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Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X44, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa, ISibalo House, Koch Street, Salvokop, Pretoria, 0002
www.statssa.gov.za, info@statssa.gov.za, Tel +27 12 310 8911

MEDIA RELEASE

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Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) – Q2: 2026

The official unemployment rate was 33,6% in the second quarter of 2026

According to the QLFS Q2: 2026 results, there was an increase of 345 000 in the number of unemployed persons to 8,5 million, while there was a decrease of 16 000 in the number of employed persons to 16,7 million compared with Q1: 2026. This resulted in an increase of 329 000 (or 1,3%) in the labour force during the same period.

The above changes in employment and unemployment resulted in the official unemployment rate (Labour Underutilisation (LU1)) increasing by 0,9 of a percentage point from 32,7% in the first quarter of 2026 to 33,6% in the second quarter of 2026.

Discouraged job-seekers decreased by 227 000 to 3,7 million, other available job-seekers decreased by 49 000 to 861 000, and unavailable job-seekers decreased by 4 000 to 44 000, resulting in a net decrease of 280 000 to 4,6 million in the potential labour force (*i.e. persons who were available but not seeking or unavailable but seeking*). Those outside the labour force for other reasons increased by 72 000 to 12,5 million. Persons outside the labour force, which is the total of those in potential labour force and others outside the labour force, decreased by 208 000 to 17,1 million in the second quarter of 2026.

In addition to the unemployment rate (LU1), other indicators of labour underutilisation (LU) were measured. The combined rate of unemployment and time-related underemployment (LU2) increased by 0,7 of a percentage point to 36,6%; the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) increased by 0,1 of a percentage point to 43,8%. The composite measure of labour underutilisation (LU4) (which combines time-related underemployment, unemployment and potential labour force as a proportion of extended labour force) remained unchanged at 46,3% in the second quarter of 2026. These labour underutilisation measures highlight people in different situations with different degrees of attachment to the labour market.

The number of persons employed in the formal sector and household sector decreased by 41 000 and 9 000 respectively in Q2: 2026, and in the informal sector increased by 34 000 over the same period.

The increases in industry employment were mainly recorded in Trade (70 000), Construction (39 000) and Finance (11 000). The largest decreases in employment were recorded in Community and social service (57 000), Mining (26 000), Agriculture and Manufacturing (15 000 each).

Mpumalanga (41 000), Eastern Cape (13 000) and Free State (9 000) were provinces that observed the highest increases in employment. Decreases in employment were recorded in Western Cape (48 000), Gauteng (22 000) and North West (15 000).

The results for the second quarter of 2026 show that the total number of unemployed youth (15-34 years) increased by 264 000 to 5,0 million compared with quarter one of 2026, while employed youth recorded a decrease of 40 000 to 5,6 million. As a result, the youth unemployment rate increased by 1,5 percentage points to 47,4% in the second quarter of 2026.

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For technical enquiries, contact:

Ms Desiree Manamela
Chief Director: Labour Statistics
Tel.: 012 310 2145
Cell: 064 866 6559
Email: DesireeM@statssa.gov.za

Ms Dihlolo Phoshoko
Director: Quarterly Labour Force Survey
Tel.: 012 406 3030
Cell: 076 061 8485
Email: DihloloP@statssa.gov.za

For media enquiries, contact:

Ms Felicia Sithole
Cell: 076 430 0693
Email: FeliciaS@statssa.gov.za