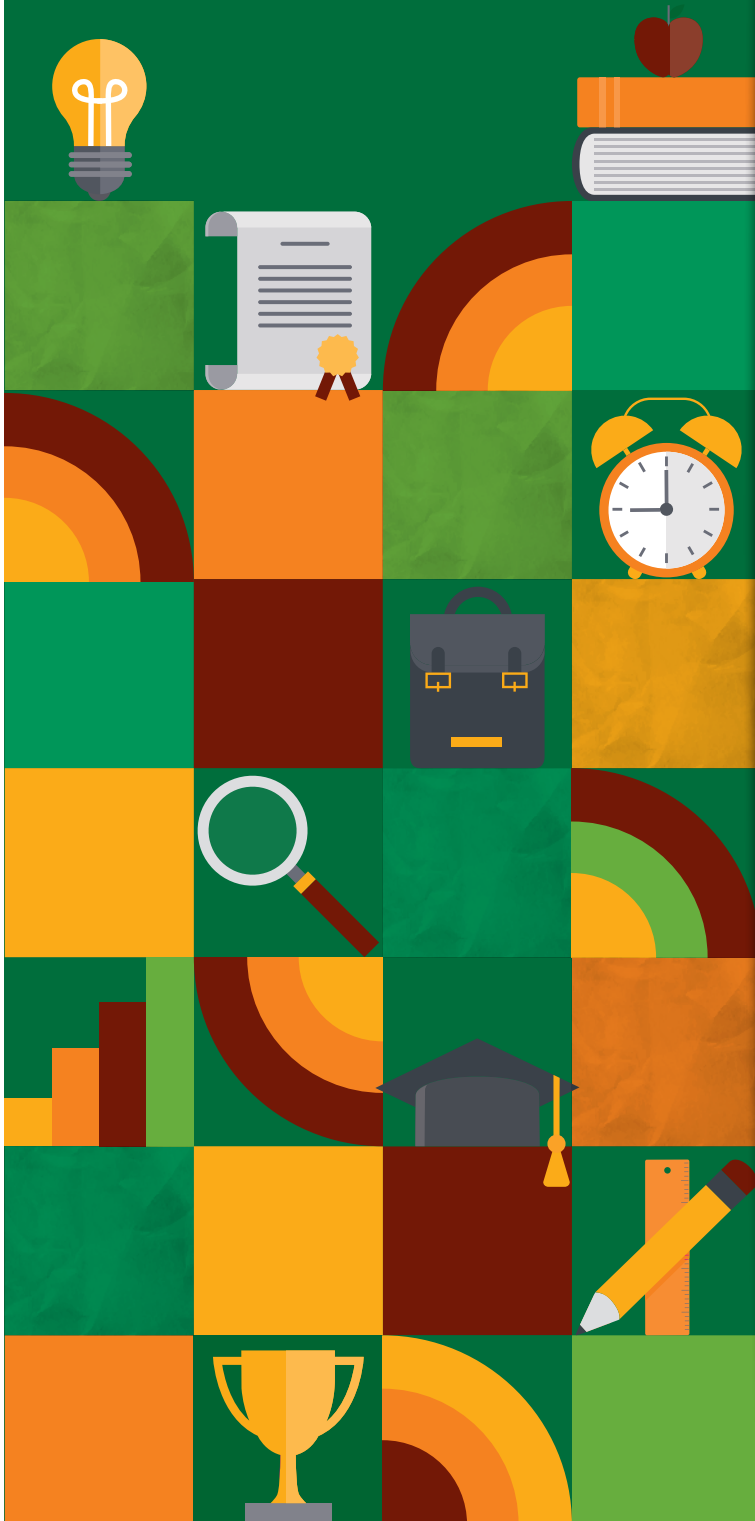


AUGUST 2024

FACT SHEET



PERSONS WHO ARE NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR TRAINING (NEET)



BACKGROUND

The unemployment levels in South Africa are among the highest in the world, and have remained consistently high throughout the period under review. Currently, the overall unemployment rate¹ has worsened to 32.9% as a direct consequence of low levels of economic growth, among other factors. More alarming is that in 2024:Q1, 35.5% of young people aged 15–24 years (3.6 million)² were not in employment, education or training (NEET). Most young people who are NEET are from disadvantaged areas, especially rural communities, where opportunities are limited. This presents itself as an explosive situation that requires urgent attention in the education and training system. Since youth are a fundamental asset to South Africa, empowering them by creating favourable conditions to develop their skills so they can actively participate in the labour market is essential for sound economic and social development, and for the future sustainability of our country.



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The post-school education and training (PSET) system has a crucial role to play in expanding access to PSET opportunities beyond current provisioning levels, to accommodate the growing number of people who are NEET, and to reskill and upskill millions of workers who have lost their jobs. This requires PSET institutions to offer a diversity of programmes, not only to take account of the needs of the youth who completed schooling, but also for those who did not complete their schooling, as well as those who require education and training opportunities to live more productive lives as workers and citizens. Monitoring NEET trends is critical, as it can alert policy-makers to the extent of the NEET problem and provide insights into the characteristics of those who are NEET. This Fact Sheet is therefore an essential information resource for policymakers, as well as for education and training providers, to guide improvements in the design and implementation of education and training policies that can respond to the NEET challenge in the country.



