



National Agricultural  
Marketing Council  
Promoting market access for South African agriculture

# Markets and Economic Research Centre

## Macroeconomic Digest



*An Update on Selected  
Macroeconomic Indicators*

*Labour – February 2025*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) published by Stats SA provides an overview of the observed changes in key labour market indicators between the third quarter (July - September) of 2024 and the fourth quarter (October – December) of 2024. The results of the QLFS indicate that the number of employed persons increased by 132 000 to 17.1 million in the fourth quarter of 2024 compared to the third quarter of 2024, while the number of unemployed persons decreased by 20 000 to 8.0 million during this period.

According to Stats SA (2025), the number of discouraged work-seekers increased by 111 000 (up by 3.3%), while the number of people who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement decreased by 93 000 (0.7%) between the two quarters, resulting in a net increase of 18 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in employment resulted in a decrease of 0.2 of a percentage point in the unemployment rate to 31.9% in the fourth quarter of 2024.



The quarter-on-quarter (Q3-2024 and Q4-2024) comparison shows that employment increased in six industries, with the agricultural sector recording a decrease of 11 000 (1.2%) quarter-on-quarter (q/q) basis, reaching 920 000 people employed in the sector.

The provincial comparative analysis shows that, Northern Cape recorded the largest increase of 33.3% in agricultural employment in Q4: 2024, followed by Mpumalanga (20.2%) and Western Cape (10.3%) while Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Free State recorded decreases of 27.4%, 17.9% and 15.4%, respectively. Overall, quarter-to-quarter agricultural employment estimations show that employment decreased by 1.2% (11 000) in the fourth quarter of 2024. During this period the number of women employed in agriculture increased by 12 000 (4.2%), while the number of men increased by 23 000 (3.5%) compared to the third quarter 2024.

## Introduction

The Macroeconomic Digest Labour Report of the fourth quarter of 2024 provides an overview of employment figures by industry, province and gender composition in the agricultural sector. The figures in this publication are based on data from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) released on 18 February 2025. The Stats SA report can be accessed online: <https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02114thQuarter2024.pdf>

### 1. Employment by Industry

The Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) published by Stats SA provides an overview of the observed changes in key labour market indicators between the fourth quarter (October- December) of 2024 and the third quarter (July - September) of 2024. The number of employed persons increased by 132 000 to 17.1 million in quarter four of 2024, while the number of unemployed persons decreased by 20 000 to 8.0 million compared with Q3: 2024, resulting in an increase of 112 000 (0.4%) in the labour force. The number of discouraged work-seekers increased by 111 000 (3.3%), while the number of people who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement decreased by 93 000 (0.7%) between Q3 and Q4 of 2024, resulting in a net increase of 18 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in employment resulted in a decrease of 0.2 percentage points in the unemployment rate, reaching 31.9% in the fourth quarter of 2024.

**Table 1** shows employment by industry between the fourth quarter of 2024 and the third quarter of 2024. Four of the ten industries experienced an increase in the number of employed persons. Notably, the finance industry increased by 232 000, followed by manufacturing (41 000), private households (18 000) and transport (17 000) industries. The largest decreases in employment were recorded in community and social services (62 000), followed by trade (48 000), construction (22 000) and agriculture (11 000).

The notable decrease in employment within the agricultural sector could be driven by seasonal variations like post-harvest labour reductions, climatic conditions, rising operational costs due to geopolitics, and market dynamics like the policy changes and price fluctuations.

**Table 1: Quarterly employment, quarter-to-quarter and year-on-year changes**

Industry	Oct – Dec 2023	Jul - Sep 2024	Oct - Dec 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr.	Year-on-year change
	Thousand				Percentage (%)		
<b>Total*</b>	<b>16 723</b>	<b>16 946</b>	<b>17 078</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>
Agriculture	920	935	924	-11	4	-1.2%	0.4%
Mining	446	484	466	-18	20	-3.9%	4.5%
Manufacturing	1 507	1 635	1 675	41	168	2.4%	11.1%
Utilities	123	127	111	-16	-12	-14.4%	-9.8%
Construction	1 322	1 381	1 359	-22	37	-1.6%	2.8%
Trade	3 362	3 469	3 421	-48	59	-1.4%	1.8%
Transport	1 023	1 047	1 064	17	41	1.6%	4.0%

Industry	Oct – Dec 2023	Jul - Sep 2024	Oct - Dec 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr.	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
Finance	2 964	2 716	2 948	232	-16	7.9%	-0.5%
Community and social services	3 913	4 021	3 959	-62	46	-1.6%	1.2%
Private households	1 134	1 128	1 146	18	12	1.6%	1.1%

**Note:** Total includes “other” industry. Whereas we take cognisance of Stats SA’s disclaimer that due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals; in this report changes between quarters and percentage values are recalculated to ensure completeness.

