorded in Trade (-133,000), Community and Social Services (-98,000), Construction (-79,000), Mining (-41,000), and Manufacturing (-40,000). In contrast, employment gains were observed in Transport (+73,000), Finance (+43,000), and Utilities (+30,000), providing some relief amid widespread employment declines.

## Responding to Youth Unemployment with IRM and JET SEP

In light of the growing youth unemployment crisis, the National Business Initiative's (NBI) efforts to foster inclusive, future-facing employment pathways are more urgent than ever. Programmes like the Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Initiative and the Just Energy Transition Skilling for Employment Programme (JET SEP) are intentionally designed to respond to the systemic exclusion of young people - particularly those in under-resourced communities - by bridging critical skills gaps and creating new forms of economic participation.



IRM focuses on skills that are both practical and in demand, opening doors for youth to enter trades that are essential to infrastructure maintenance and economic resilience. Complementing this, JET SEP is a response to South Africa's evolving energy landscape, aiming to catalyse private sector investment in skills anticipation and development within the Just Energy Transition. Since its launch, the programme has onboarded **31 influential CEOs**, conducted **50+ industry working group engagements**, and convened **30+ cross-sectoral dialogues** - building alignment between business, government, civil society, and academia.

As IRM and JET SEP continue to expand, there is increasing emphasis on **supporting young people, particularly young women, as well as SMMEs**, as vital drivers of innovation and employment. In doing so, these programmes are not just creating pathways for employment, they offer a meaningful opportunity for young people to actively participate in the economy.

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*The National Business Initiative (NBI) is an independent and voluntary coalition of South African and multinational businesses launched in 1995 by the then President, Nelson Mandela.*

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