PURPOSE

This Fact Sheet provides a detailed statistical profile of people who are NEET. Information about NEETs assists the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about PSET provisioning. NEET data provides the DHET and its stakeholders with evidence that can be used to inform the development of policy, strategies and interventions, as well as the setting of appropriate targets and effective budgeting.



METHODOLOGY

The statistics used in this publication are drawn from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS), which is conducted quarterly by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA). This data cover a period of eight years, from 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1. Q1 data was selected for this publication, since it represents the latest available data for 2024:Q1 at the time of preparing this Fact Sheet. More importantly, this period also considers the economic and labour market after-effects of Covid-19 in 2020 and its extension into 2021, thus providing a more realistic picture of the current NEET challenge in South Africa. International comparative data was obtained from International Labour Organization (ILO) publications. Many countries use the age group 15–24 years as the unit of analysis for understanding NEETs. However, this Fact Sheet provides NEET data for a wider age range of people in consideration of the DHET’s mandate, which includes adult learners as opposed to merely young people.



TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

4.1. NEET

NEET refers to people who are not in employment, education or training. There are two categories of NEETs, namely, active NEETs and inactive NEETs. **Active NEETs** are persons who are NEET but are actively seeking employment and are available to start work (i.e., it excludes those who are not actively looking for work). **Inactive NEETs** are persons who are NEET and not looking for work. According to Stats SA, a person can be classified as an inactive NEET for various reasons, such as managing a home (homemaker), for health reasons, being too young/too old/retired, being a discouraged work-seeker, and other unmentioned reasons. **Inactive NEETs represent the ‘broader’ definition of NEETs.** This Fact Sheet reports data on the combination of both inactive and active NEETs.



Many countries use people aged 15–24 years as the unit of analysis for understanding NEETs. However, this Fact Sheet provides NEET data for a wider age range of people in consideration of the DHET’s mandate.

4.2 NEET RATE

The NEET rate is calculated by dividing the number of persons who are NEET in a given age group by the total population in the same age group. For instance, the NEET rate for youth is calculated as the number of persons aged 15–24 years who are NEET divided by the number of persons aged 15–24 in the population.

4.3 YOUTH

In South Africa, the official definition for 'youth' refers to persons aged 15–34 years. The advantage of looking at this broader age range is that it includes the growing share of individuals who remain in education for longer and only enter the labour market in their late 20s.

4.4 TERTIARY EDUCATION

Tertiary education refers to the following qualifications:

- undergraduate degree;
- postgraduate degree;
- diploma;
- postgraduate diploma;
- higher certificate (upon completion of matric); and
- advanced diploma or advanced certificate.



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section presents an overview of the extent, trends and patterns of the NEET challenge in South Africa.




Table 1 illustrates the current NEET challenge in South Africa by demographic characteristics. Over 17.2 million people aged 15–60 years were NEET in 2024. This translates to 43.7% of the total population aged 15–60 years.




From the perspective of gender and race, more females than males were NEET in 2024, accounting for 54.9% of total NEETs, while Black Africans made up the majority of total NEETs at 87.1%.

In 2024, 3.6 million people aged 15–24 years were NEET, which translates to 21.0% of the 15–60-year-old population. In terms of highest level of educational attainment, those with secondary less than grade 12 (42.8%) comprised the largest share of NEETs, followed by those with Grade 12 (35.0%). Persons with tertiary education made up 7.8% of the total NEETs.

When looking at the labour market status of the NEET population aged 15–60 years, the majority (53.3%) were not actively looking for employment.

TABLE 1: Persons aged 15–60 years who were NEET by demographic characteristics, 2024:Q1

| NUMBER OF PERSONS AGED 15–60 YEARS (THOUSANDS) | NUMBER OF PERSONS AGED 15–60 YEARS WHO WERE NEET (THOUSANDS) | NEET RATE (%) |
|---|--|---|
| 39 603 | 17 296 | 43.7% |
|  Demographics |  Number of persons who were NEET (thousands) |  Share of persons who were NEET (%) |
| Gender | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| Male (15–60 years) | 7 798 | 45.1 |
| Female (15–60 years) | 9 497 | 54.9 |
| Population group | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| Black African (15–60 years) | 15 069 | 87.1 |
| Coloured (15–60 years) | 1 350 | 7.8 |
| Indian/Asian (15–60 years) | 325 | 1.9 |
| White (15–60 years) | 550 | 3.2 |
| Age group | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| 15–24 | 3 638 | 21.0 |
| 25–34 | 5 496 | 31.8 |
| 35–60 | 8 160 | 47.2 |
| Highest level of educational attainment | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| No schooling (15–60 years) | 392 | 2.3 |
| Primary and less (15–60 years) | 1 889 | 10.9 |
| Secondary less than Grade 12 (15–60 years) | 7 399 | 42.8 |
| Grade 12 (15–60 years) | 6 056 | 35.0 |
| Tertiary (15–60 years) | 1 348 | 7.8 |
| Other (15–60 years) | 211 | 1.2 |
| Labour market status | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| Active (15–60 years) | 8 078 | 46.7 |
| Inactive (15–60 years) | 9 217 | 53.3 |





| |  Demographics |  Number of persons who were NEET (thousands) |  Share of persons who were NEET (%) |
|--|--|--|--|
| Reason | | 17 296 | 100.0 |
| Job loser (15–60 years) | | 2 291 | 13.2 |
| Job leaver (15–60 years) | | 238 | 1.4 |
| New entrant (15–60 years) | | 3 434 | 19.9 |
| Re-entrant (15–60 years) | | 339 | 2.0 |
| Other – last worked >5 years ago (15–60 years) | | 3 194 | 18.5 |
| Scholar/student | | 327 | 1.9 |
| Homemaker (15–60 years) | | 2 951 | 17.1 |
| Health reasons (15–60 years) | | 1 562 | 9.0 |
| Too young/too old/retired (15–60 years) | | 669 | 3.9 |
| Discouraged work-seekers (15–60 years) | | 2 290 | 13.2 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

The following statistics demonstrate the NEET trends in South Africa for the period under review. According to Table 2, the NEET rate of 15–60-year-olds in 2023 and 2024 show a slight decrease by 2.7% and 0.01%, respectively. These statistics could be attributed to the recovery of the economy after the Covid-19 pandemic as industries resumed business.