Source: Stats SA, 2025

**Table 2** illustrates employment trends in agriculture per province. Six provinces recorded the increases in employment in the agricultural sector, while three recorded decreases between the third quarter of 2024 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Notably, the Northern Cape recorded the largest increase of 33.3% in agricultural employment in Q4: 2024, followed by Mpumalanga (20.2%), Western Cape (10.3%), KwaZulu Natal (4.8%), and Gauteng (4.3%), while the decreases recorded by the Eastern Cape, Limpopo and Free State provinces were 27.4%, 17.9% and 15.4%, respectively. The reported drop in agricultural employment in some areas or provinces in South Africa can be attributed to climatic challenges, rising production costs, energy supply issues, and regional economic difficulties. The year-on-year comparison employment in agriculture increased by 4 000, translating to a 0.4 % increase.

**Table 2: Agricultural employment by province**

Employment by Agriculture per province	Oct -Dec 2023	Jul -Sep 2024	Oct - Dec 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. Change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
<b>Total Agriculture</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>924</b>	<b>-11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>
Western Cape	234	175	193	18	-41	10.3%	-17.5%
Eastern Cape	96	124	90	-34	-6	-27.4%	-6.3%
Northern Cape	58	39	52	13	-6	33.3%	-10.3%
Free State	73	78	66	-12	-7	-15.4%	-9.6%
KwaZulu-Natal	153	145	152	8	-1	4.8%	-0.7%
North West	53	62	63	1	11	1.6%	18.9%
Gauteng	38	47	49	2	11	4.3%	28.9%
Mpumalanga	86	109	131	22	45	20.2%	52.3%
Limpopo	129	156	128	-28	-1	-17.9%	-0.8%

**Note:** Whereas we take cognisance of Stats SA’s disclaimer that due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals; in this report changes between quarters and percentage values are recalculated to ensure completeness.

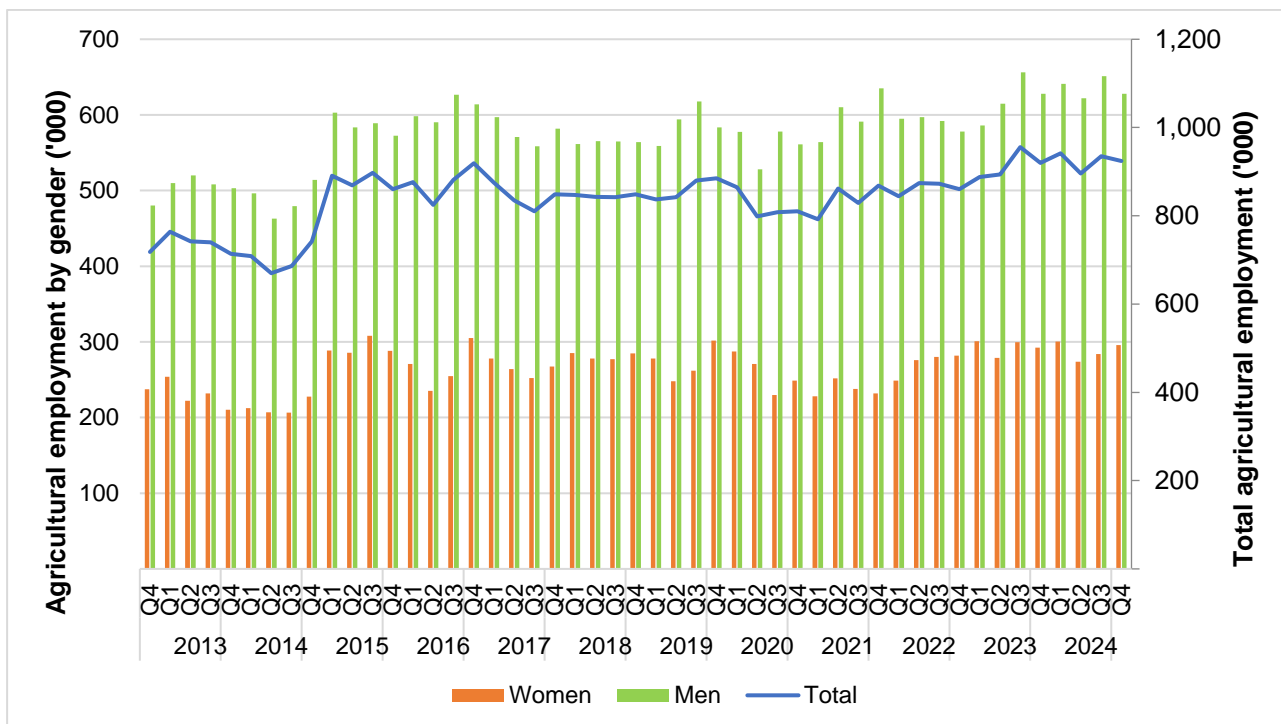
Source: Stats SA, 2025

## 2. Gender composition of employment in the agricultural sector

The agricultural sector, a vital part of many economies worldwide, has traditionally exhibited a notable gender imbalance in its workforce. This is evidenced by the significant disparity in the number of women employed in agriculture compared to their male counterparts. The gender makeup of

