

Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q1:2026

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Statistician-General



stats sa

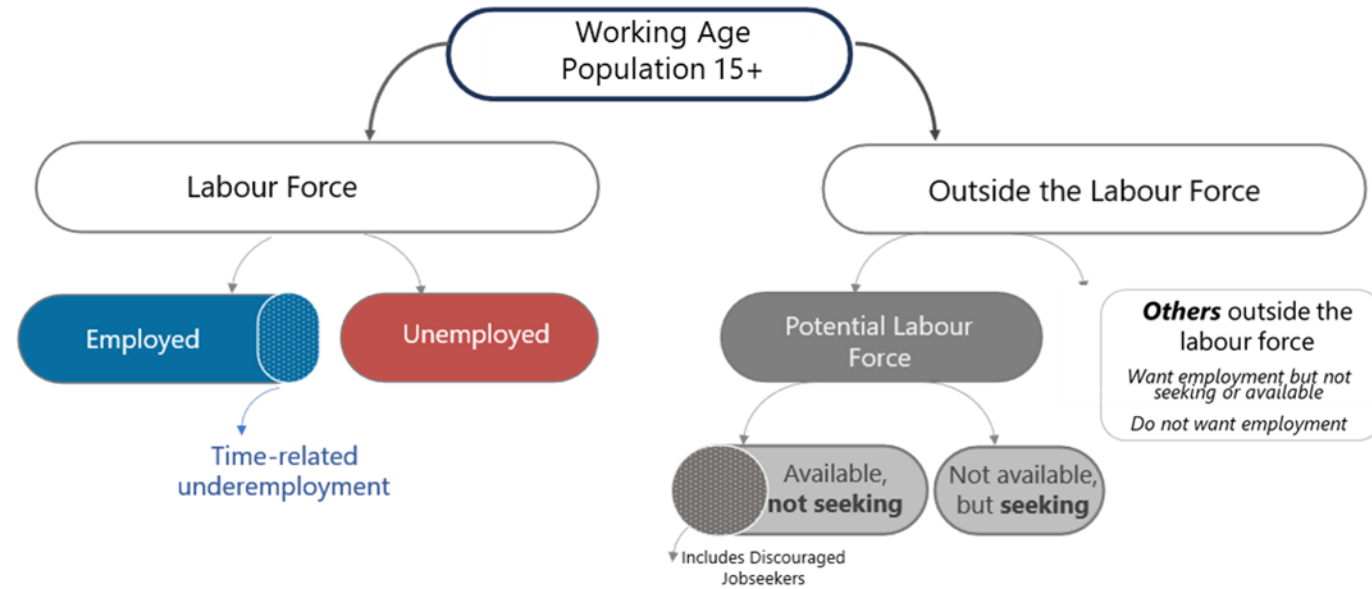
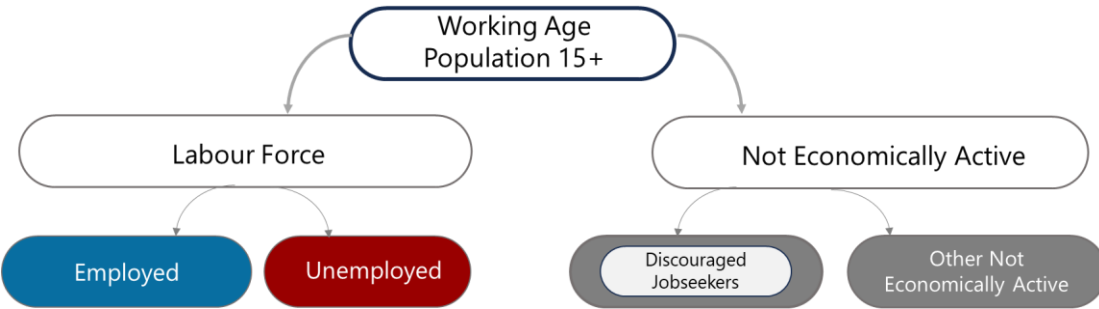
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Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



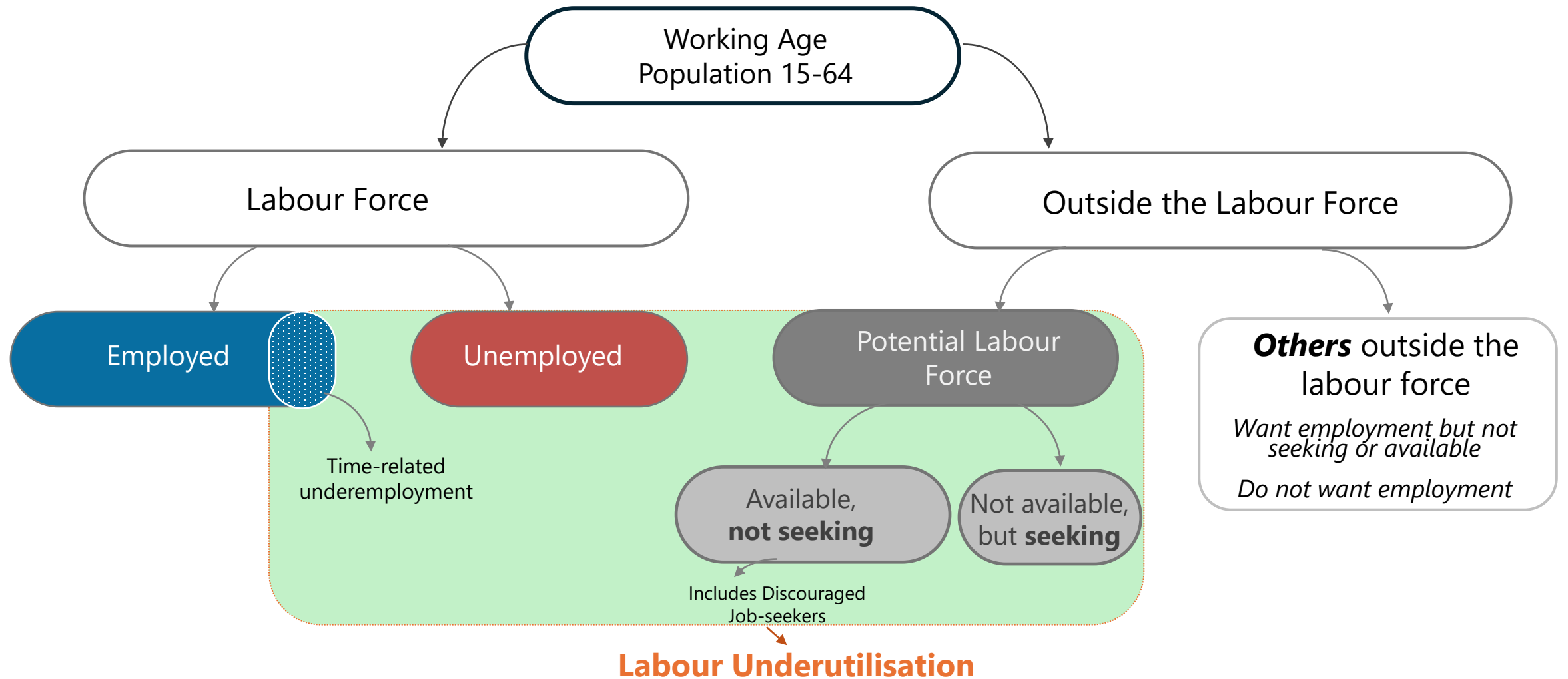
Stats SA adopting more recent ICLS resolutions for reporting

◀ Before

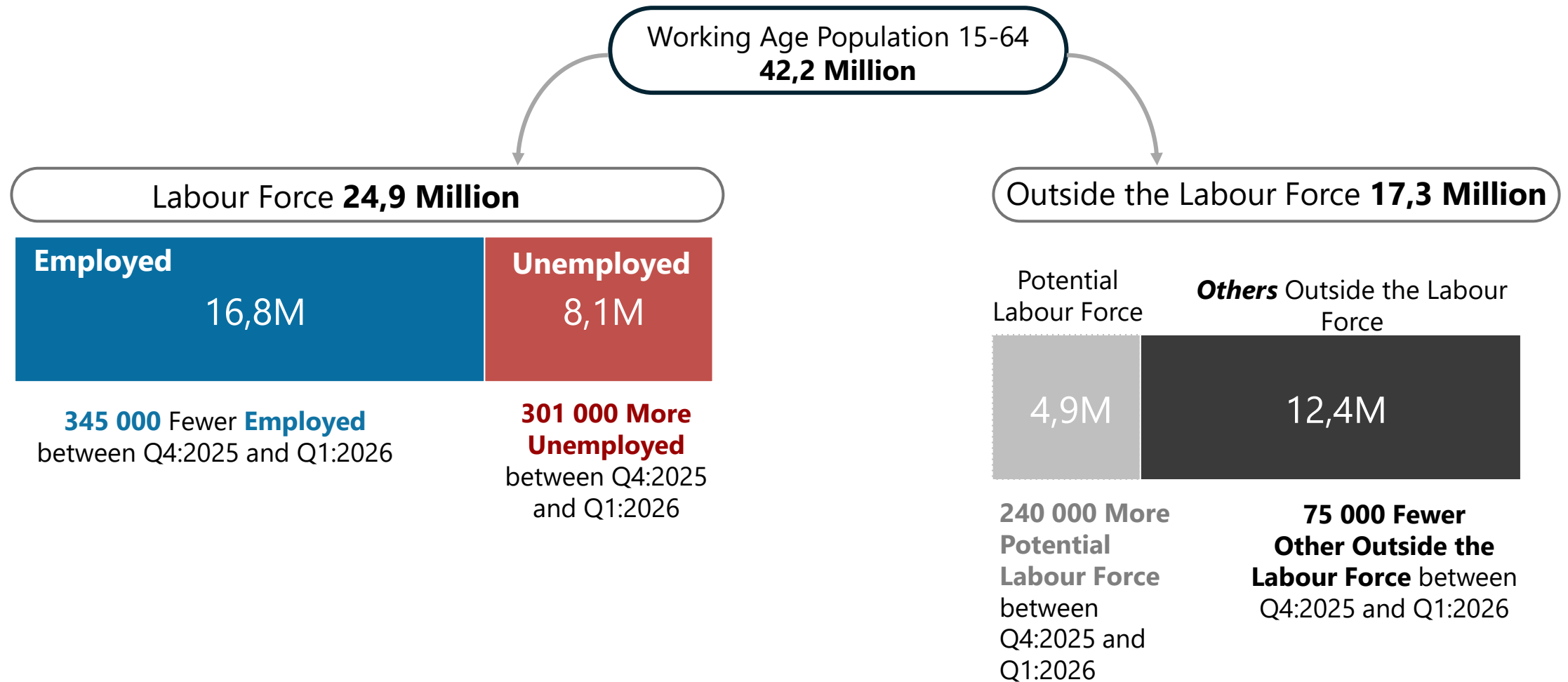
▶ Now



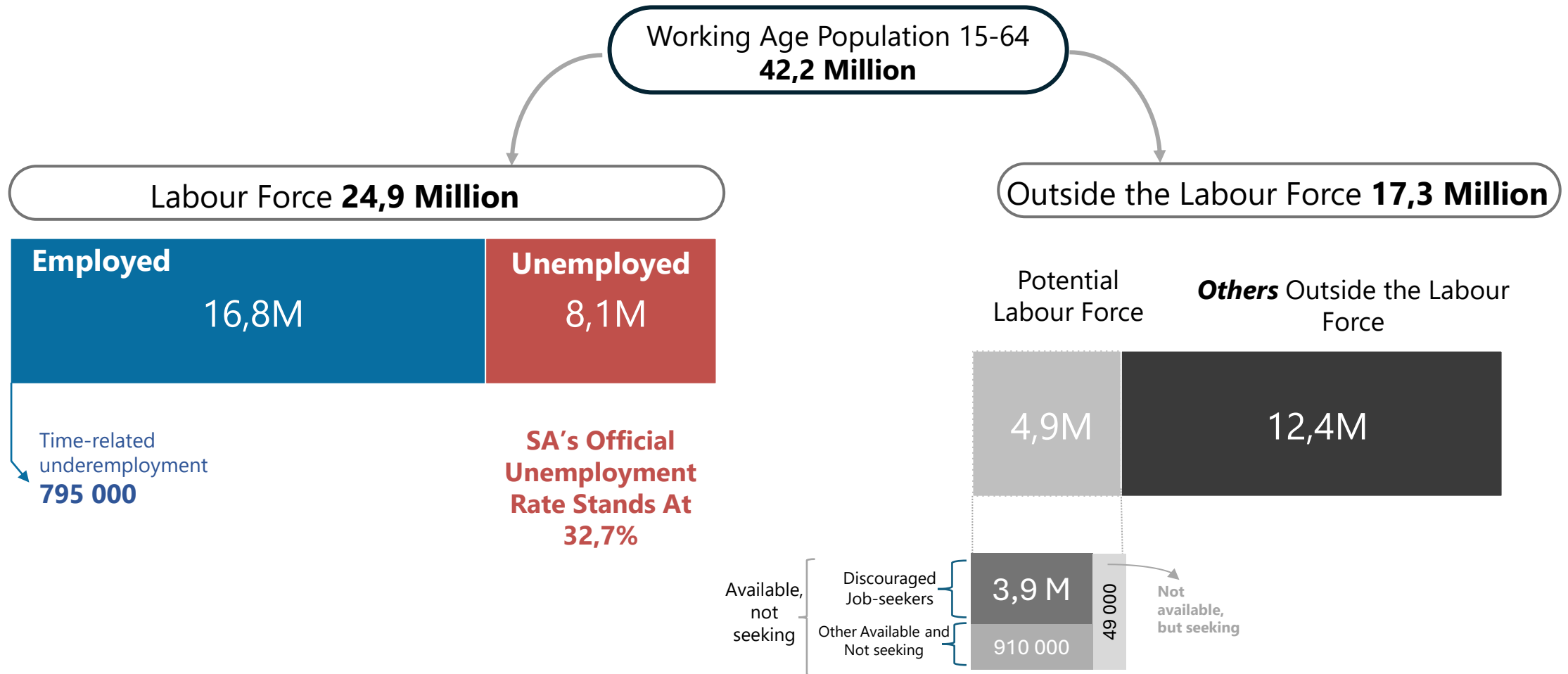
Labour Statistics now report on a greater variety of labour indicators



There were about **345 thousand fewer people employed** in Q1:2026 than in Q4:2025.