TABLE 2: Total number and percentage of persons aged 15–60 who were NEET, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

| |  Total number of persons aged 15–60 years (thousands) |  Number of persons aged 15–60 years who were NEET, (thousands) |  NEET rate (%) |  Year-on-year % change of persons who were NEET |
|-------------|--|---|--|--|
| 2017 | 35 824 | 13 859 | 38.7% | – |
| 2018 | 36 370 | 14 219 | ↑ 39.1% | 2.6% |
| 2019 | 36 936 | 14 824 | ↑ 40.1% | 4.3% |
| 2020 | 37 452 | 15 328 | ↑ 40.9% | 3.4% |
| 2021 | 38 002 | 16 685 | ↑ 43.9% | 8.9% |
| 2022 | 38 473 | 17 782 | ↑ 46.2% | 6.6% |
| 2023 | 39 094 | 17 297 | ↓ 44.2% | –2.7% |
| 2024 | 39 604 | 17 296 | ↓ 43.7% | –0.01% |




Source: Own calculations, based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note 1: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Note 2: ↑ Indicates an increase in the number of people who were NEET, and ↓ indicates a decline in the number of people who were NEET.

As shown in Table 3, the number of persons aged 15–24 years who were NEET remained stable at over 3 million in the eight years under review, while the number of NEETs aged 24–35 years in 2024:Q1 decreased slightly from 2023:Q1, from about 5.6 million to 5.5 million, which translates to a decrease of 1.54%.

TABLE 3: Total number of NEETs by age group, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

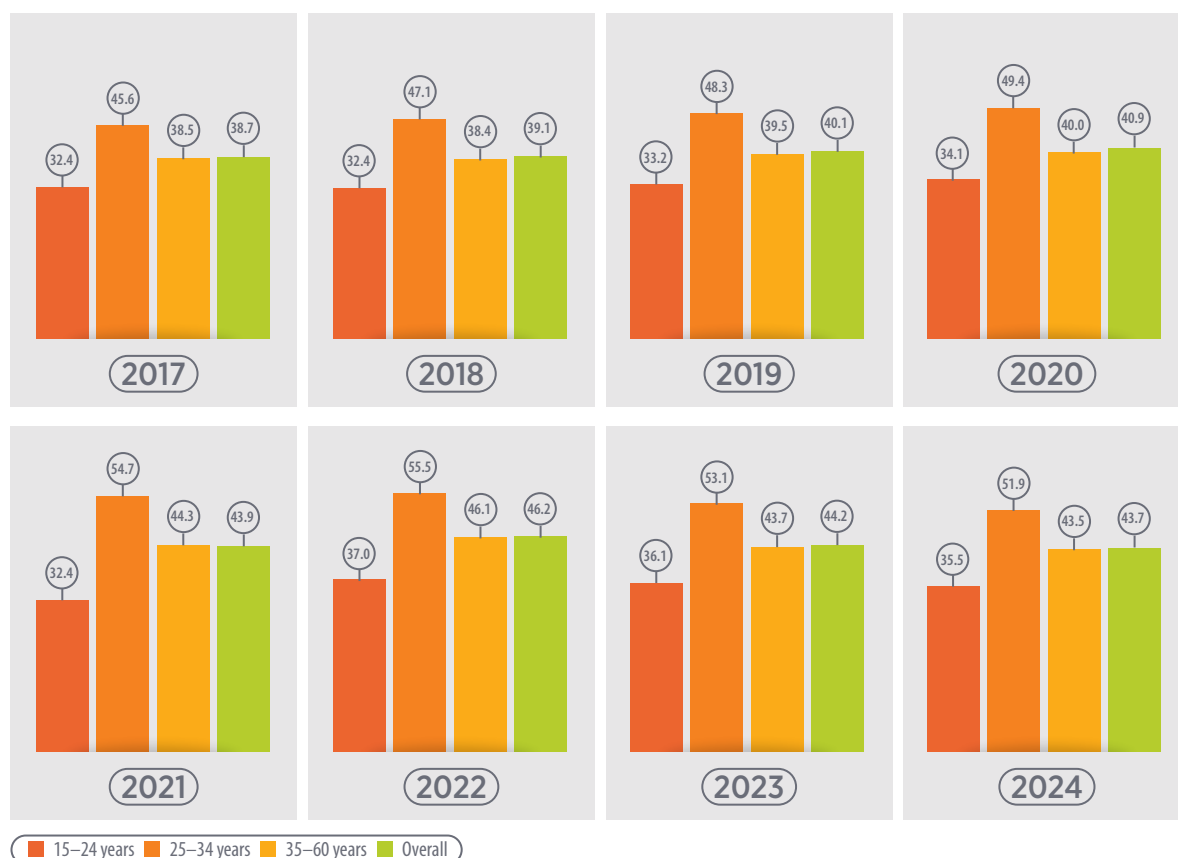
| NEET | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
|  15–24 years | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 318 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
|  25–34 years | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
|  35–60 years | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 799 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 685 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |

Source: Own calculations, based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Furthermore, the NEET rate across all age groups fluctuated from 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1, as illustrated in Figure 1. These statistics could be attributed to the recovery of the economy from the detrimental effects of the Covid-19 pandemic after most industries resumed business.

