



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 – May 2024

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 first quarter (January - March) of 2024 and the fourth quarter (October - December) of 2023. The results of the QLFS indicate that the number of employed persons increased by 22 000 to 16.7 million in the first quarter of 2024 compared to the fourth quarter of 2023, while the number of unemployed persons increased by 330 000 to 8.2 million during the same quarter.

According to Stats SA (2024) the number of discouraged job seekers declined by 1 000, yet the number of persons who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement decreased by 214 000 (a 1.6% decrease) between the two quarters, resulting in a net decrease of 215 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in both employment and unemployment caused the unemployment rate to rise by 0.8% to 32.9% in the first quarter of 2024.



The quarter-on-quarter (Q1-2024 and Q4-2023) comparison shows that employment increased in six industries, with agricultural sector recording an increase of 21 000 (2.3%) quarter-on-quarter (q/q) basis, reaching 941 000 people employed in the sector.

The provincial comparative analysis shows that the North West province recorded the largest increase of 46.6% in agricultural employment in Q1:2024, followed by Gauteng (23.1%) and Mpumalanga (21.1%), while the Western Cape Province recorded the largest decrease of 8.0% followed by KwaZulu-Natal (7.0%). Overall, quarter-to-quarter agricultural employment estimations suggest that employment increased by 2.3% (21 000) in the first quarter of 2024. During the fourth quarter of 2023, the number of women employed in agriculture increased by 8 000 (2.8%), while the number of men increased by 13 000 (2.1%) compared to quarter four of 2023.

Introduction

The Macroeconomic Digest Labour Report of the first 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 obtained from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) released on 14 May 2024. The Stats SA report can be accessed online:

<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2024.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 first quarter (January - March) of 2024 and the fourth quarter (October - December) of 2023. The number of employed persons increased by 22 000 to 16.7 million in the first quarter of 2024, while the number of unemployed persons increased by 330 000 to 8.2 million compared to the fourth quarter of 2023, resulting in an increase of 352 000 (up by 1.4%) in the labour force. According to Stats SA (2024), the number of discouraged work-seekers decreased by 1 000, and the number of people who were not economically active for reasons other than discouragement decreased by 214 000 (down by 1.6%) between the two quarters, resulting in a net decrease of 215 000 in the not economically active population. Consequently, an increase in both employment and unemployment caused the unemployment rate to rise by 0.8% to 32.9% in the first quarter of 2024.

Table 1 shows employment by industry between the first quarter of 2024 and the fourth quarter of 2023. Six out of the ten industries experienced an increase in the number of employed persons. The largest increase in employment was recorded in Trade (109 000), Manufacturing (99 000), Private households (44 000), Transport (39 000), Agriculture (21 000), and Mining (9 000). However, employment decreased in the following industries: Community and social services by 122 000, Construction by 106 000, Finance by 50 000 and Utilities by 17 000. Overall, employment in South Africa increased by 22 000 across the ten industries.

The increase in employment within the agricultural sector may be attributed to the harvesting season of fruits and vegetables. The harvesting season that started in May have resulted in a surge in demand for labour, as farmers require additional hands to help with the harvest. This can lead to increase employment opportunities for seasonal workers and migrant labourers, providing them with much needed income during this time.

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

Industry	Jan-Mar 2023	Oct-Dec 2023	Jan-Mar 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr.	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
Total*	16 192	16 723	16 745	22	552	0.1%	3.4%
Agriculture	888	920	941	21	54	2.3%	6.1%
Mining	413	446	454	9	42	1.9%	10.1%
Manufacturing	1 654	1 507	1 606	99	-48	6.6%	-2.9%
Utilities	135	123	105	-17	-30	-14.1%	-21.9%
Construction	1 201	1 322	1 215	-106	15	-8.0%	1.2%
Trade	3 269	3 362	3 471	109	202	3.2%	6.2%
Transport	992	1 023	1 062	39	69	3.8%	7.0%
Finance	2 667	2 964	2 914	-50	247	-1.7%	9.2%
Community and social services	3 902	3 913	3 791	-122	-111	-3.1%	-2.8%
Private households	1 056	1 134	1 178	44	122	3.9%	11.5%

*Note: Total includes "other" industry. Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Source: Stats SA, 2024

Table 2 illustrates employment trends in agriculture per province. Three provinces recorded the increases in employment in the agricultural sector, while two recorded a decrease between the first quarter of 2024 and the fourth quarter of 2023. The North West province recorded the largest increases in agricultural employment in Q1:2024 of 46.6%, followed by Gauteng (23.1%) and Mpumalanga (21.1%), while the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal recorded the decreases of 8.0% and 7.0%, respectively. Generally, quarter-to-quarter agricultural employment estimations suggest that employment increased by 2.3% (21 000) in the first quarter of 2024. During the period under review, fruit and vegetables are normally ready to be harvested in South Africa, which might have increased labour demand for seasonal workers.