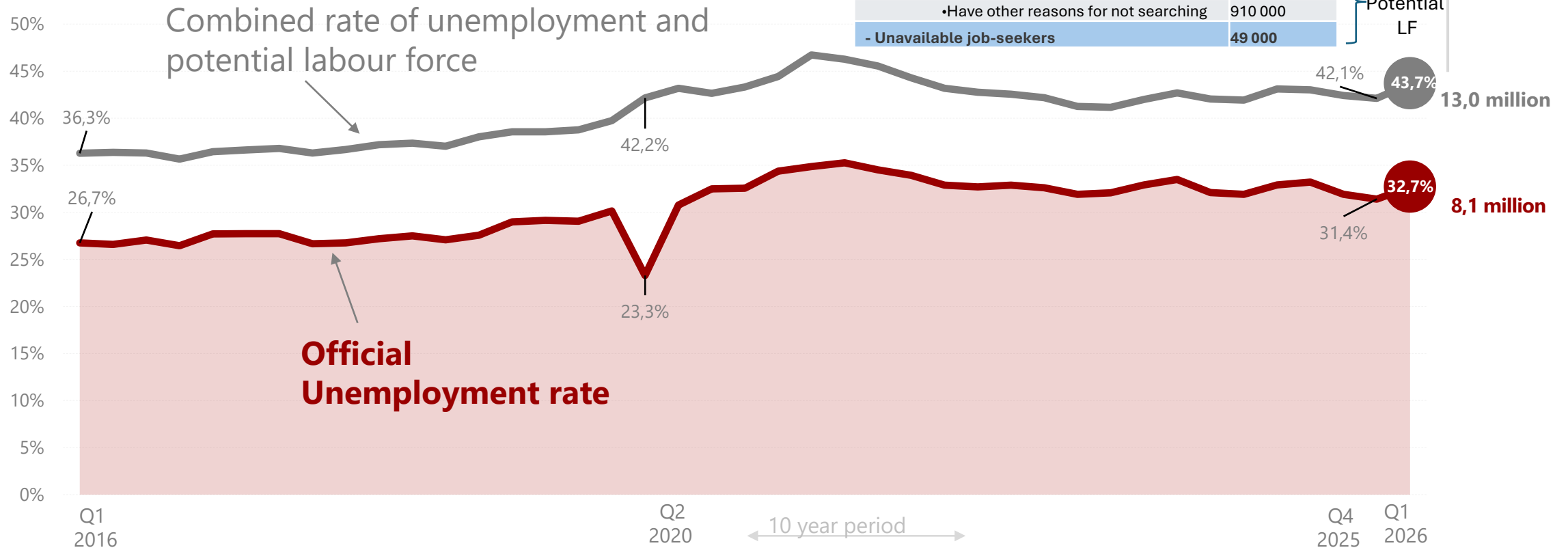
The official **unemployment rate increased** by 1,3 percentage points to **32,7%** in Q1:2026 compared to Q4:2025.



The combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) **increased by 1,6 percentage points** to **43,7%** in Q1:2026 compared to Q4:2025.

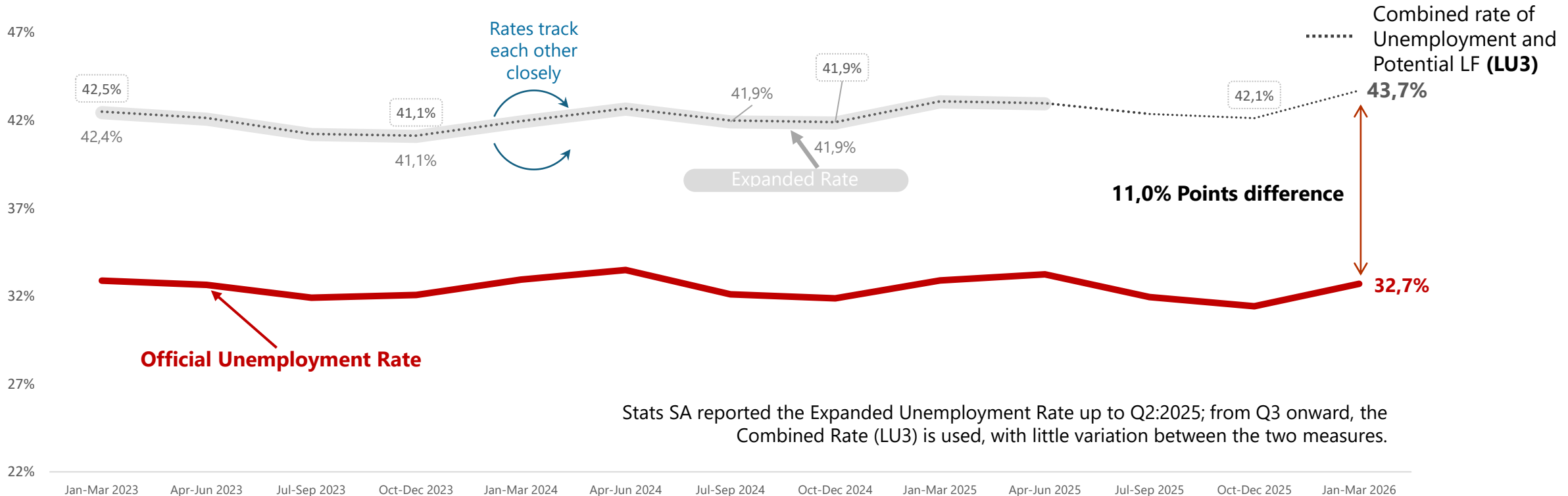
Official UR vs combined rate of unemployment and potential LF (LU3): Q1:2016-Q1:2026

Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force includes the following:	
- Official unemployment (searched and available)	8,1 M
- Available to work but are/or	
• Discouraged job-seekers	3,9 M
• Have other reasons for not searching	910 000
- Unavailable job-seekers	49 000



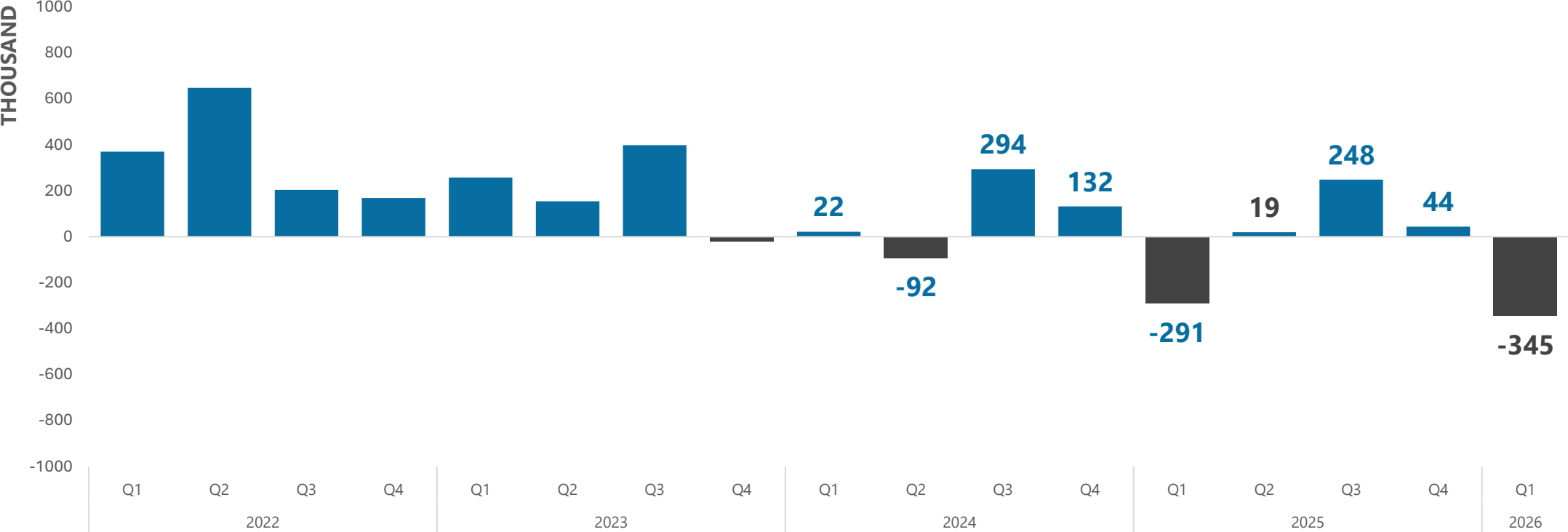
In Q1:2026, there was an **11,0 percentage points difference** between the official unemployment rate and the combined rate of unemployment and potential LF(LU3).

Official UR and Expanded UR vs Combined rate of Unemployment and Potential LF (LU3): Q1:2023-Q1:2026



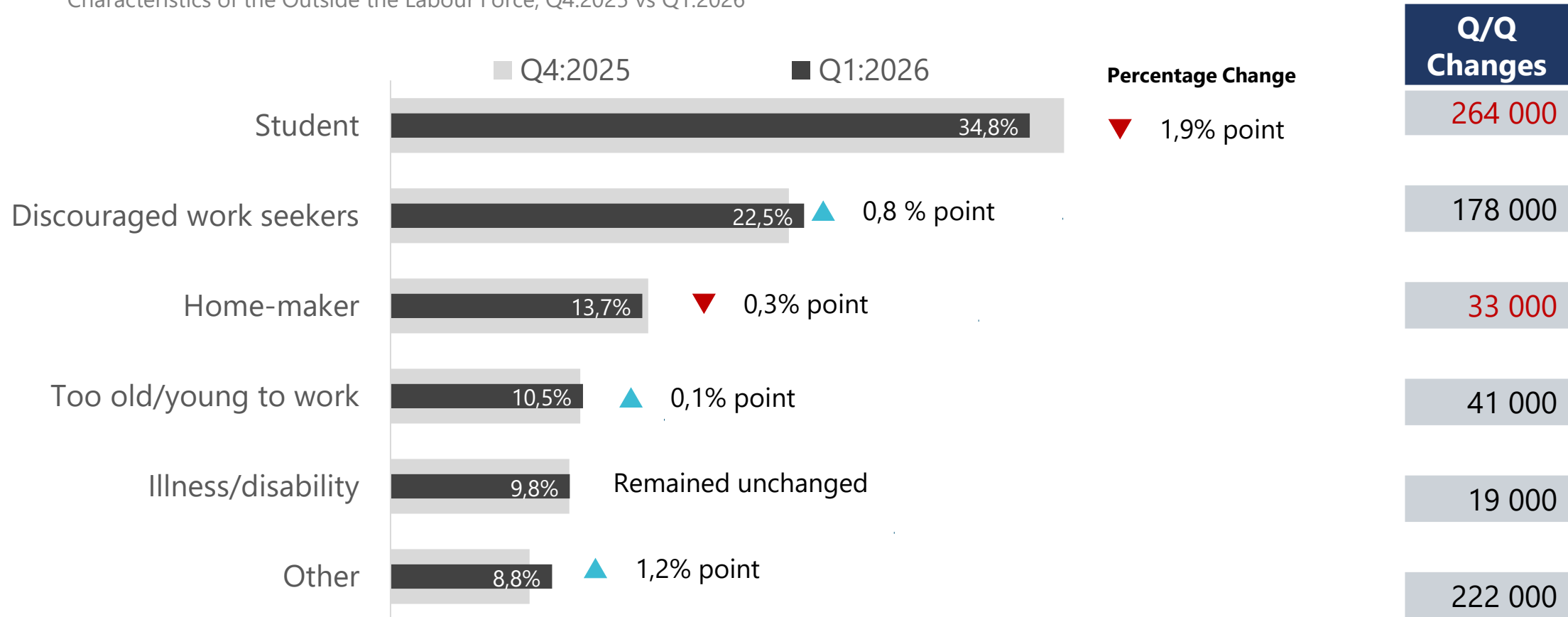
Employment decreased by 345 000 in the first quarter of 2026, following an increase of **44 000** in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Employment changes: Q1:2022-Q1:2026 (Quarter-on-quarter)



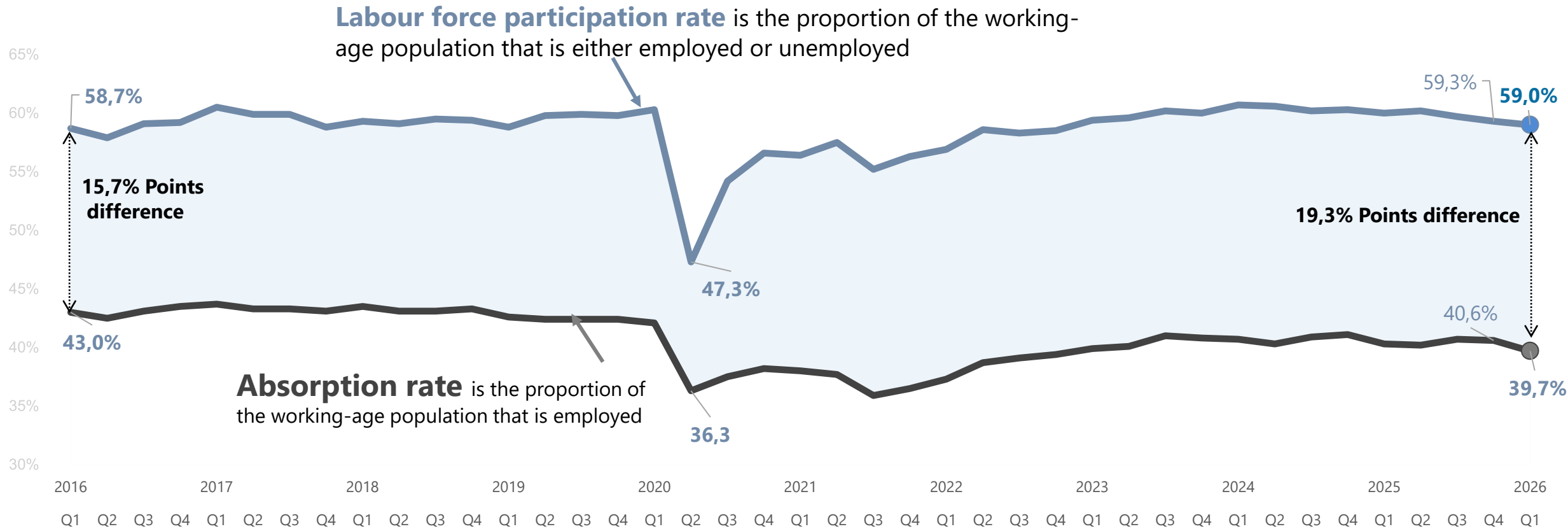
The number of persons **Outside the Labour Force increased by 164 000** in Q1:2026 compared to Q4:2025.