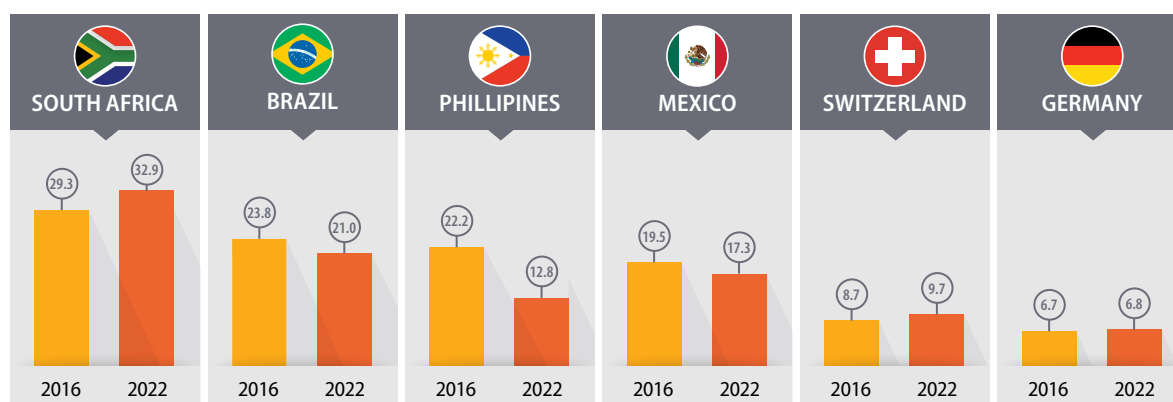
FIGURE 1: NEET rates by age group, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1.



Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

The South African NEET rate for persons aged 15–24 years remained consistently higher (in both 2016 and 2022) compared with South Africa’s BRICS counterpart, Brazil, and peer countries like the Philippines.

FIGURE 2: NEET rates for the persons aged 15–24 by country, 2016 and 2022.



Source: International Labour Organization

Note: Data downloaded from ILOSTAT: https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer48/?lang=en&id=EIP_NEET_SEX_NB_A [Accessed 10/01/2024].

The analysis of persons who were NEET by labour market status (active and inactive), as shown in Table 4, indicates again that many of the NEETs were not actively looking for employment, except for those in the 25–34-year age group. In 2024:Q1, over 2 million of the persons aged 25–34 years who were NEET did not actively look for employment, due to various reasons (either discouraged or not economically active).

TABLE 4: Number of NEETs by labour market status (active and inactive), 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

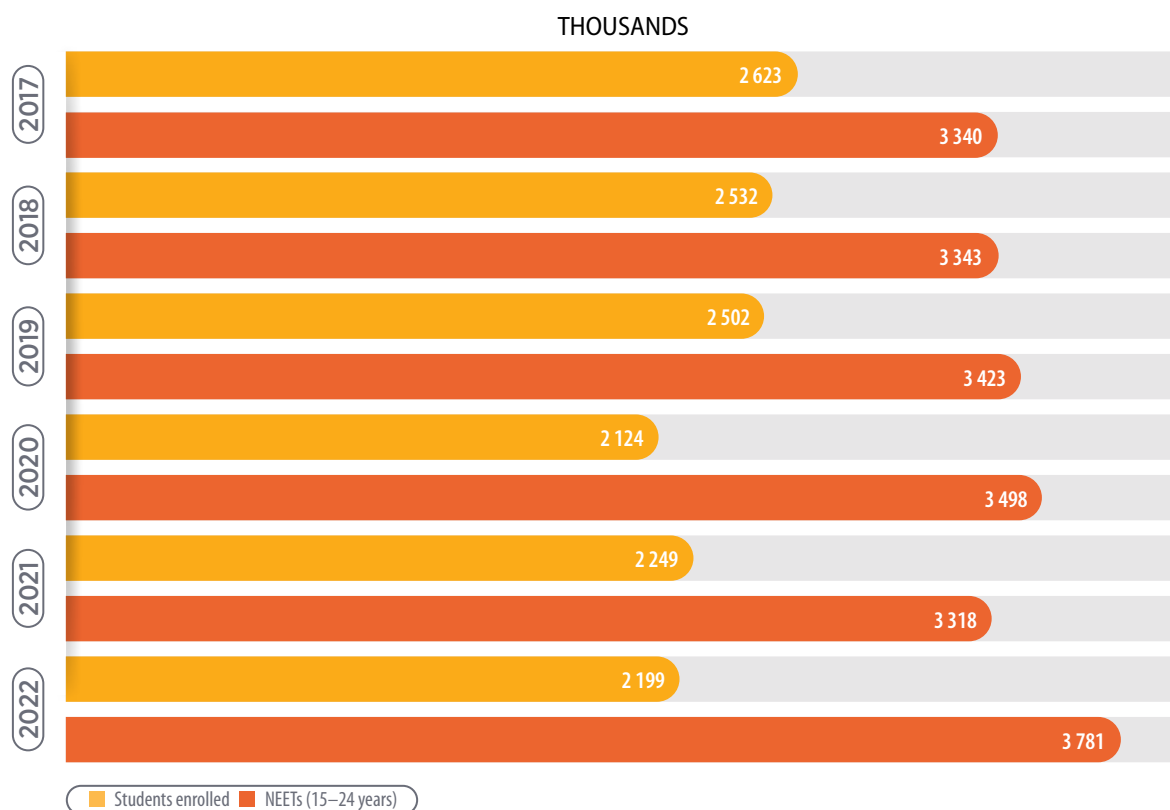
| LABOUR MARKET STATUS | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 318 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
| Active | 1 502 | 1 330 | 1 344 | 1 587 | 1 266 | 1 542 | 1 671 | 1 578 |
| Inactive | 1 838 | 2 013 | 2 079 | 1 912 | 2 052 | 2 239 | 2 026 | 2 060 |
| 24–34 YEARS | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
| Active | 2 357 | 2 374 | 2 488 | 2 459 | 2 933 | 2 983 | 3 059 | 3 203 |
| Inactive | 2 089 | 2 288 | 2 355 | 2 242 | 2 706 | 2 804 | 2 524 | 2 294 |
| 35–60 YEARS | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 438 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
| Active | 2 215 | 2 155 | 2 241 | 2 267 | 2 901 | 3 153 | 3 034 | 3 297 |
| Inactive | 3 860 | 4 060 | 4 318 | 4 171 | 4 826 | 5 061 | 4 982 | 4 863 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 685 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Figure 3 illustrates the total number of students who attended a PSET institution versus the number of NEETs in the 15–24-year age group. The number of students who attended PSET institutions decreased by 2.22% from 2021 to 2022, while the number of NEETs increased by 13.95% in the same period.

