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The Eastern Cape labour market at a glance: 2015 (Quarter 1) Fact Sheet

Key Terms

Official unemployment: the unemployed are defined as working-age individuals who wanted work and looked for employment. Those that wanted work but did not take any steps to look for employment (sometimes referred to as 'discouraged workers') are classified as economically inactive according to this definition.

Official unemployment rate =
$$\frac{\text{searching unemployed}}{\text{employed} + \text{searching unemployed}}$$

Expanded unemployment: the unemployed under the expanded definition includes all of the officially unemployed as well as those who wanted work but did not look for it. This is the preferred measure of unemployment given the available evidence that the non-searching unemployed are likely to be involuntarily unemployed.

Expanded unemployment rate =
$$\frac{\text{searching unemployed} + \text{nonsearching unemployed}}{\text{employed} + \text{searching unemployed} + \text{nonsearching unemployed}}$$

Labour force participation rate: the percentage of the total working age population (or the specified age group) that is economically active (i.e. employed or unemployed).

Absorption rate: the percentage of the total working age population (or the specified age group) that is employed.

QLFSS: Quarterly Labour Force Surveys undertaken every three months by Statistics South Africa

Trends in unemployment, labour force participation and employment

Between the 1st quarter of 2013 and the 1st quarter of 2015, the official unemployment rate in the province decreased (very marginally) from 29.8% to 29.6% (Figure 1). In other words, unemployment remained unchanged over this short period. At the same time, the percentage of the province's total working age population that was employed (the absorption rate) increased by about 5%. Overall, however, the growth (4.7%) in the percentage of the working age population that was economically active (i.e. either working or looking for work) grew at almost the same rate.

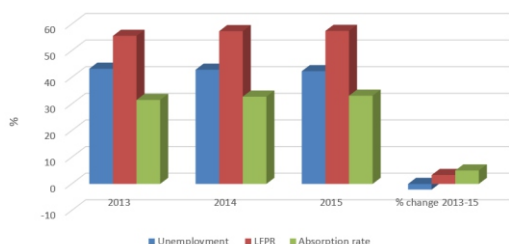
Figure 1: Official unemployment, participation and absorption rates in the Eastern Cape, 2013-2015



Source: QLFS 2013(1), QLFS 2014(1), QLFS 2015(1)

Perhaps a more appropriate way to assess the labour market is through the expanded definition of unemployment, which also includes those who wanted work but didn't necessarily look for a job. As highlighted in past NALSU Fact Sheets there is not necessarily a clear distinction between the searching and non-searching unemployed in South Africa and the non-searching unemployed are likely to be involuntarily unemployed. The use of the expanded unemployment rate (Figure 2) suggests a higher level of unemployment for the province. Under the broader definition of the labour force, unemployment decreased from 43% to 42% between 2013 and 2015. Part of the stability in the broad unemployment rate is explained by the increase in the absorption rate which occurred at the same time that the percentage of the working age population, that was broadly active, changed minimally (3%).

Figure 2: Expanded unemployment, participation and absorption rates in the Eastern Cape, 2013-2015



Source: QLFS 2013(1), QLFS 2014(1), QLFS 2015(1)

Unemployment among the youth (defined here as those aged 19 to 24, inclusive) is far higher than for the labour force as a whole. Among this group, many of whom are likely looking for employment for the first time, 71% are unemployed according to the expanded definition (2015- Quarter 1). Youth unemployment paints a grim picture for young people in the province as data for the most recent period show that youth unemployment increased by 7.7% since the first quarter of 2013. The percentage of youth in the province who are employed decreased by about 17%. The data highlights that in 2015, 14% of the Eastern Cape's youth were employed compared to 16% in 2013.

Figure 3: Youth (age 19-24) expanded unemployment, participation and absorption rates, 2013-2015

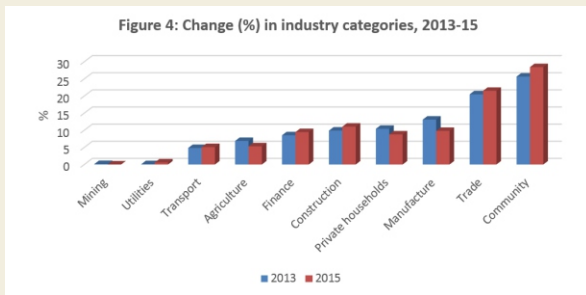


Source: QLFS 2013(1), QLFS 2014(1), QLFS 2015(1)

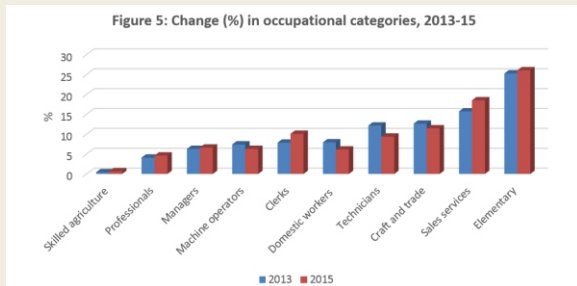
Sectoral trends in employment

In addition to very small changes in overall rates of unemployment in the province, there has been a drop in the percentage of the workforce in manufacturing and an increase in community and social services (Figure 4). In other words, the single largest employer in the province (the community and social services sector) increased its share of total employment once again- this time by about two percentage points. Overall, however, comparisons between the sectoral compositions of the workforce in the first quarter of each year suggest that there have been only very small changes. The structure of the workforce is, therefore, largely unchanged over the period.

Those who were employed were, therefore, more likely to be working either in the public sector or in relatively low paying sectors with limited job security or social protection. This is confirmed by the findings in Figure 5 which show that the provincial workforce was, once again, concentrated in elementary occupations at the same time there were relatively small increases in the percentage of the work force engaged in sales or employed as clerks.

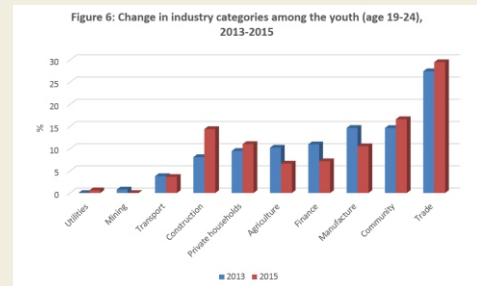


Source: QLFS 2013(I), QLFS 2015(I)



Source: QLFS 2013(I), QLFS 2015(I)

In examining the provincial youth workforce, Figure 6 shows that young people were, once again, increasingly absorbed into wholesale and retail trade. The increase in the percentage of young workers employed in these two sectors was from 27 per cent in 2013 to 29 per cent in 2015. At the same time, the manufacturing sector experienced a reduction in its share of the 19-24 year old workforce between the 1st quarter of 2013 and the 1st quarter of 2015 (from 15 per cent to 11 per cent).



Source: QLFS 2013(I), QLFS 2015(I)



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