Characteristics of the Outside the Labour Force, Q4:2025 vs Q1:2026

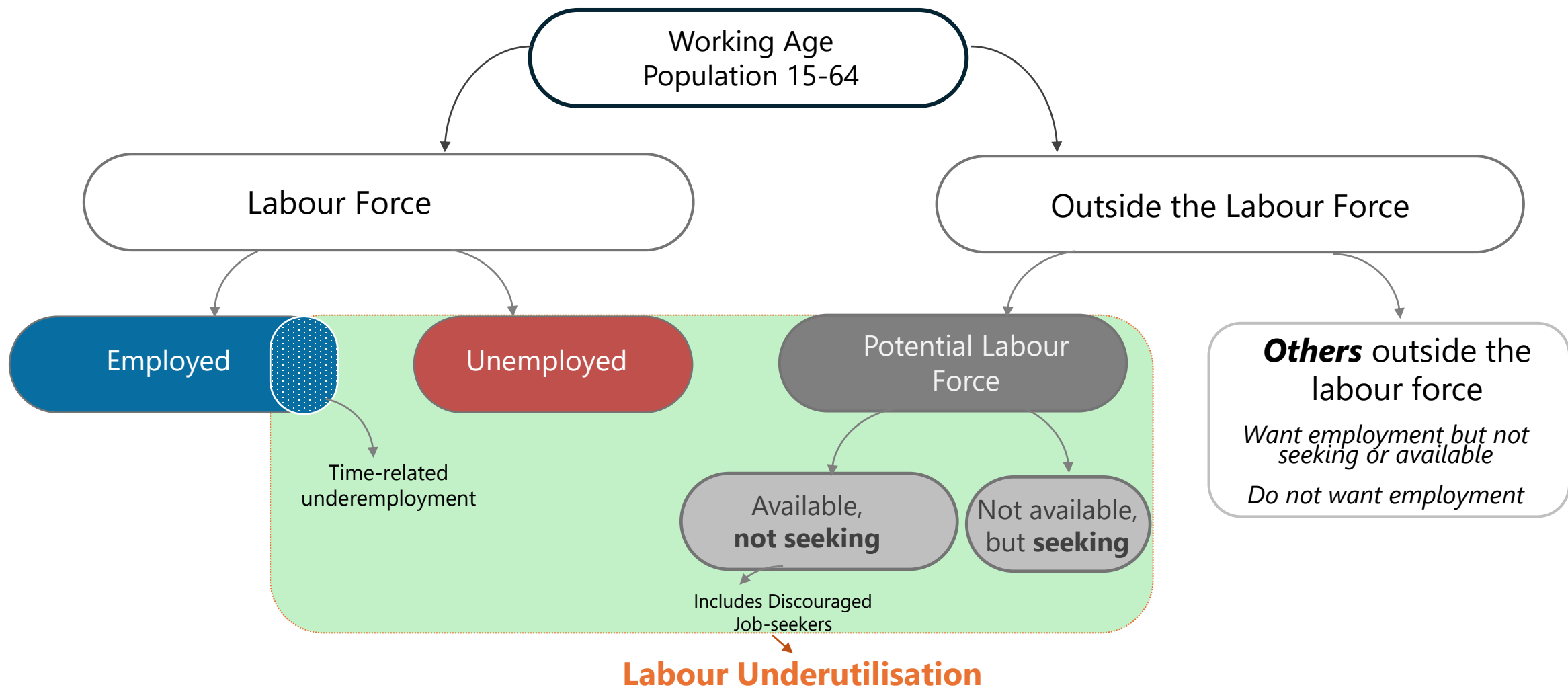


The **labour force participation rate** and **Absorption rate** decreased by 0,3 and 0,9 of a percentage point to 59,0% and 39,7% in Q1:2026 respectively, compared to Q4:2025.

Labour force participation and absorption rates Q1:2016-Q1:2026



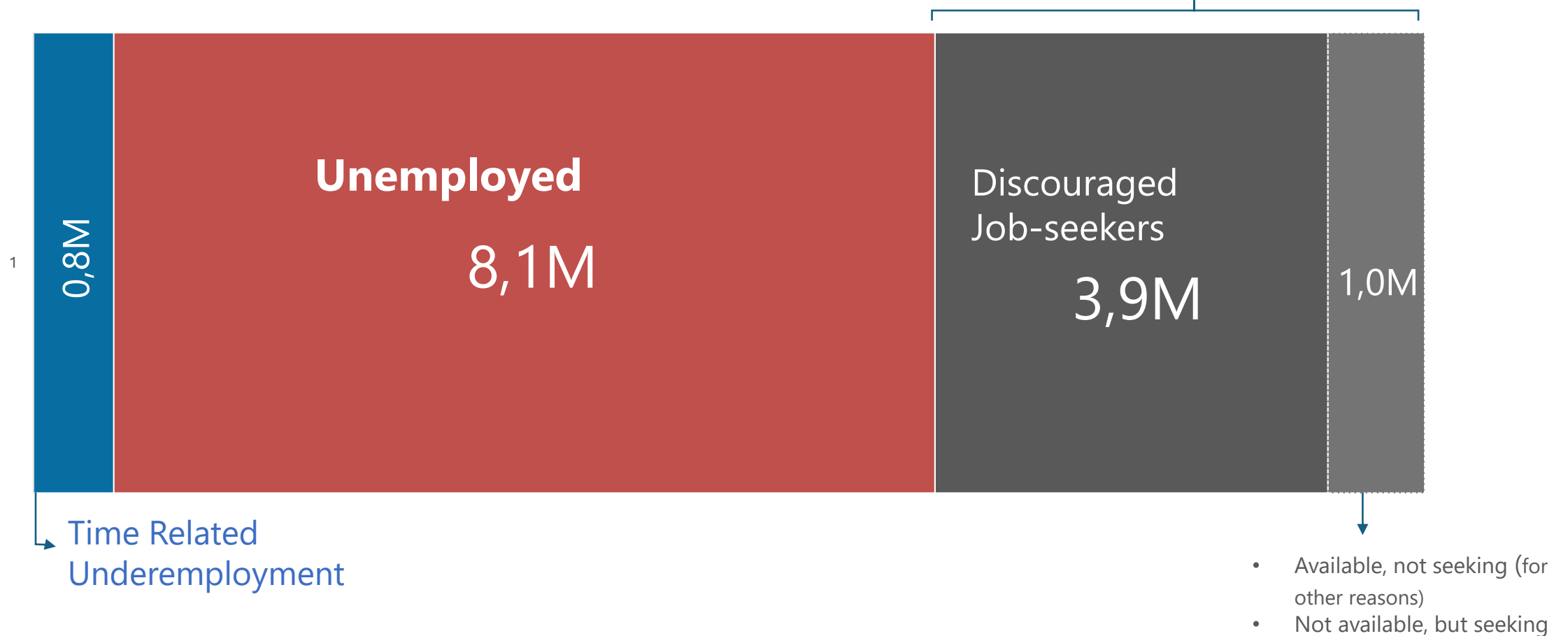
In addition to Unemployment, the 19th ICLS resolution introduces other measures of Labour Underutilisation



The **Discouraged job-seekers** dominate the **Potential Labour force**, accounting for 80,2% of the potential labour force in Q1:2026.

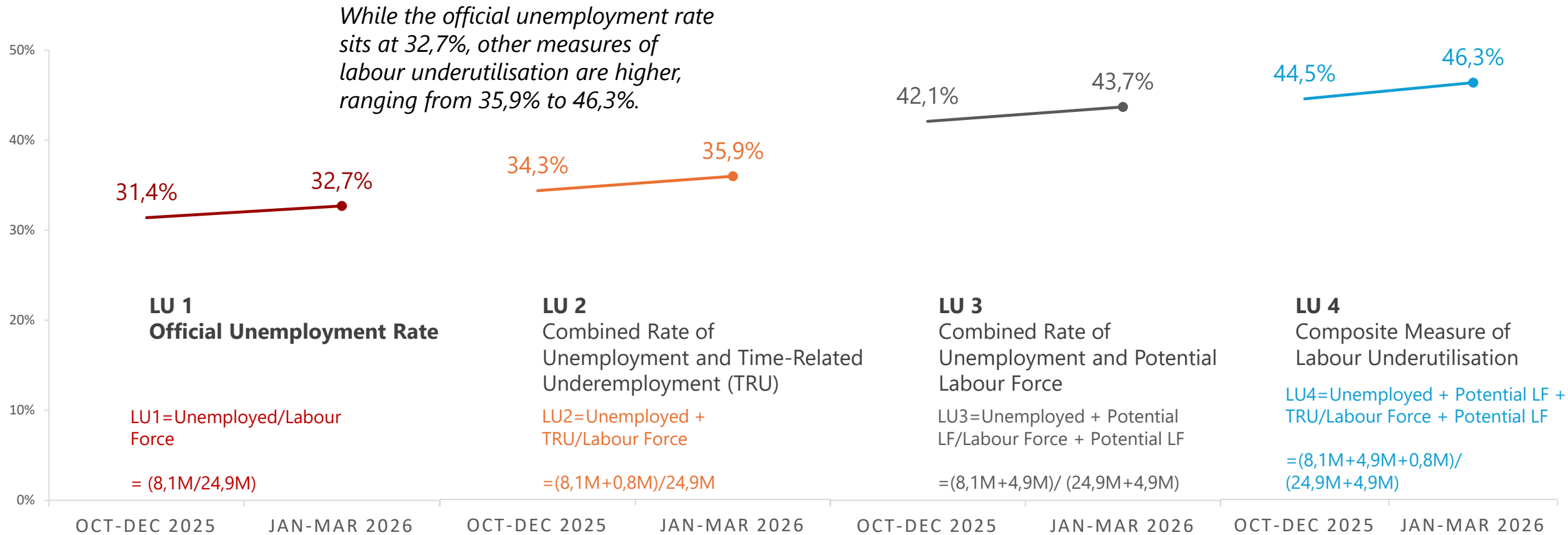
Labour underutilisation indicators (Q1:2026)

Potential Labour Force



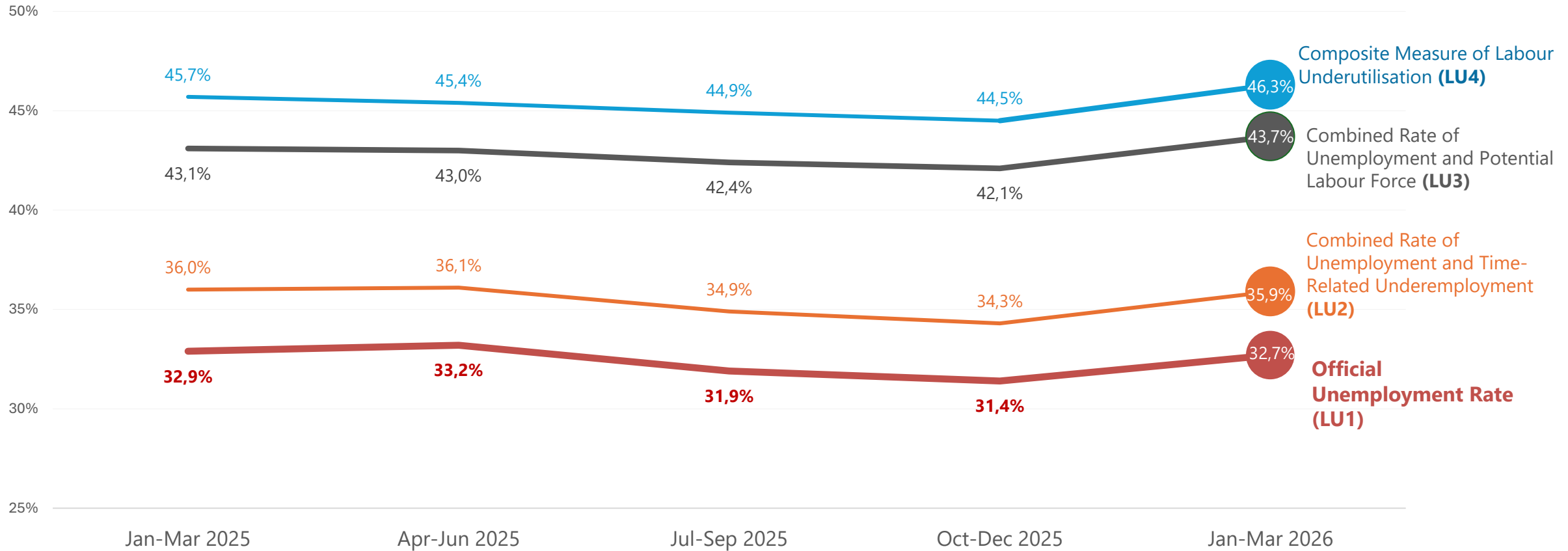
Labour underutilisation reflects the total number of people in the labour force who are not being fully utilised, as well as some who are outside of the labour force who can be considered 'potential labour supply'.