FIGURE 3: Total number of students (all age groups) who attended a PSET institution versus the number of NEETs (15–24-year-olds), 2017–2022.



Sources: Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar; Statistics on Post School Education and Training in South Africa (DHET: 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2022).




Note 1: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Note 2: Number of students enrolled includes: public and private higher education institutions; colleges (TVET, CET and private colleges); and SETA-supported work-based learning.

Table 5 outlines the number of persons who were NEET by gender and age group. Within the 15–24-year-old category, the number of males increased from 1 755 in 2023:Q1 to 1 770 in 2024:Q1, while the number of females in the same age category and period under review decreased from 1 942 to 1 868.

TABLE 5: Total number of NEETs by gender and age group, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

| GENDER | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|-------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 318 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
| Men | 1 576 | 1 528 | 1 622 | 1 658 | 1 573 | 1 872 | 1 755 | 1 770 |
| Women | 1 764 | 1 815 | 1 801 | 1 840 | 1 746 | 1 909 | 1 942 | 1 868 |

| GENDER | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| THOUSANDS | | | | | | | | |
| 25–34 YEARS | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
|  Men | 1 969 | 2 048 | 2 195 | 2 286 | 2 599 | 2 717 | 2 569 | 2 535 |
|  Women | 2 477 | 2 614 | 2 648 | 2 744 | 3 040 | 3 070 | 3 014 | 2 961 |
| 35–60 YEARS | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 799 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
|  Men | 2 369 | 2 456 | 2 577 | 2 708 | 3 154 | 3 421 | 3 330 | 3 493 |
|  Women | 3 706 | 3 759 | 3 981 | 4 091 | 4 573 | 4 793 | 4 686 | 4 667 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 685 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

The distribution of persons who were NEET by race and age group, as shown in Table 6, indicates that the largest number of NEETs were Black Africans, followed by Coloureds, across all age groups. Black Africans represented 87.1% of the total number of NEETs.

TABLE 6: Number of NEETs by race and age group, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

| RACE BY AGE GROUP | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| THOUSANDS | | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 318 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
| Black African | 2 914 | 2 900 | 2 984 | 3 039 | 2 920 | 3 341 | 3 270 | 3 228 |
| Coloured | 314 | 292 | 313 | 321 | 259 | 327 | 304 | 296 |
| Indian/Asian | 46 | 59 | 38 | 58 | 44 | 37 | 49 | 37 |
| White | 66 | 92 | 88 | 80 | 95 | 76 | 74 | 78 |
| 25–34 YEARS | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
| Black African | 4 019 | 4 182 | 4 362 | 4 538 | 5 075 | 5 160 | 5 080 | 4 989 |
| Coloured | 284 | 284 | 299 | 312 | 395 | 392 | 329 | 329 |
| Indian/Asian | 59 | 84 | 88 | 78 | 81 | 98 | 79 | 75 |
| White | 82 | 112 | 93 | 103 | 89 | 136 | 96 | 104 |

| RACE BY AGE GROUP | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 35–60 YEARS | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 799 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
| Black African | 4 907 | 5 025 | 5 321 | 5 575 | 6 427 | 6 854 | 6 817 | 6 852 |
| Coloured | 613 | 619 | 642 | 675 | 730 | 797 | 663 | 726 |
| Indian/Asian | 183 | 184 | 196 | 191 | 207 | 208 | 196 | 213 |
| White | 371 | 386 | 399 | 358 | 364 | 355 | 340 | 369 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 685 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |







Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

For the 15–24-year age group, the largest share of NEETs had Grade 12 as their highest educational qualification (47.4%), followed by those with secondary less than Grade 12 (38.4%), as indicated in Table 7.