employment in the agricultural industry is critical in understanding the dynamics of labour distribution and its consequences for food security, poverty reduction, and general development.

**Figure 1** provides an overview of the employment situation and gender distribution in the agricultural sector. Data from Stats SA (2025) show that men have been the key players in the agriculture sector from the fourth quarter of 2012 to the fourth quarter of 2024. In the fourth quarter of 2024, the number of men and women actively involved in agriculture was 628 000 and 296 000, respectively. During the fourth quarter of 2024, the number of women increased by 12 000 (4.32%), while the number of men decreased by 23 000 (1.18%) compared to the previous quarter. When both genders are combined, the number of people employed in agriculture decreased by 11 000 (1.18%) for the fourth quarter of 2024.

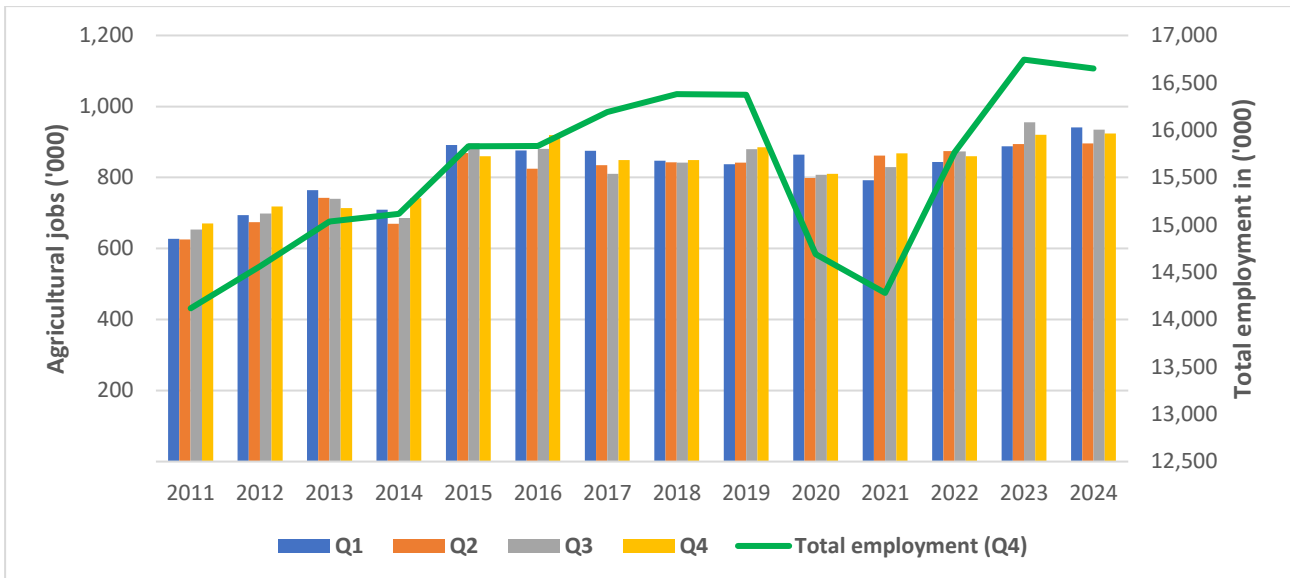


**Figure 1: Employment distribution in agriculture by gender**

Source: Stats SA, 2025

**Figure 2** illustrates the long-term trends of employment in the agricultural sector on a quarterly basis since 2011. In general, long-term trends reveal a substantial increase in agricultural employment, but with some periods of notable declines. These periodic decreases can be attributed to seasonal employment in some subsectors, longer dry spells and unfavourable farming seasons as farmers tend to hire more workers during specific periods of a particular marketing season. On a long-term basis, employment increased by 37.8%, from 671 000 jobs in the fourth quarter of 2011 to 924 000 in the fourth quarter of 2024. When comparing agricultural employment to overall employment in South Africa in quarter 4, agriculture employed about 5.5% of all the employed, making the sector essential in the employment of South Africans.





**Figure 2: Employment trends in the agricultural sector**

Source: Stats SA, 2025

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