Labour underutilisation indicators (Q4:2025 vs Q1:2026)



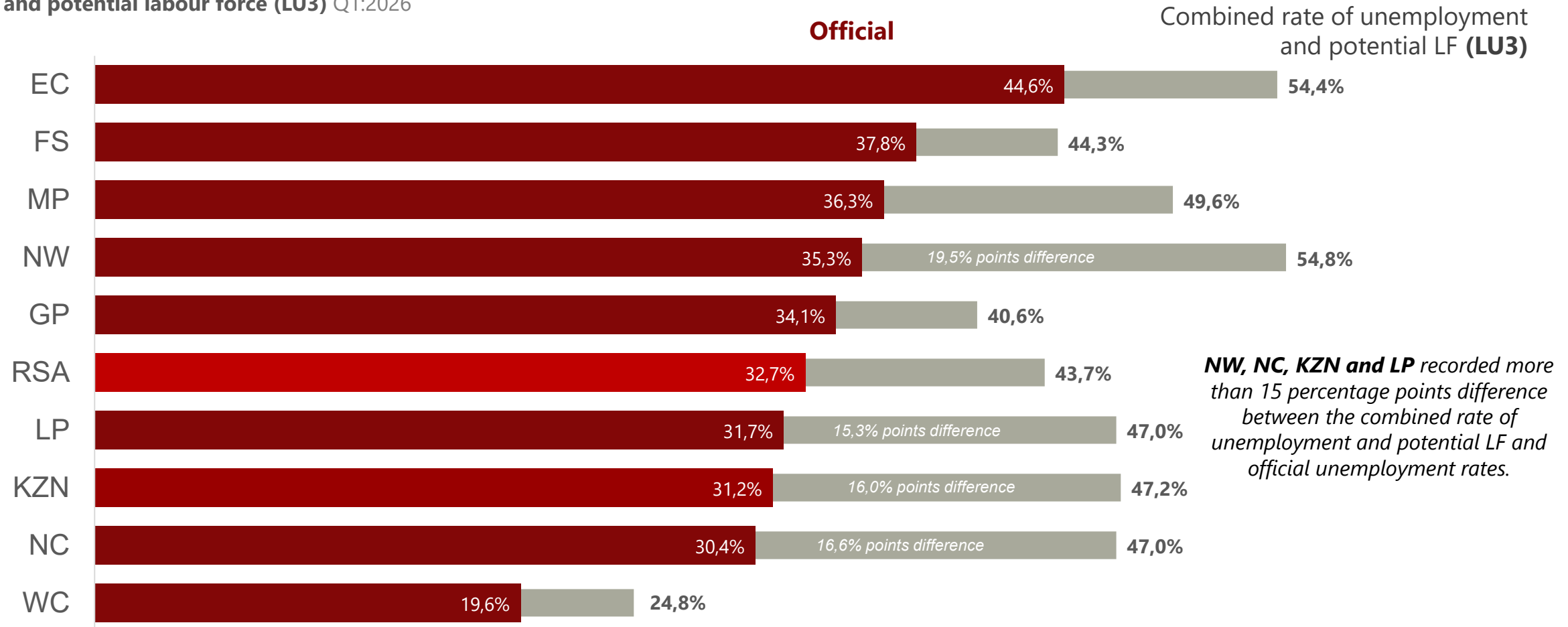
The labour underutilisation rate (i.e. composite measure of labour underutilisation (LU4)) stood at **46,3%** in the first quarter of 2026 compared to 45,7% in the same quarter of 2025.

There is a considerable gap (11,0 percentage points) between LU1 and LU3 indicating that there is a sizeable proportion of people who are not employed, want to work but not taking enough steps to look for work or are not available for work.



NW (54,8%) recorded the **highest combined rate of unemployment and potential LF** in Q1:2026, followed by **EC** (54,4%).

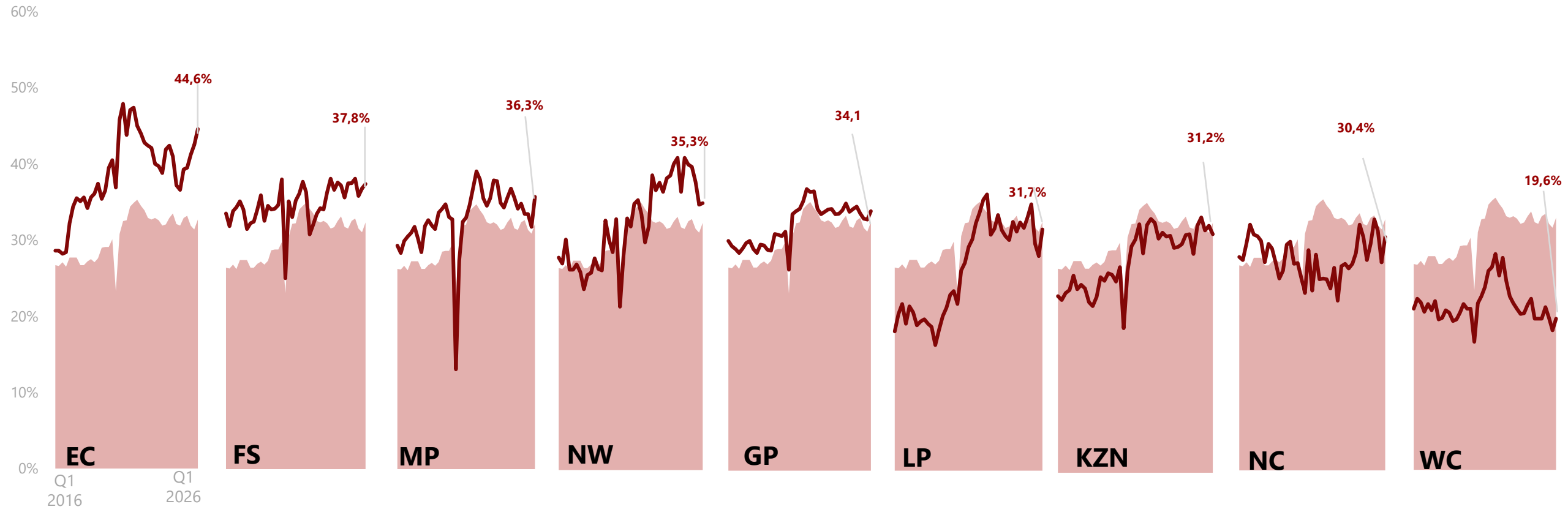
Provincial unemployment rates: **Official Unemployment rate** vs **Combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3)** Q1:2026



Over the past ten years, the unemployment rate in the **WC** has consistently remained below South Africa's national average, while the **EC** has consistently recorded unemployment rates above the national level.

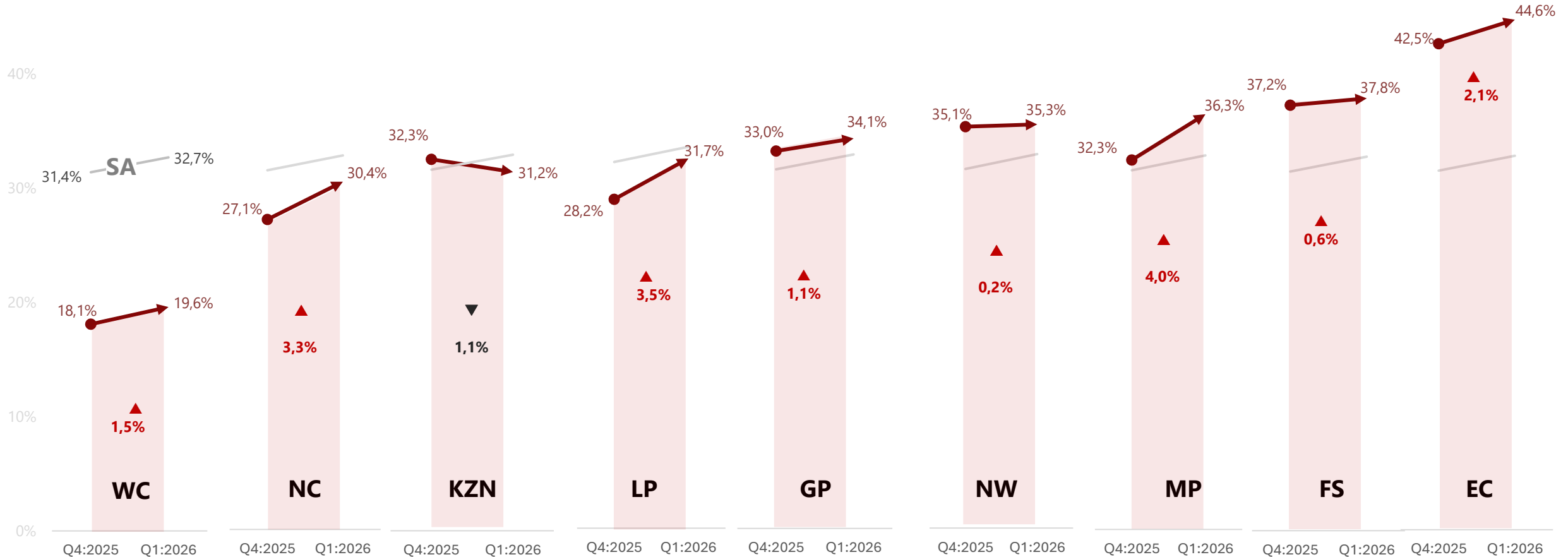
Official Unemployment rate by province, Q1:2016-Q1:2026

SA Unemployment Rate
Provincial Unemployment Rate



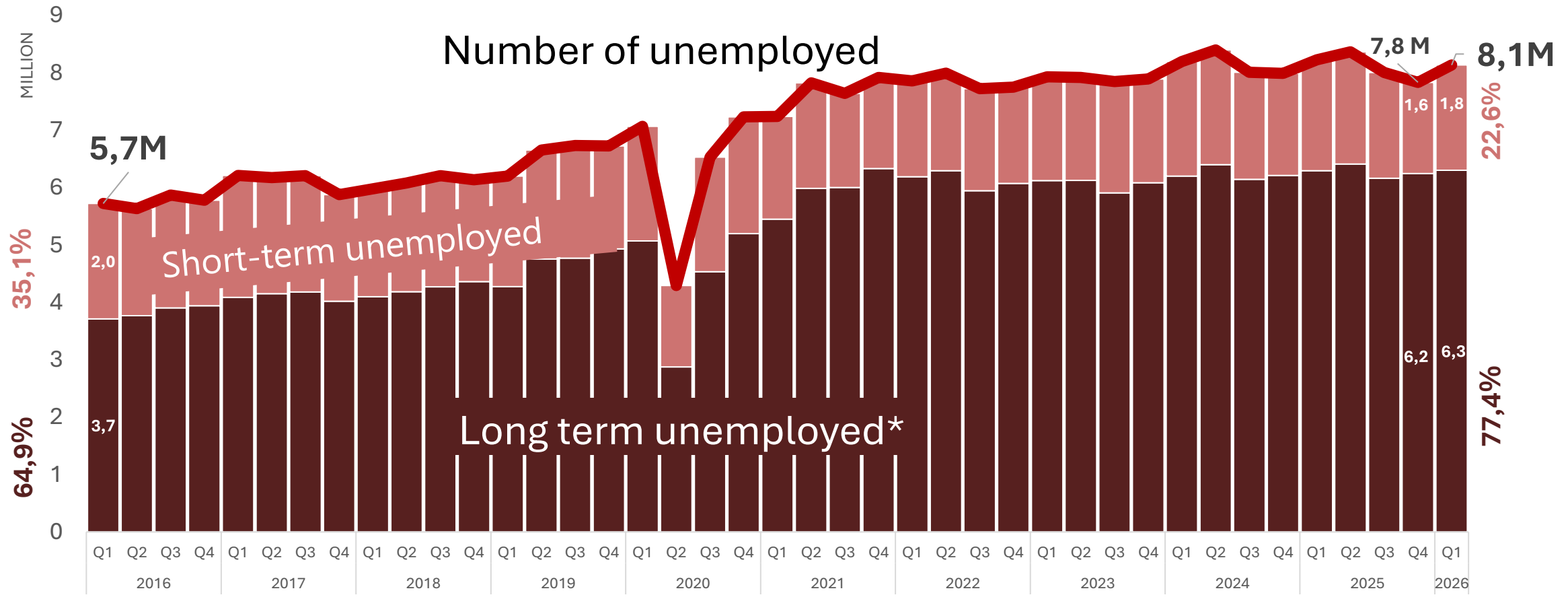
The **official unemployment rate** increased in all the provinces except for KZN between Q4:2025 and Q1:2026, with *the largest increases recorded in MP, LP, NC and EC.*

Official unemployment rate by province: Q4:2025-Q1:2026



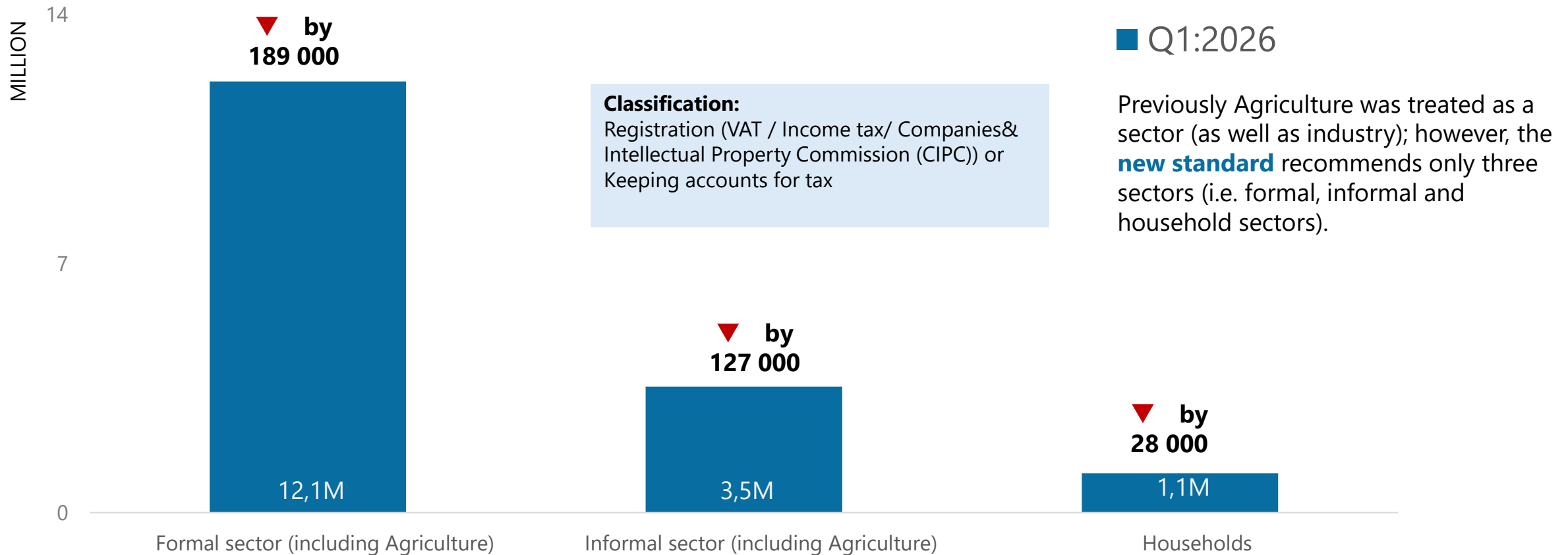
From Q1:2016 to Q1:2026, the **number of unemployed persons** in South Africa **increased from 5,7 million to 8,1 million**, while the proportion of those in long-term unemployment increased from 64,9% to 77,4% over the same period.

