

## Q4 2025 Labour Force Survey: A Modest Shift Amid Persistent Structural Pressure



Coming on the heels of President Cyril Ramaphosa's State of the Nation Address (SONA), Statistics South Africa released the [Quarterly Labour Force Survey \(QLFS\)](#) for Q4:2025, providing a detailed snapshot of the nation's labour market dynamics. The latest data indicates a slight improvement: the official unemployment rate decreasing by 0,5 of a percentage point to 31,4% in Q4:2025 compared to Q3:2025.

However, this marginal improvement must be considered alongside deeper structural trends. Many South Africans remain entirely excluded from the labour market, disconnected not only from active employment but from the very pathways that enable participation, income security and long-term economic mobility.

### **The survey highlights the following trends:**

- The labour force participation rate (the share of the working-age population either employed or actively seeking work) fell by 0.4 percentage points to 59.3%.

- A significant share of young people remain disengaged from both the labour market and from education or training opportunities. These young people are classified as not in employment, education or training (NEET).
- Breaking this down further, of the 10.3 million young people aged 15–24 years, 34.0% were NEETs. This is 0,5 of a percentage point higher than the NEET rate in Q4:2024. Within this age group, the NEET rate for women increased by 1,4 percentage points, while the rate for men decreased by 0,5 of a percentage point.
- The number of persons outside the labour force increased by 248 000 in Q4:2025 compared to Q3:2025.

## Youth at the Epicentre of the Crisis

Young people continue to bear a disproportionately high share of South Africa's unemployment burden.

Youth aged 15–24 and 25–34 recorded the highest unemployment rates at 57.0% and 39.2%, respectively. By comparison, the unemployment rate for those aged 35–65 was 22.6% in Q4 2025, underscoring disproportionate labour market disadvantages faced by young people aged 15–34.

With graduate unemployment decreasing by 0,1 of a percentage point from 10,4% in Q3:2025 to 10,3% in Q4:2025, education remains a protective factor, though not an absolute shield. Those with matric and less than matric remain especially vulnerable, with unemployment rates of 33,7% and 37,6% respectively.



Shifting the Narrative Through Targeted Interventions

While the data presents a challenging picture, it reinforces the urgency of targeted interventions that connect young people to meaningful economic opportunities.

Just last year, **over 160 learners** graduated from the **National Business Initiative's (NBI) Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Initiative** across TVET colleges in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and the Western Cape. Their graduation demonstrated how targeted skills development, key partnerships and demand-led training can create tangible pathways into employment.

One of the graduates, Thembisile Zulu, completed the Handyperson training at Umfolozi TVET College in KwaZulu-Natal and, reflecting on her journey, shared:

*“The learning experience was great, particularly the hands-on training with the host employer. Now that I have the qualification, my wish is to open my own electrical company and help other students gain skills.”*

Thembisile's journey illustrates what becomes possible when structured training meets real workplace exposure.

Through initiatives like IRM, young people who might otherwise fall into the NEET category are instead building skills and entering workplaces with confidence.



Behind the headline figures of the QLFS are millions of young people navigating constrained opportunity, limited networks and systemic barriers to entry.

As we continue our work in aligning skills training to real labour market demand, the task before us is not simply to improve the statistics. It is to build systems that enable sustained participation, income security and dignity through work.