The year-on-year comparison shows that that employment in agriculture increased by 54 000, translating to a 6.1% increase. The favourable climatic conditions in some of the provinces in the country may have provided farmers with the opportunity to recruit workers to assist them with planting and land preparation.

Table 2: Agricultural employment by province

Employment by Agriculture per province	Jan-Mar 2023	Oct-Dec 2023	Jan-Mar 2024	Qtr.-to-qtr. Change	Year-on-year change	Qtr.-to-qtr. change	Year-on-year change
	Thousand					Percentage (%)	
Total Agriculture	888	920	941	21	54	2.3%	6.1%
Western Cape	251	234	215	-19	-36	-8.0%	-14.2%
Eastern Cape	90	96	99	3	9	3.0%	10.3%
Northern Cape	41	58	54	-3	14	-6.1%	33.3%
Free State	82	73	79	5	-3	7.1%	-3.8%
KwaZulu-Natal	143	153	143	-11	-1	-7.0%	-0.5%
North West	45	53	77	25	32	46.6%	71.1%
Gauteng	32	38	47	9	15	23.1%	46.7%
Mpumalanga	81	86	105	18	24	21.1%	29.9%
Limpopo	124	129	123	-6	-1	-4.4%	-0.6%

Source: Stats SA, 2024

2. Gender composition of employment in the agricultural sector

Gender composition of employment in the agricultural sector plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics of labour distribution and its implications on food security, poverty alleviation, and overall development. It is important to analyse and address gender disparities in agricultural employment to ensure equal opportunities, empower women farmers, and promote inclusive and sustainable agricultural practices. Furthermore, such analysis can help identify areas where interventions and policies are needed to enhance the participation of women in agricultural activities, improve their access to resources.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the employment situation and gender distribution in the agricultural sector. Data from Stats SA (2024) shows that men have been the primary participants in the agriculture sector from the first quarter of 2012 to the first quarter of 2024. In the first quarter of 2024, the number of men and women actively involved in agriculture was 641 000 and 300 000, respectively. During the first quarter of 2024, the number of women increased by 8 000 (2.8%), while the number of men increased by 13 000 (2.1%) compared to the previous quarter. When combining both genders, the number of people employed in agriculture increased by 21 000 (2.3%) for the first quarter of 2024.