TABLE 7: Share of NEETs by highest level of educational attainment, 2017:Q3 to 2024:Q1

| HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | PER CENT (%) | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 24.1 | 23.5 | 23.1 | 22.8 | 19.9 | 21.3 | 21.4 | 21.0 |
|  No schooling | 1.2 | 1.0 | 1.2 | 1.5 | 0.9 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
|  Primary and less | 9.4 | 9.7 | 9.5 | 7.8 | 6.6 | 6.5 | 7.1 | 10.1 |
|  Secondary less than Grade 12 | 46.5 | 43.8 | 43.4 | 43.0 | 40.2 | 37.7 | 38.4 | 38.4 |
|  Grade 12 | 37.8 | 40.4 | 40.7 | 42.1 | 46.3 | 50.0 | 47.4 | 47.4 |
|  Tertiary | 4.4 | 4.1 | 4.3 | 4.8 | 5.3 | 4.0 | 4.4 | 4.4 |
|  Other | 0.7 | 1.0 | 0.9 | 0.9 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 1.6 | 1.6 |
| 24–34 YEARS | 32.1 | 32.8 | 32.7 | 32.8 | 33.8 | 32.5 | 32.3 | 31.8 |
|  No schooling | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.2 | 1.2 |
|  Primary and less | 8.5 | 8.1 | 8.2 | 7.7 | 4.9 | 7.0 | 5.8 | 5.8 |
|  Secondary less than Grade 12 | 48.4 | 48.7 | 50.5 | 48.3 | 48.1 | 46.5 | 45.0 | 45.0 |
|  Grade 12 | 34.0 | 33.3 | 31.6 | 33.8 | 37.3 | 36.1 | 37.2 | 37.2 |
|  Tertiary | 6.8 | 7.4 | 7.6 | 8.4 | 8.3 | 8.6 | 10.1 | 10.1 |
|  Other | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.9 | 0.9 |

| HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | PER CENT (%) | | | | | | | |
| 35–60 YEARS | 43.8 | 43.7 | 44.2 | 44.4 | 46.3 | 46.2 | 46.3 | 47.2 |
|  No schooling | 6.9 | 6.5 | 6.2 | 5.4 | 3.5 | 4.6 | 4.0 | 4.0 |
|  Primary and less | 23.4 | 22.4 | 20.9 | 19.3 | 16.5 | 16.4 | 15.7 | 15.7 |
|  Secondary less than Grade 12 | 43.3 | 42.7 | 42.8 | 44.3 | 46.0 | 45.3 | 44.3 | 44.3 |
|  Grade 12 | 19.1 | 21.2 | 22.3 | 22.9 | 26.4 | 26.6 | 27.7 | 27.7 |
|  Tertiary | 6.0 | 6.0 | 6.8 | 6.9 | 6.8 | 6.4 | 7.2 | 7.2 |
|  Other and unspecified | 1.4 | 1.1 | 1.0 | 1.1 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| TOTAL | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

Table 8 indicates the total number of persons who were NEET by province and age group. Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and Eastern Cape recorded the highest number of people who were NEET across all the age groups over the eight years under review, with Gauteng recording about 4.3 million in 2024 and Northern Cape recording the lowest in the same year, with about 383 thousand persons.

TABLE 8: Total number of NEETs by province and age group, 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1

| PROVINCE | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 318 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
|  Western Cape | 310 | 296 | 294 | 311 | 248 | 374 | 335 | 323 |
|  Eastern Cape | 462 | 460 | 491 | 487 | 416 | 502 | 453 | 496 |
|  Northern Cape | 83 | 81 | 87 | 91 | 94 | 99 | 82 | 99 |
|  Free State | 157 | 144 | 151 | 163 | 148 | 174 | 155 | 174 |
|  KwaZulu-Natal | 788 | 779 | 795 | 820 | 783 | 796 | 801 | 742 |
|  North West | 237 | 265 | 278 | 270 | 253 | 307 | 332 | 359 |
|  Gauteng | 681 | 656 | 671 | 717 | 723 | 866 | 820 | 776 |
|  Mpumalanga | 297 | 313 | 281 | 300 | 282 | 320 | 335 | 292 |
|  Limpopo | 324 | 349 | 375 | 340 | 371 | 344 | 383 | 379 |