*Long term unemployment–unemployed for a year or longer



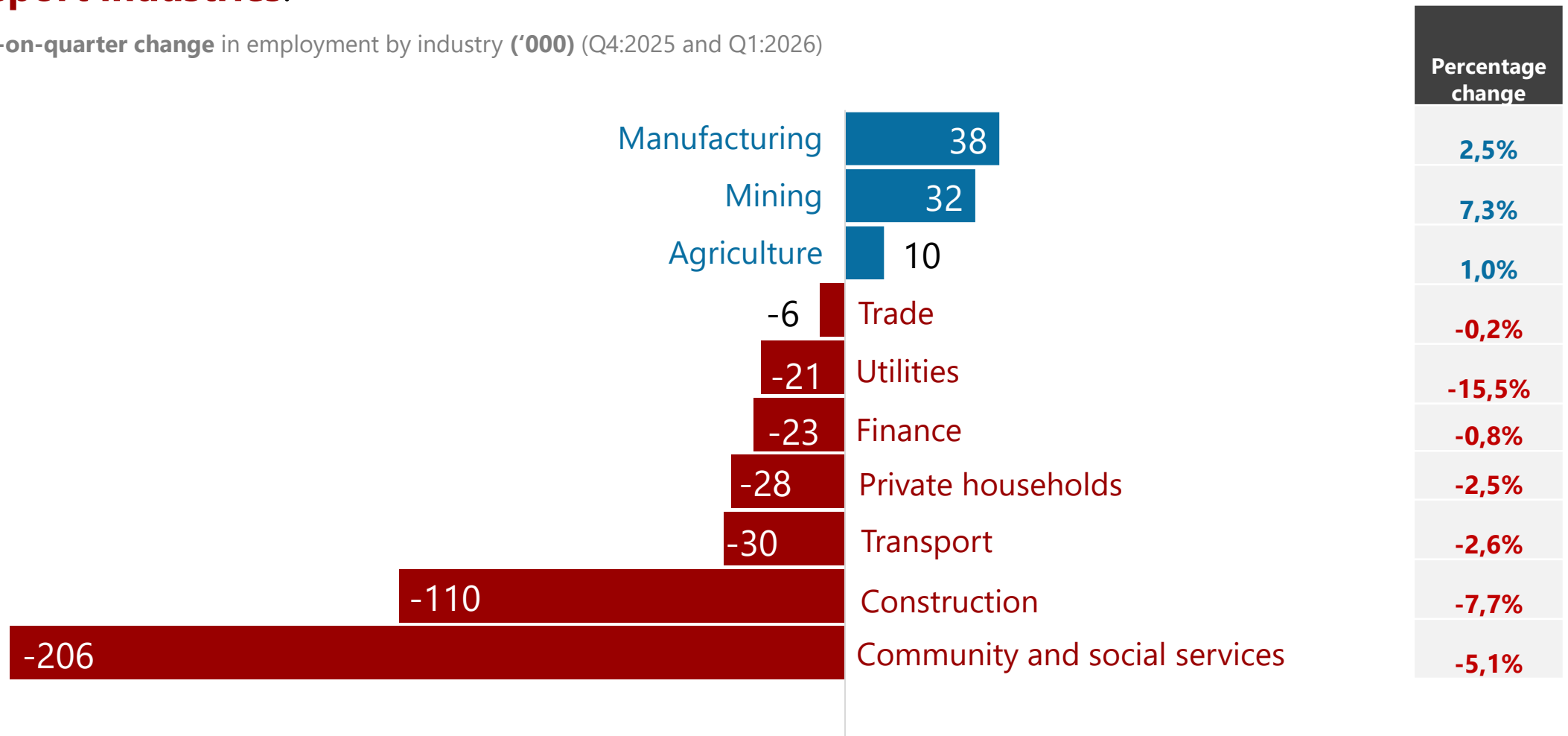
Employment decreased across all sectors in the first quarter of 2026 with the formal sector recording the largest decrease of 189 000 jobs.

Employment by sector, (Quarter-on-quarter), *(New standard)*



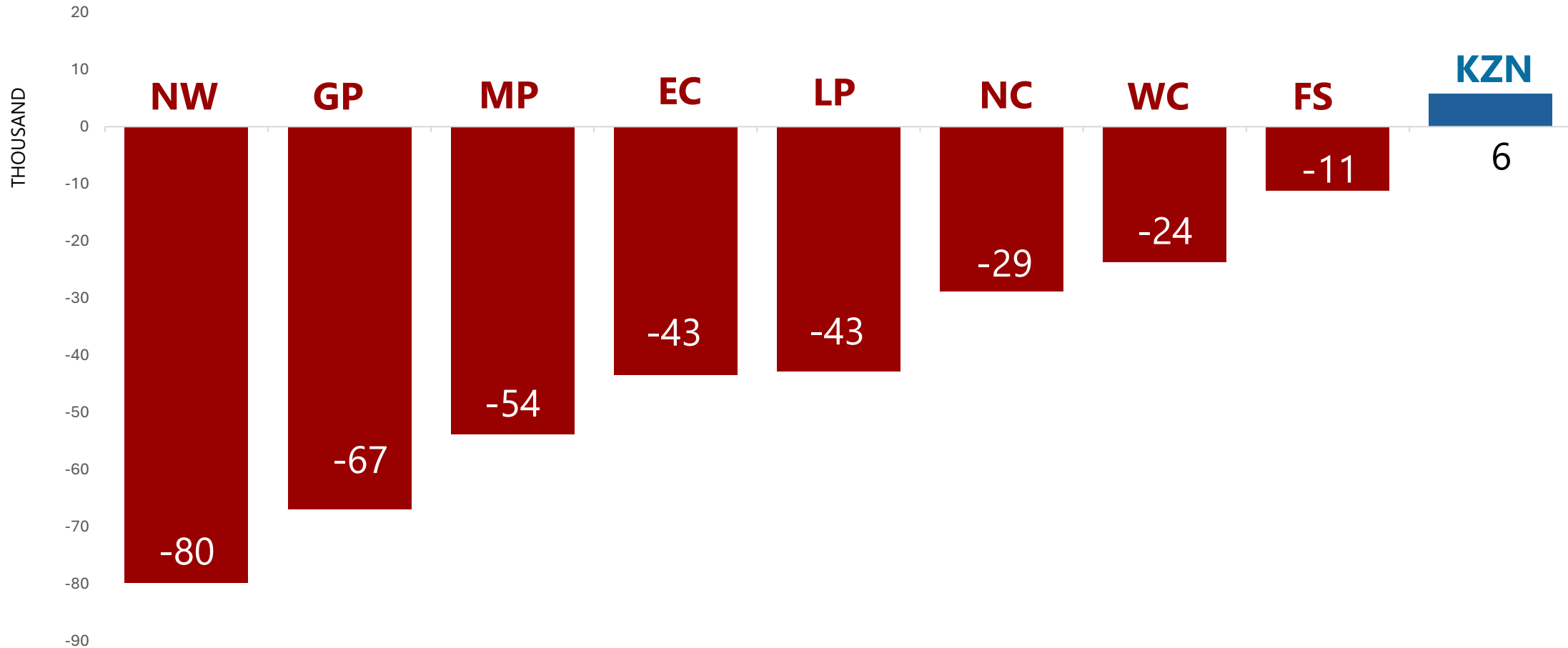
Employment increased in the **Manufacturing, Mining** and **Agriculture industries**. However, the largest **decreases** were recorded in the **Community and social services, Construction** and **Transport industries**.

Quarter-on-quarter change in employment by industry ('000) (Q4:2025 and Q1:2026)



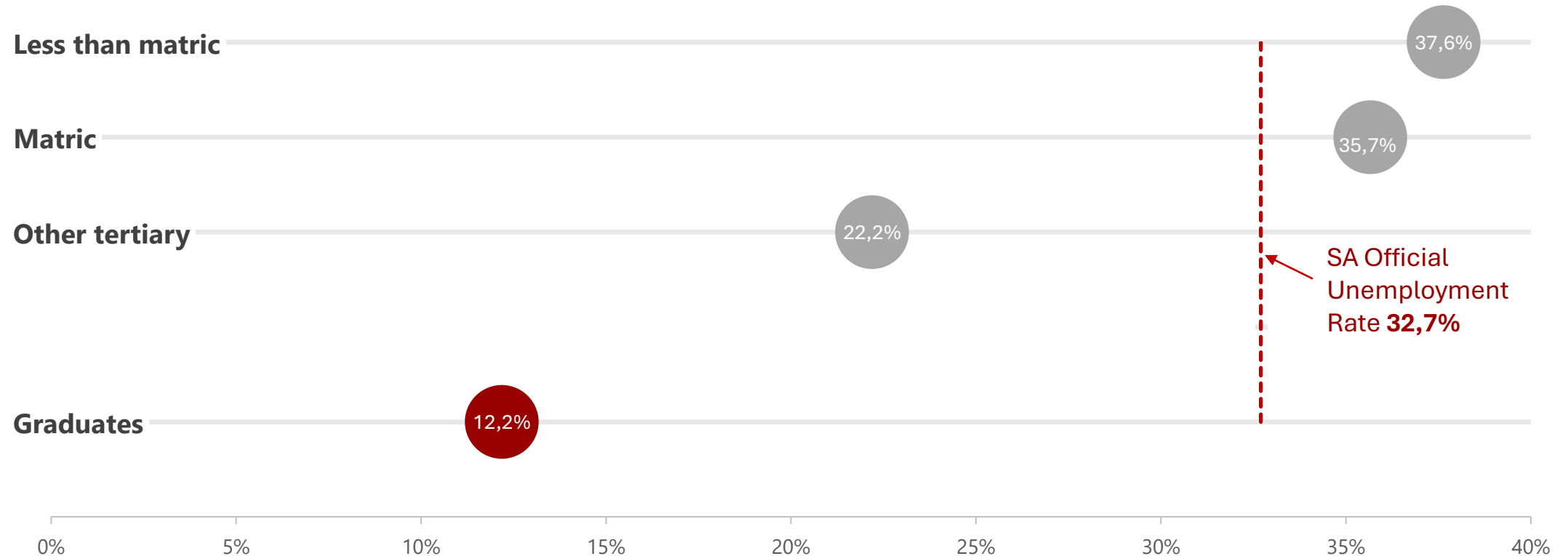
NW, GP and **MP** recorded the largest decreases in employment in Q1:2026, while **KZN** was the only province to record an increase in employment.

Quarter-on-quarter change in employment by province (Q4:2025 and Q1:2026)



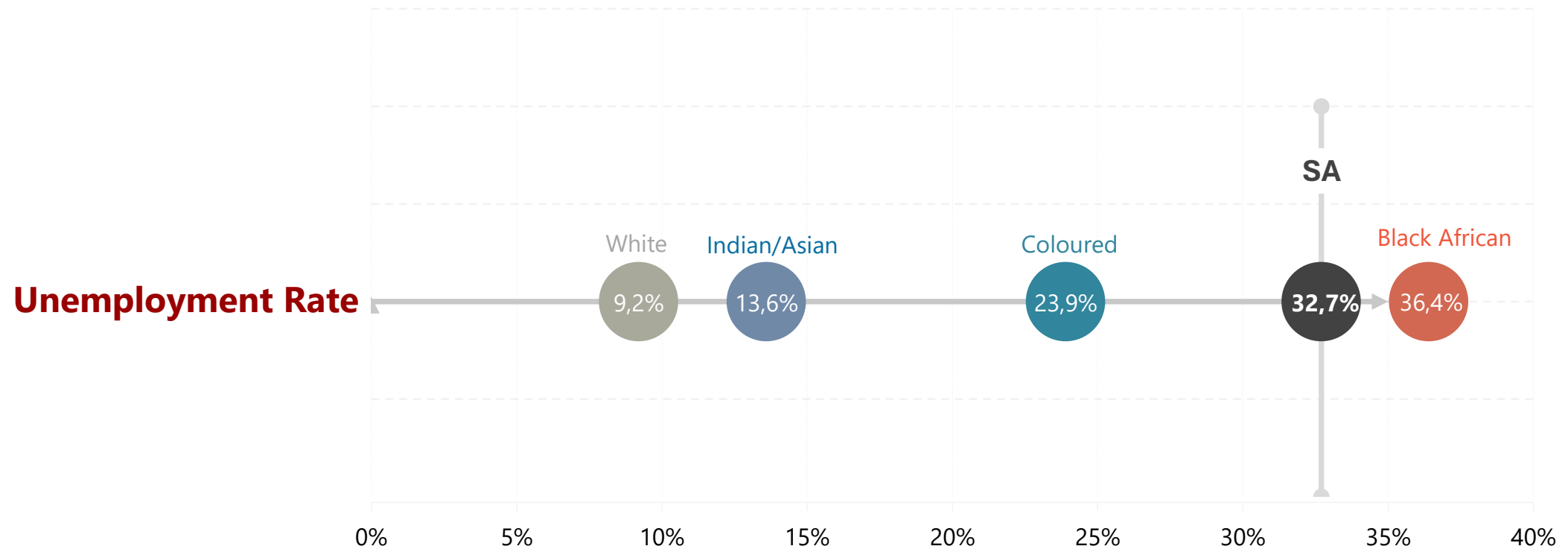
The Graduate unemployment rate increased by 1,8 percentage points from 10,3% in Q4:2025 to **12,2%** in Q1:2026. Those with **matric** and **less than matric** remain vulnerable with unemployment rates of 35,7% and 37,6%, respectively.