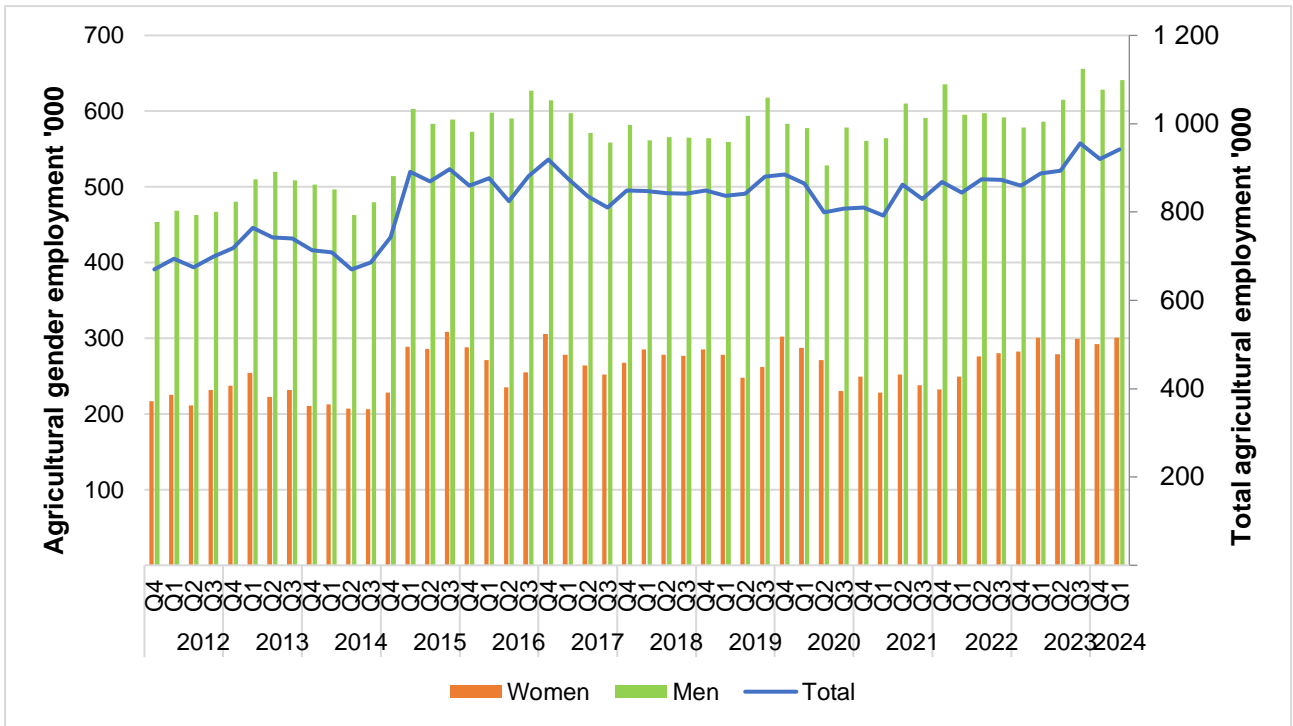


Figure 1: Gender distribution in agriculture

Source: Stats SA, 2024

Figure 2 illustrates the long-term trends of employment in the agricultural sector quarterly since 2011. Long-term trends reveal a substantial increase in agricultural employment; however, there are periods when agricultural employment declined, as observed in **Figure 2**. These periodic decreases can be attributed to seasonal employment, as farmers tend to hire more workers during specific periods of a particular marketing season. On a long-term basis, employment increased by 50%, from 627 000 jobs in the first quarter of 2011 to 941 000 in the first quarter of 2024. When comparing agricultural employment to overall employment in South Africa in quarter 1 of 2024, agriculture employed about 5.6% of the employed pool, making the sector essential in the employment of South African citizens.

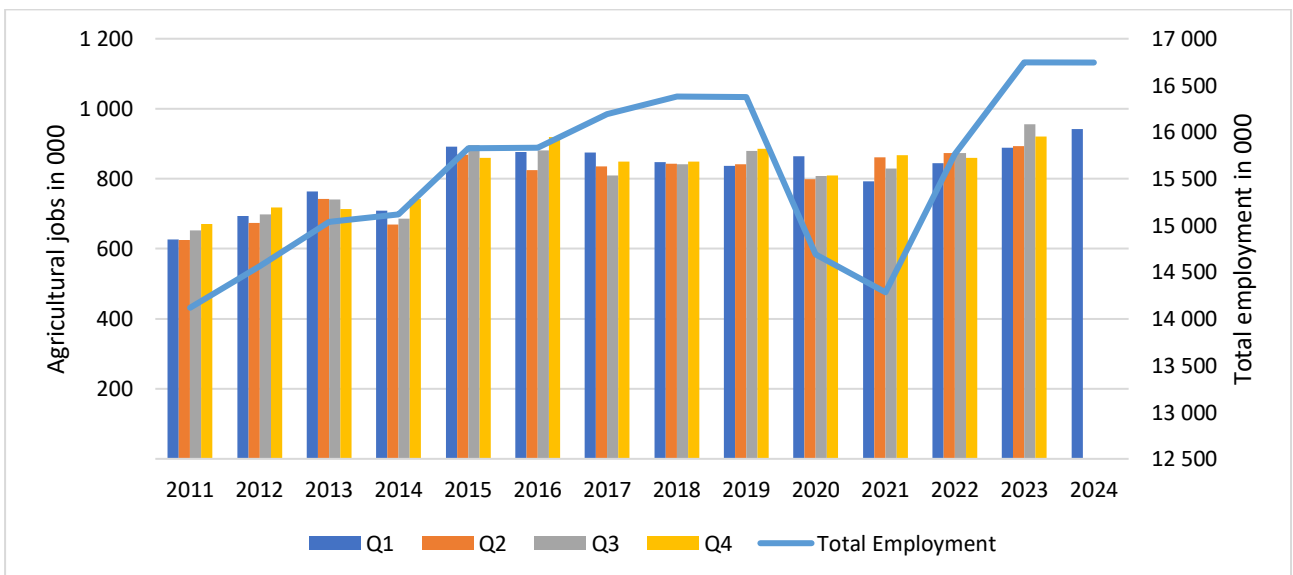


Figure 2: Employment trends in the agricultural sector

Source: Stats SA, 2024

Compiled by:

Matume Maila
Corné Dempers
Dr Moses Lubinga

Enquiries: Dr Moses Lubinga: HLubinga@namc.co.za

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