| PROVINCE | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 25–34 YEARS | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
| 📍 Western Cape | 349 | 364 | 388 | 383 | 509 | 472 | 456 | 401 |
| 📍 Eastern Cape | 585 | 631 | 687 | 656 | 677 | 754 | 713 | 804 |
| 📍 Northern Cape | 110 | 99 | 99 | 96 | 109 | 115 | 113 | 106 |
| 📍 Free State | 266 | 233 | 249 | 269 | 302 | 256 | 270 | 292 |
| 📍 KwaZulu-Natal | 957 | 995 | 1 019 | 1 052 | 1 208 | 1 240 | 1 219 | 1 128 |
| 📍 North West | 328 | 311 | 344 | 365 | 412 | 400 | 407 | 377 |
| 📍 Gauteng | 988 | 1 151 | 1 121 | 1 187 | 1 333 | 1 377 | 1 328 | 1 352 |
| 📍 Mpumalanga | 362 | 385 | 395 | 420 | 469 | 498 | 451 | 449 |
| 📍 Limpopo | 499 | 493 | 541 | 603 | 620 | 674 | 627 | 588 |
| 35–60 YEARS | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 799 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
| 📍 Western Cape | 678 | 669 | 722 | 766 | 847 | 986 | 784 | 855 |
| 📍 Eastern Cape | 732 | 801 | 845 | 825 | 870 | 907 | 951 | 1 036 |
| 📍 Northern Cape | 162 | 160 | 159 | 158 | 173 | 170 | 173 | 178 |
| 📍 Free State | 339 | 312 | 329 | 351 | 351 | 353 | 355 | 386 |
| 📍 KwaZulu-Natal | 1 157 | 1 155 | 1 239 | 1 256 | 1 435 | 1 521 | 1 503 | 1 437 |
| 📍 North West | 482 | 495 | 538 | 543 | 550 | 607 | 652 | 671 |
| 📍 Gauteng | 1 538 | 1 626 | 1 664 | 1 796 | 2 198 | 2 260 | 2 189 | 2 216 |
| 📍 Mpumalanga | 437 | 436 | 453 | 479 | 555 | 586 | 615 | 597 |
| 📍 Limpopo | 549 | 560 | 609 | 624 | 748 | 825 | 794 | 785 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 685 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.

There are several explanations for people being NEET. For 15–34-year-olds, the dominant reasons were new entrants to the labour market, followed by discouraged work-seekers, job losers and homemakers, respectively, as can be seen in Table 9. Among the 35–60-year age group, however, being a homemaker, health reasons and discouraged work-seekers were the three dominant reasons for being NEET, from 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1.

There was a decrease in the number of discouraged work-seekers and job losers from 2022 to 2024, due to a willingness to shift from being inactive to actively engaging in the labour market, either through employment or job-seeking efforts.

TABLE 9: Total number of NEETs by reason and age group, 2017:Q3 to 2024:Q1

| REASON | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | THOUSANDS | | | | | | | |
| 15–24 YEARS | 3 340 | 3 343 | 3 423 | 3 498 | 3 070 | 3 781 | 3 697 | 3 638 |
| Job loser | 277 | 281 | 241 | 278 | 183 | 201 | 266 | 250 |
| Job leaver | 65 | 40 | 42 | 47 | 32 | 32 | 22 | 22 |
| New entrant | 1 089 | 948 | 989 | 1 191 | 996 | 1 243 | 1 316 | 1 236 |
| Re-entrant | 50 | 39 | 57 | 42 | 38 | 30 | 32 | 35 |
| Other – last worked >5 years ago | 22 | 23 | 15 | 29 | 16 | 36 | 36 | 36 |
| Homemaker | 447 | 419 | 416 | 360 | 343 | 339 | 322 | 303 |
| Health reasons | 132 | 119 | 149 | 131 | 145 | 124 | 158 | 139 |
| Too young/too old/retired | 53 | 86 | 100 | 60 | 58 | 91 | 91 | 90 |
| Discouraged work-seekers | 610 | 741 | 769 | 729 | 650 | 857 | 683 | 686 |
| Other not economically active | 596 | 649 | 645 | 632 | 608 | 829 | 771 | 843 |
| 25–34 YEARS | 4 445 | 4 662 | 4 843 | 5 031 | 5 640 | 5 787 | 5 583 | 5 497 |
| Job loser | 870 | 805 | 848 | 883 | 889 | 833 | 850 | 960 |
| Job leaver | 150 | 116 | 130 | 134 | 130 | 114 | 88 | 99 |
| New entrant | 878 | 1 001 | 1 057 | 1 145 | 1 417 | 1 475 | 1 520 | 1 511 |
| Re-entrant | 132 | 113 | 121 | 157 | 134 | 120 | 142 | 148 |
| Other – last worked >5 years ago | 326 | 340 | 332 | 449 | 363 | 441 | 458 | 484 |
| Homemaker | 706 | 728 | 707 | 642 | 765 | 733 | 691 | 611 |
| Health reasons | 295 | 275 | 295 | 233 | 251 | 280 | 287 | 291 |
| Too young/too old/retired | 3 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 6 |
| Discouraged work-seekers | 831 | 1 019 | 1 092 | 1 084 | 1 166 | 1 338 | 1 155 | 994 |
| Other not economically active | 255 | 263 | 258 | 298 | 519 | 446 | 382 | 392 |
| 35–60 YEARS | 6 074 | 6 214 | 6 559 | 6 799 | 7 727 | 8 214 | 8 016 | 8 160 |
| Job loser | 856 | 841 | 836 | 861 | 1 090 | 1 125 | 895 | 1 082 |
| Job leaver | 140 | 127 | 117 | 132 | 206 | 109 | 86 | 117 |
| New entrant | 314 | 284 | 334 | 369 | 425 | 666 | 697 | 687 |
| Re-entrant | 111 | 102 | 124 | 137 | 180 | 121 | 107 | 157 |
| Other – last worked >5 years ago | 793 | 800 | 831 | 1 067 | 1 000 | 1 132 | 1 249 | 1 255 |
| Homemaker | 1 292 | 1 304 | 1 397 | 1 357 | 1 434 | 1 482 | 1 476 | 1 338 |
| Health reasons | 1 127 | 1 081 | 1 126 | 1 083 | 1 029 | 1 087 | 1 098 | 1 132 |
| Too young/too old/retired | 450 | 481 | 496 | 500 | 500 | 590 | 589 | 569 |
| Discouraged work-seekers | 765 | 967 | 1 059 | 1 029 | 1 260 | 1 482 | 1 397 | 1 311 |
| Other not economically active | 226 | 227 | 240 | 265 | 602 | 422 | 422 | 513 |
| TOTAL | 13 859 | 14 219 | 14 824 | 15 328 | 16 436 | 17 782 | 17 297 | 17 296 |

Source: own calculations based on Stats SA, QLFS Nesstar.