Official Unemployment rate by level of education, Q1:2026



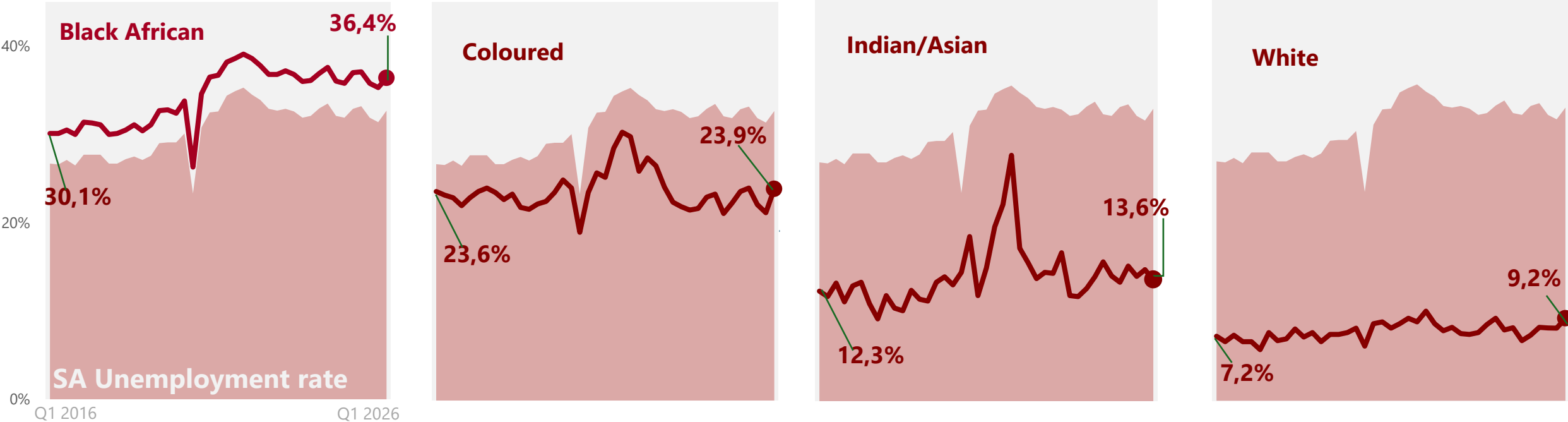
The unemployment rate among the **Black African (36,4%)** population group remains higher than the national average and other population groups.

OFFICIAL unemployment rate by population group, Q1:2026



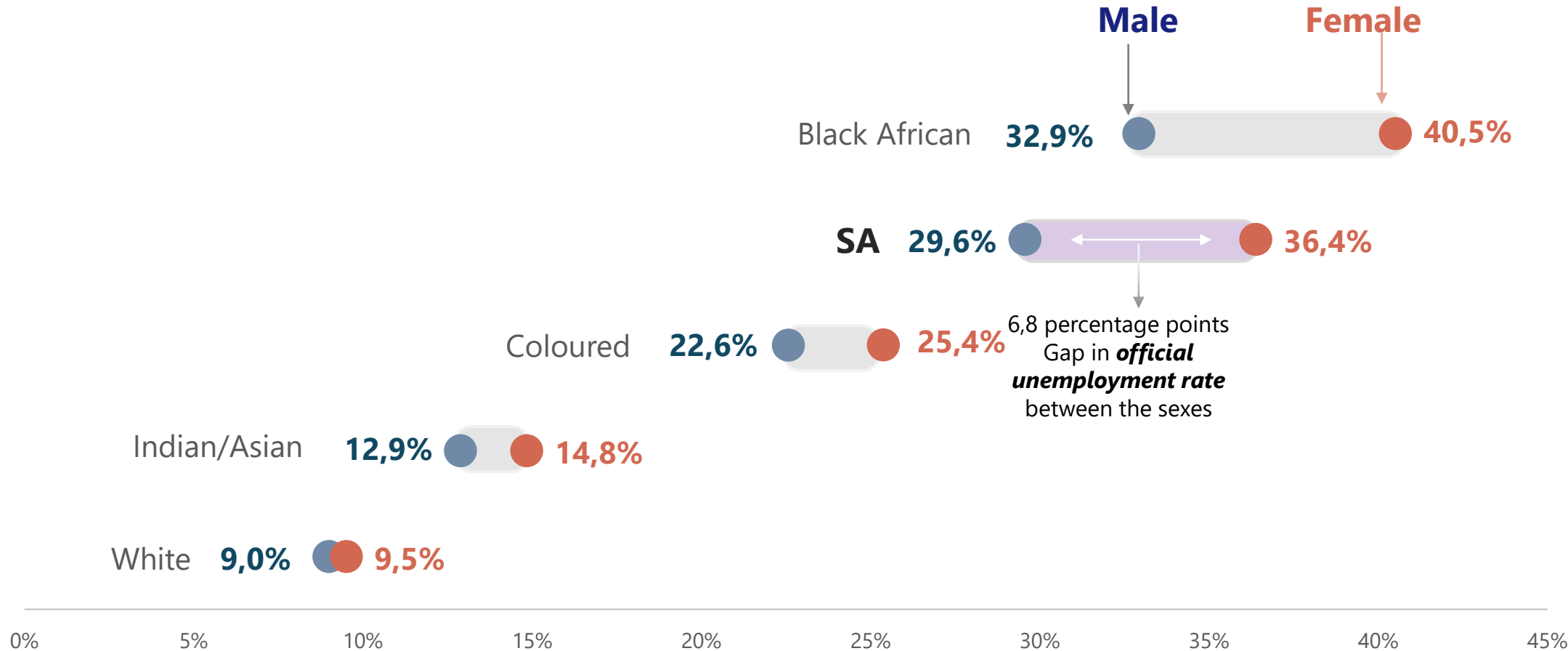
Black African unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the national average and other population groups over the past 10-year period.

Official Unemployment rates by population group, Q1:2016-Q1:2026



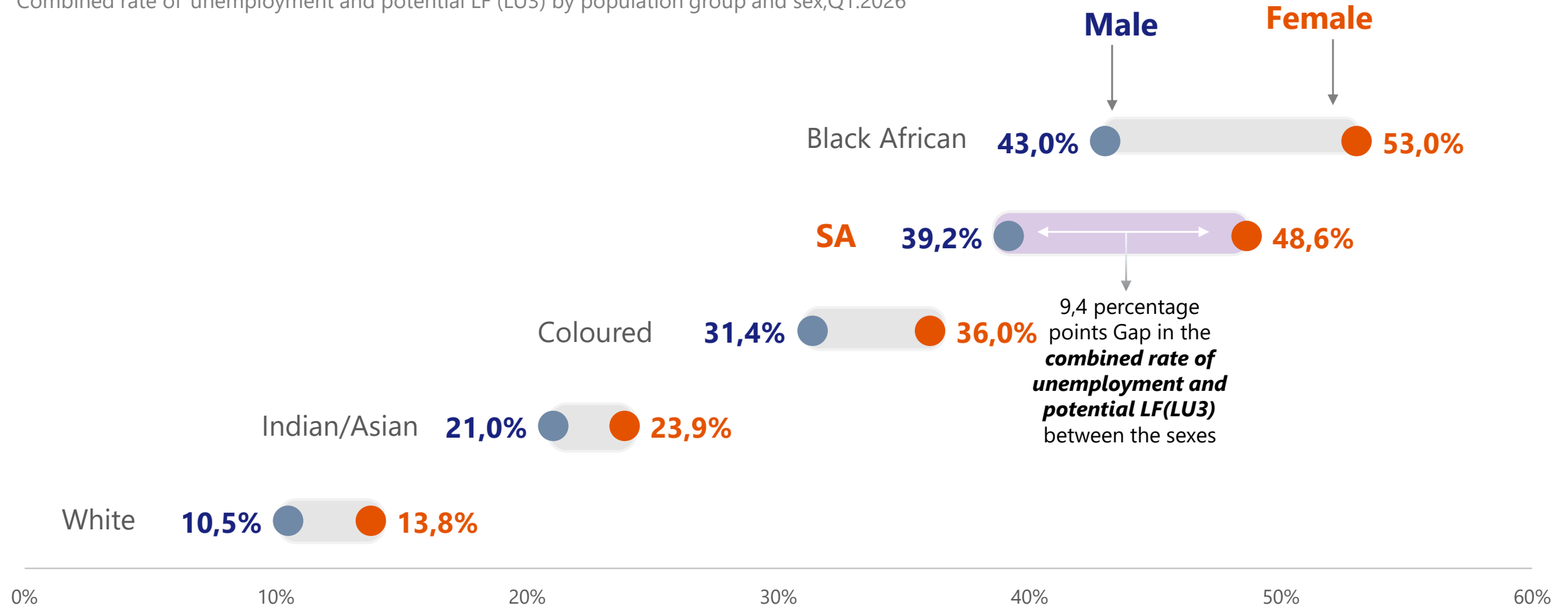
Black African women continue to be the most vulnerable with an unemployment rate of **40,5%** in Q1:2026. This is 4,1 percentage points higher than the national average for women at 36,4%.

Official unemployment rate by population group and sex, Q1:2026



Using the combined rate of unemployment and potential labour force (LU3) definition, **Gender disparity** persists throughout all population groups.

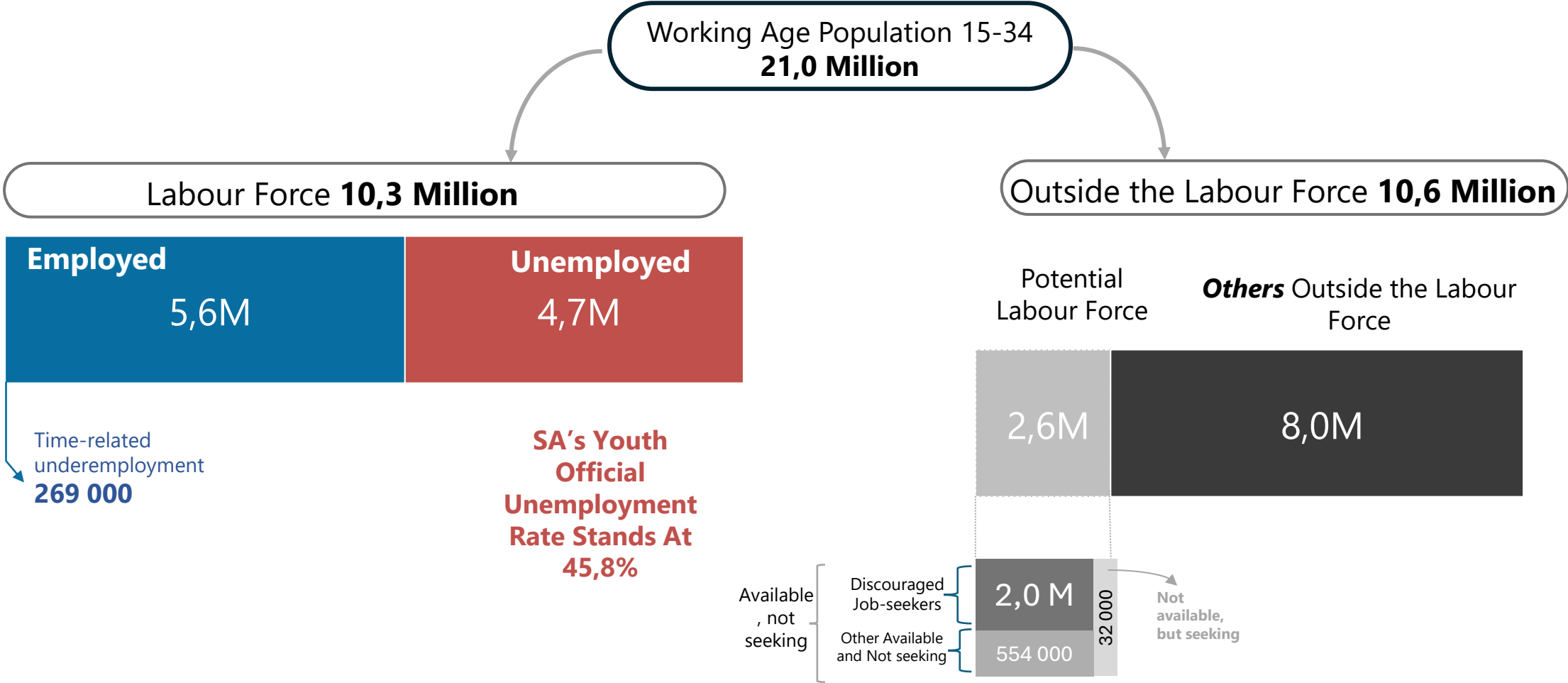
Combined rate of unemployment and potential LF (LU3) by population group and sex, Q1:2026



Understanding Labour market outcomes among youth



The **official unemployment rate** among South Africa's **youth** (aged 15-34) stands at **45,8%** in **Q1:2026**.



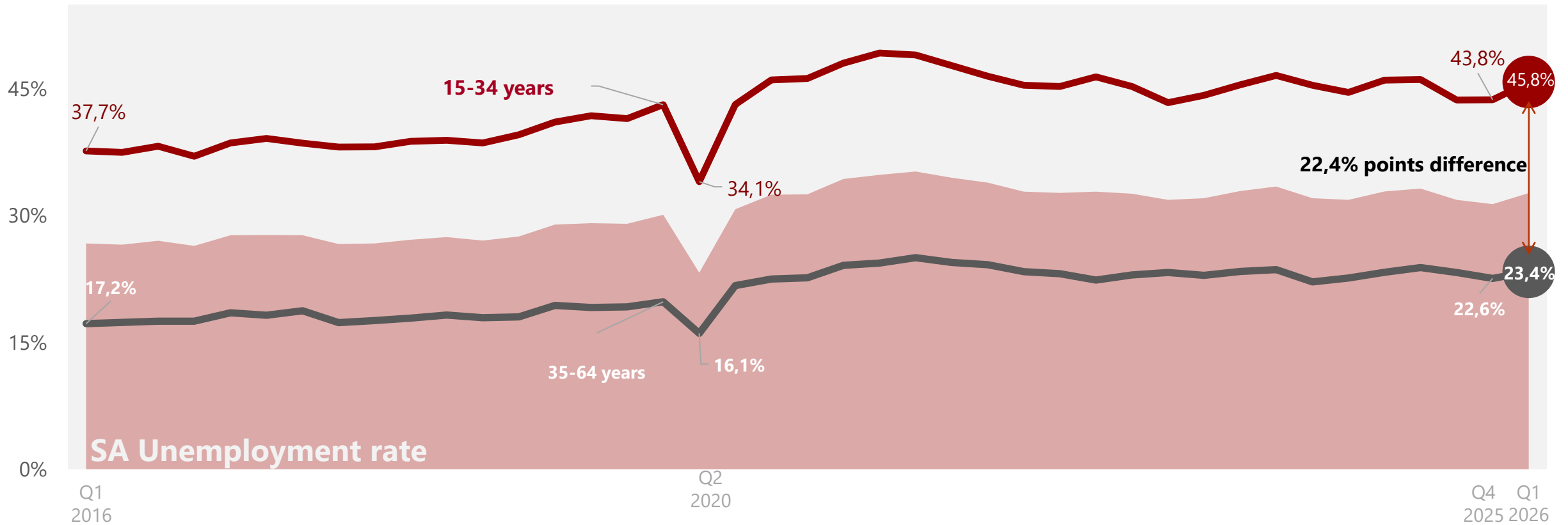
2,0 million out of 3,9 million discouraged job-seekers, were young people aged 15-34 years in Q1: 2026

Discouraged job-seekers by age-group, Q1:2026



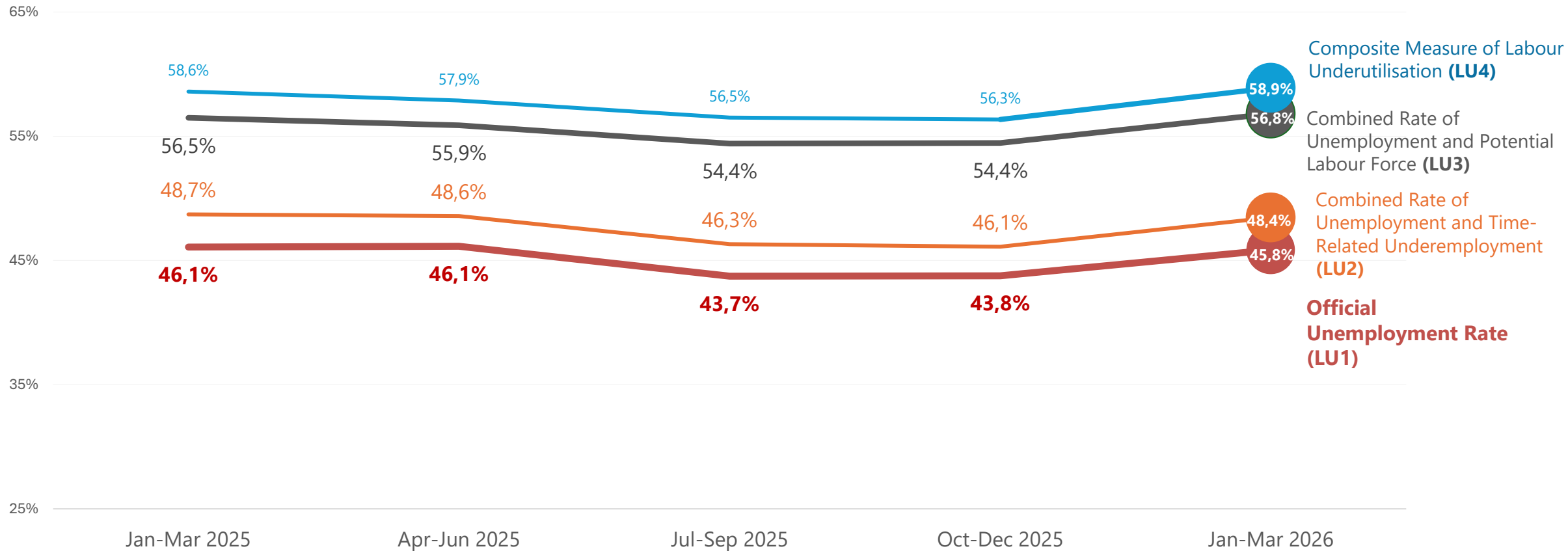
Youth aged **15-34 years** are more vulnerable to unemployment than older age groups, with their unemployment rate increasing by **8,1 percentage points** between Q1:2016 and Q1:2026.

Official Unemployment rates by age group, **Q1:2016-Q1:2026**

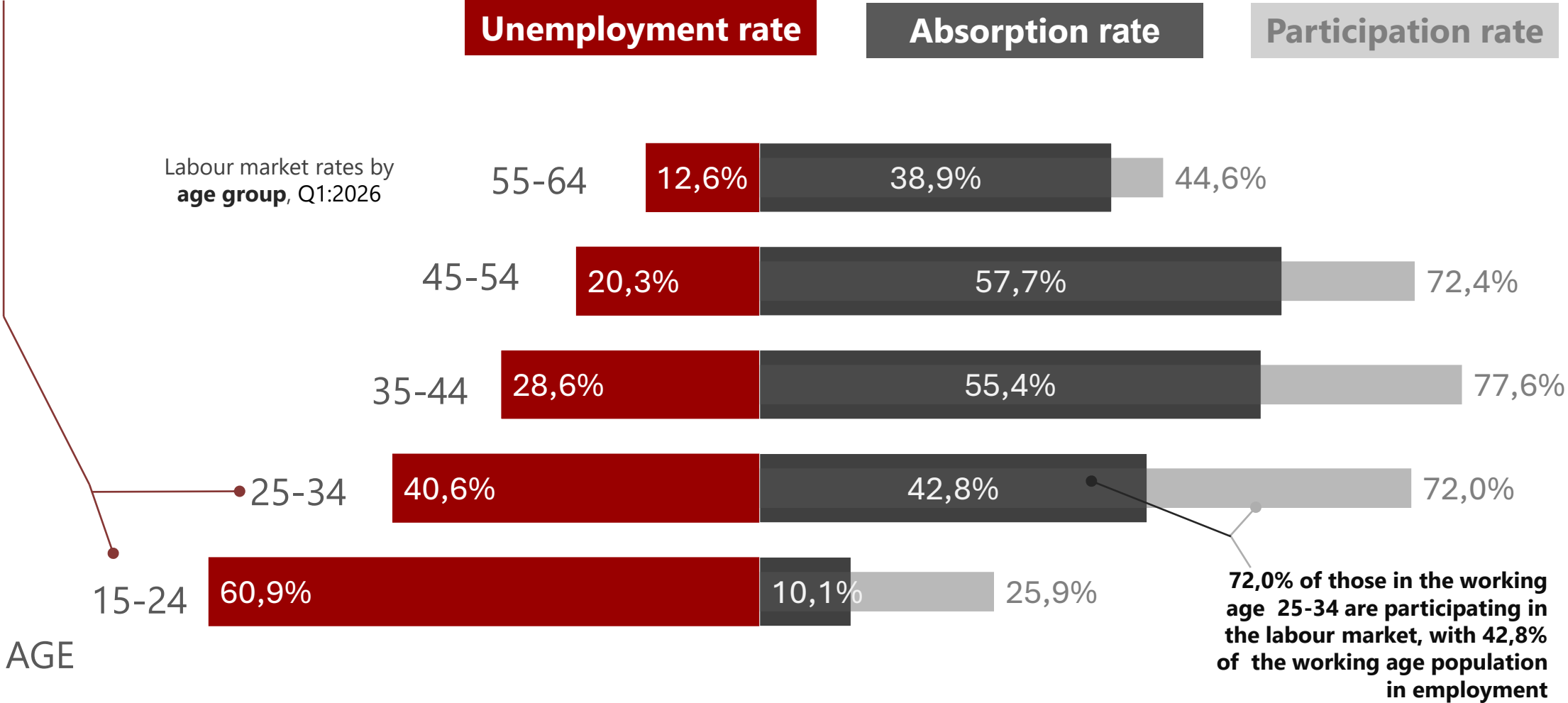


Among youth aged 15–34, the labour underutilisation rate (i.e. composite of labour underutilisation (LU4)) increased by 0,3 of a percentage point from 58,6% in Q1:2025 to 58,9% in Q1:2026.

There is a considerable gap (11,0 percentage points) between LU1 and LU3 indicating that there is a sizeable proportion of youth aged 15-34 who are not employed, want to work but not taking enough steps to look for work or are not available for work.

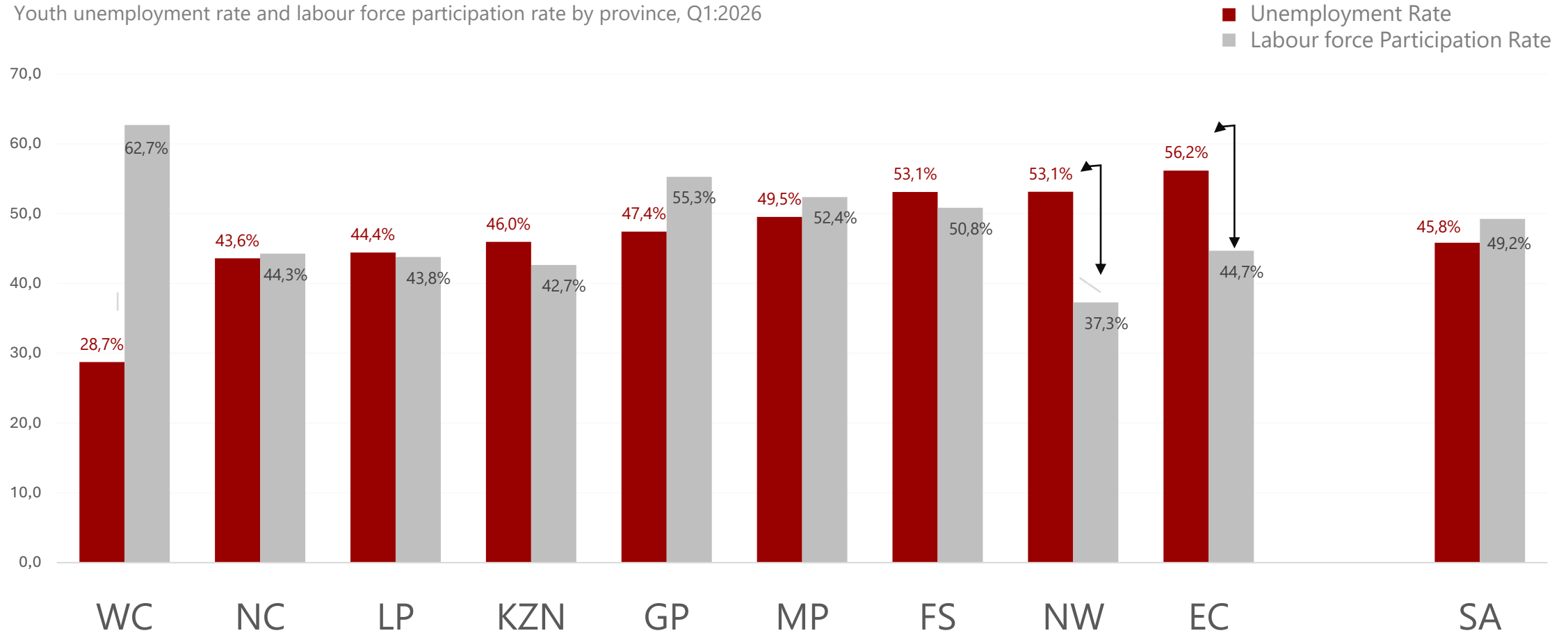


Youth aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years continue to have the highest unemployment rates at **60,9%** and **40,6%** respectively.



EC showed the *highest unemployment rate and NW the lowest participation rate amongst youth* (15-34 years).