Note: Due to rounding, numbers do not necessarily add up to totals.



CONCLUSION

This Fact Sheet provides a profile of people who were NEET for the period 2017:Q1 to 2024:Q1. As indicated, South Africa has one of the highest NEET rates in the world. Most notable was the substantial and drastic upsurge in the share of NEETs in the 15–60-year-old population, which grew from 38.7% in 2017:Q1 to 43.7% in 2024:Q1. This translates to an increase of around 3.4 million people. Persons who were NEET were predominantly Black African, female, aged 25–34 and probably living in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal or Eastern Cape.

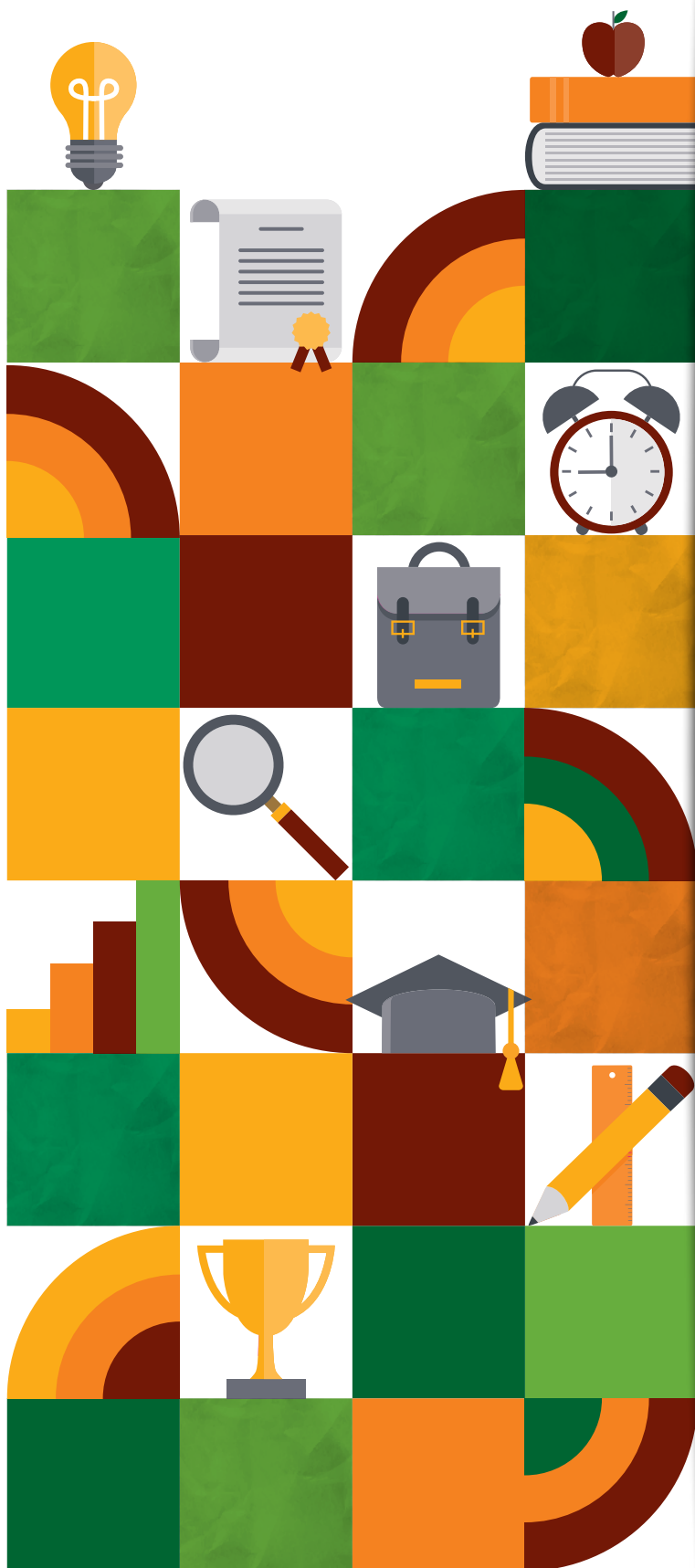
Additionally, the data reveals that participation in PSET is not keeping pace with the growing number of NEET youths, due largely to significant declines in enrolment in TVET and CET colleges. Thus, PSET opportunities are not enough to curb the high number of people who are NEET in the country.

The majority of persons who are NEET in South Africa have education levels below matric, suggesting that higher levels of educational attainment are a contributing factor to the reduction of NEETs in South Africa. Overall, the PSET system has a crucial role to play in enabling the attainment of basic skills, including reskilling and upskilling.



ENDNOTES

1. Official definition (which excludes those NOT seeking employment).
2. Stats SA (2024). Quarterly Labour Force Survey (1st Quarter).

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Khuluvhe, M. and Gwantshu WS., (2024). *Fact sheet on NEETs*. Department of Higher Education and Training, Pretoria.

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