Youth unemployment rate and labour force participation rate by province, Q1:2026

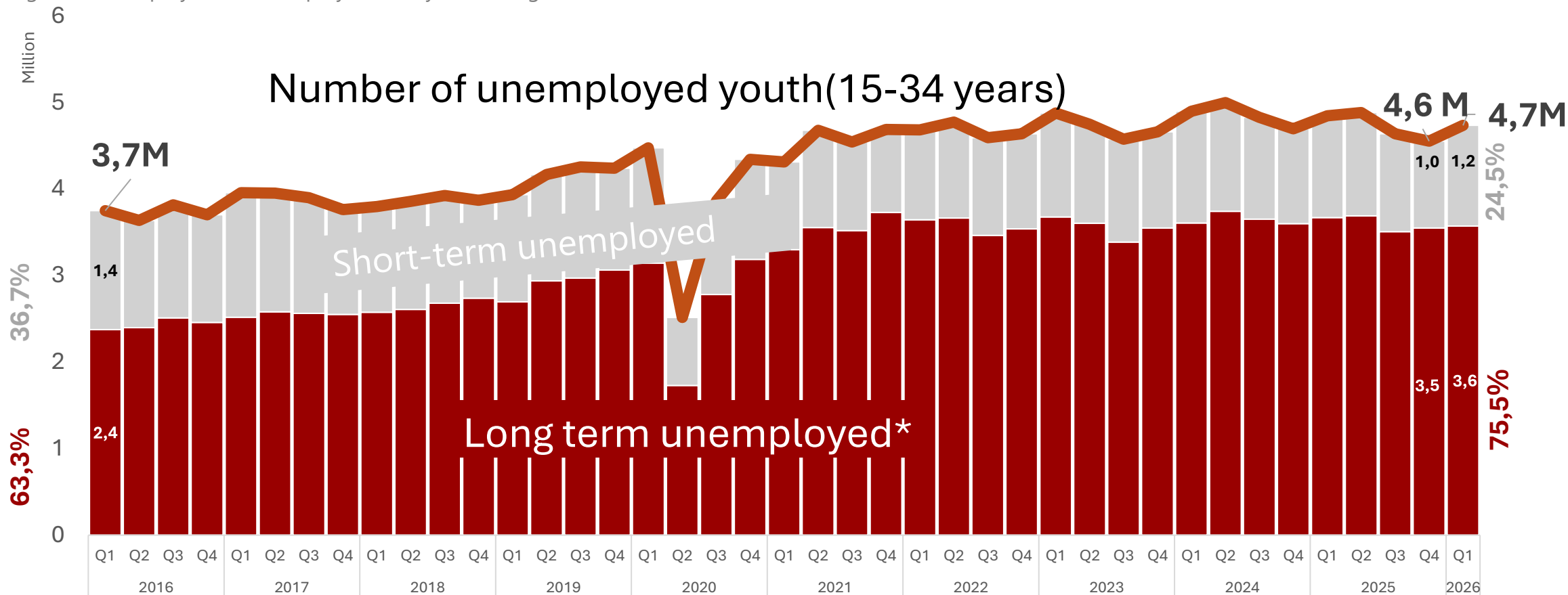


Due to rounding numbers may not add up

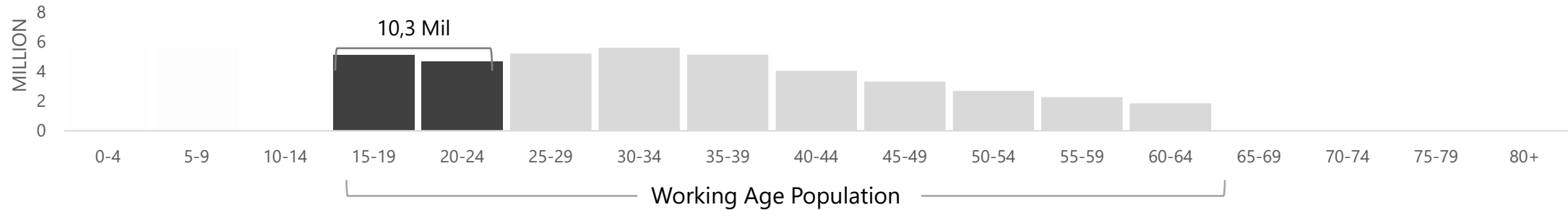


The **number of unemployed** youth in South Africa **increased from 3,7 million** in Q1:2016 to **4,7 million** in Q1:2026. *The proportion of those in long-term unemployment increased from 63,3% in Q1:2016 to 75,5% in Q1:2026.*

*Long term unemployment–unemployed for a year or longer



Approximately **3,9 million out of 10,3 million (or 37,6%)** young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education or training (NEET).



Number of NEET for ages 15-24
Q1:2026

**3,9 Million
NEET**

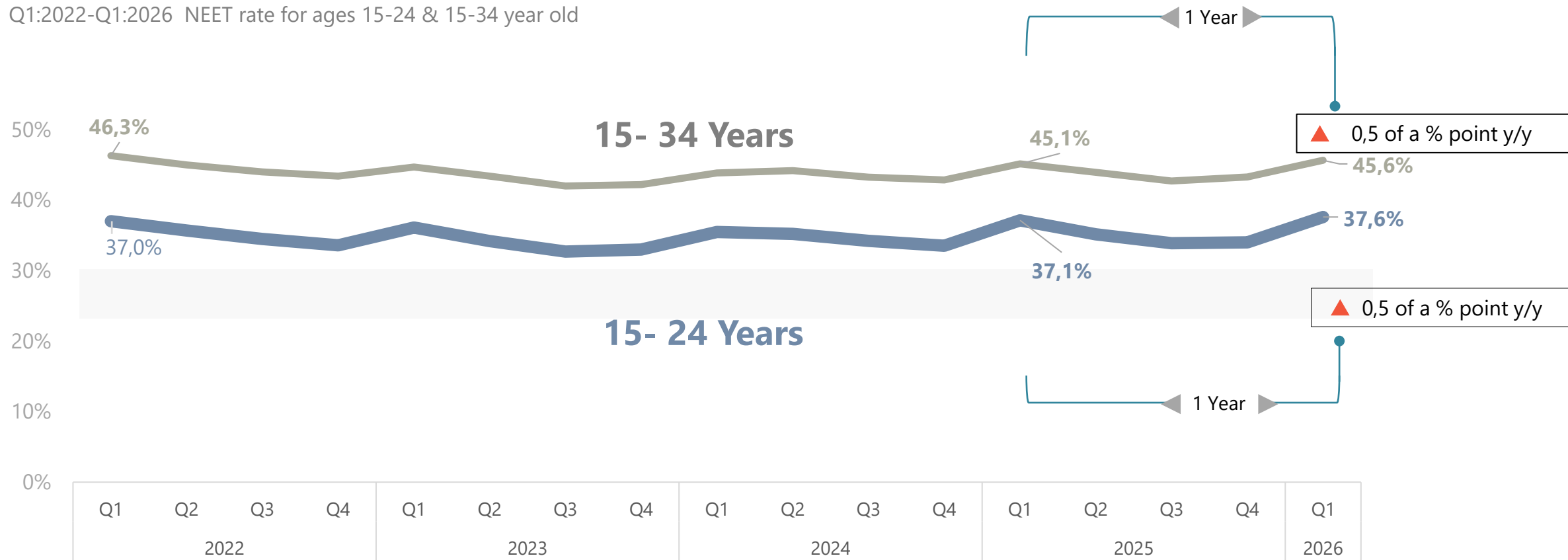
6,5 Million

**Employed or in
Education or Training**

Due to rounding numbers may not add up

The overall NEET rate (15 – 24 years) increased by 0,5 of a percentage point between Q1:2025 and Q1:2026.

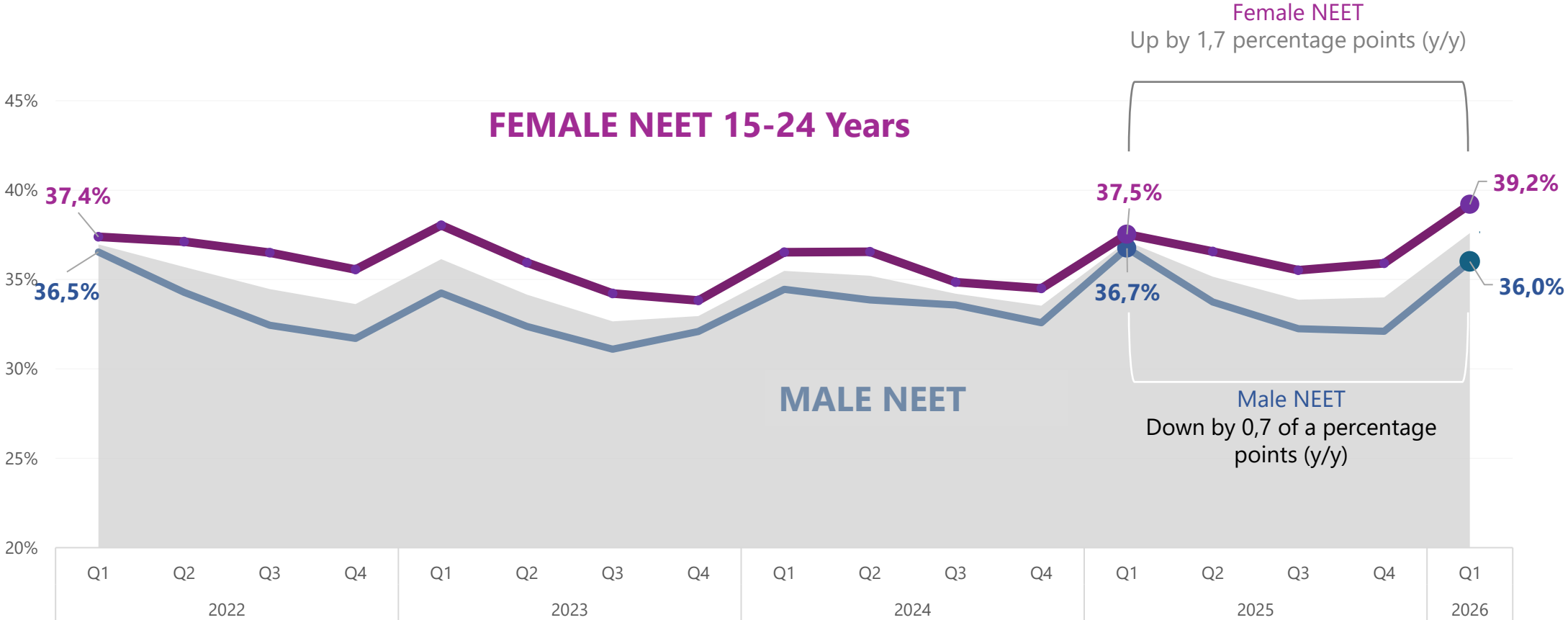
Q1:2022-Q1:2026 NEET rate for ages 15-24 & 15-34 year old



Due to rounding numbers may not add up

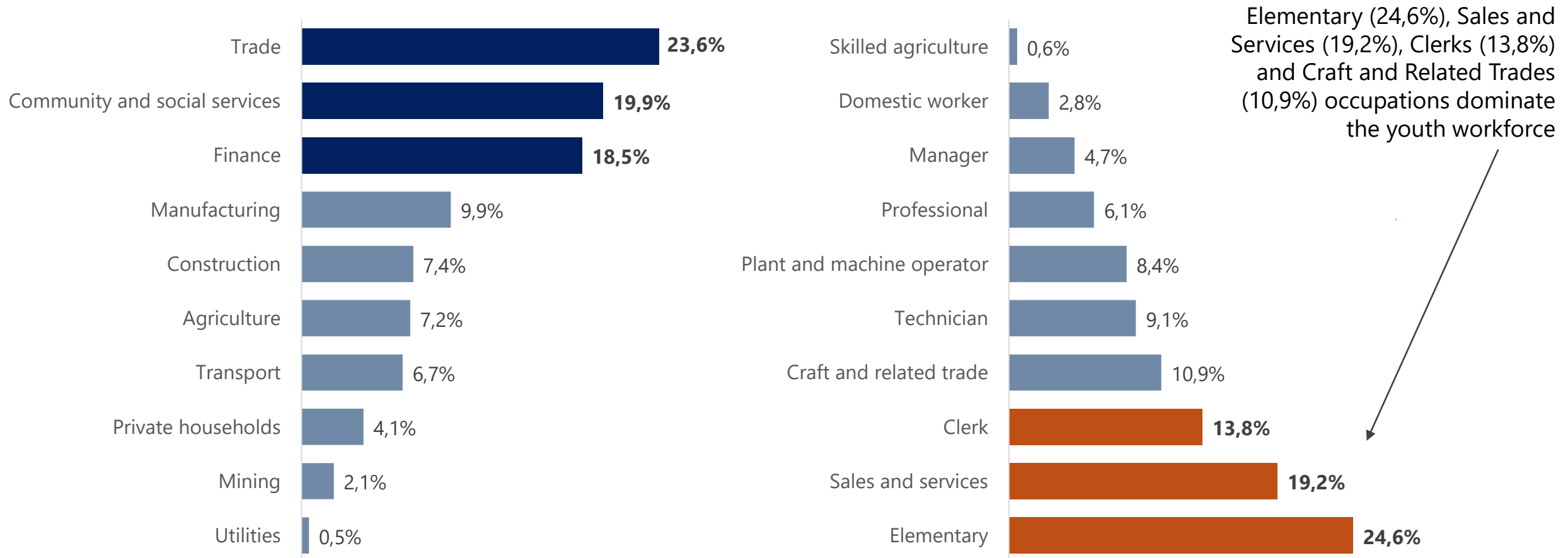
39,2% of young females aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in Q1: 2026. This is a 1,7 percentage points increase compared to Q1: 2025.

NEET (15-24 years) by sex, Q1:2022-Q1:2026



More youth are employed in **Trade, Community & Social services and Finance industries.**

Youth (15-34 years) Employment by Industry and Occupation Q1: 2026



RECAP (QLFS, Q1:2026)

- ❖ The unemployment rate **increased** by 1,3 percentage points to 32,7% in Q1:2026.
- ❖ There is a considerable gap of 11,0 percentage points between the official unemployment rate **LU1 (32,7%)** and the combined rate of unemployment and potential LF **(LU3) (43,7%)**, indicating that there is an unmet need for employment among the working-age population.
- ❖ The absorption rate and the labour force participation rate **decreased** by 0,9 and 0,3 of a percentage point, respectively, between Q4:2025 and Q1:2026.
- ❖ The number of unemployed **increased** by 301 000 persons in Q1:2026 compared to Q4:2025. The number of employed persons **decreased** by 345 000 over the same period.
- ❖ The largest **employment losses** were recorded in the Services (206 000) and Construction (110 000) industries. **Employment gains** were recorded in Manufacturing (38 000), Mining (32 000) and Agriculture (10 000) industries.
- ❖ Youth aged 15-24 years and 25-34 years continue to have the highest unemployment rates at 60,9% and 40,6%, respectively.





General Household Survey (January-December)



Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey (April 2025-March 2026)



Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Collected quarterly)



Domestic Tourism Survey (January-December)



Consumer Price Index (Collected monthly)



Quarterly Labour Force Survey Parallel.



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