

South African youth and unemployment



At least two definitions of unemployment are used in South Africa – the official definition (also called the strict definition) and the expanded definition.

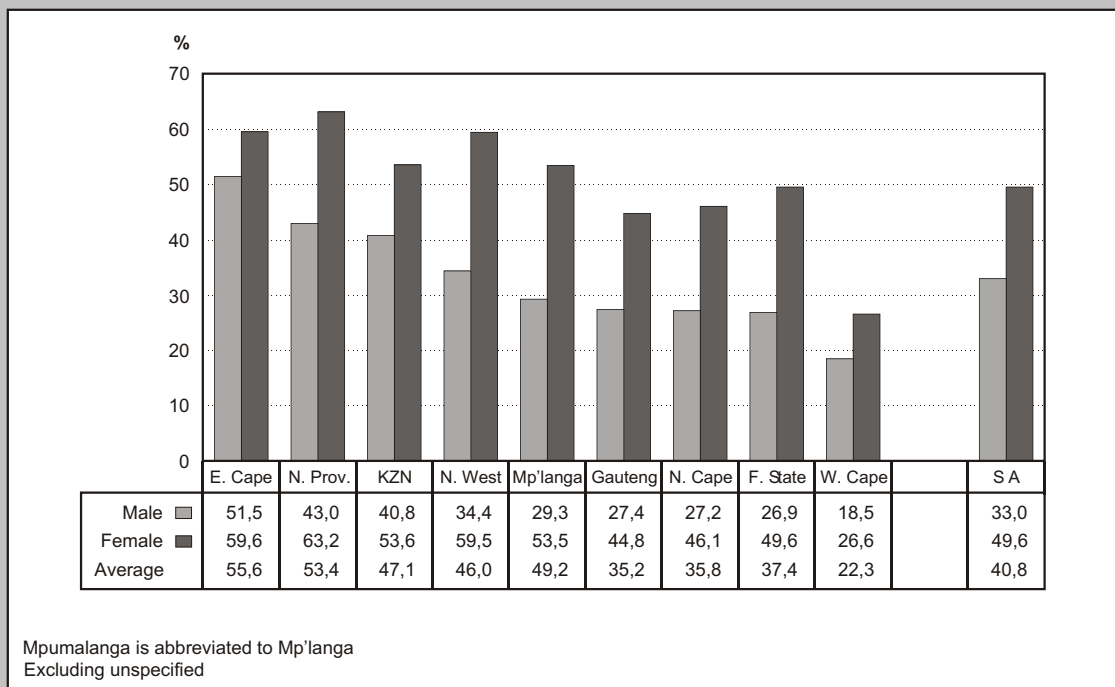
While both definitions include people aged 15 or older who are not employed but are available for work, the main requirement as regards the official definition is that an individual must have taken specific steps to seek employment in the four weeks prior to a given point in time. With the expanded definition, however, the main focus is on the availability for work, irrespective of whether or not a person has taken active steps to find work.

Unemployment rates calculated according to the official definition are therefore, by definition, lower than the expanded definition.

Unemployment figures from Census '96 are assumed to be according to the expanded definition, since no questions were asked about steps taken to seek work.

Figure 6.1 shows that the expanded unemployment rate was 40,8% for all youth of both sexes countrywide. For male youth it was 33,0% while for females it was 49,6%.

Figure 6.1: Unemployment (expanded definition) among youth by province and sex



Eastern Cape had the highest expanded unemployment rate for youth (55,6%), followed by Northern Province (53,4%), Mpumalanga (49,2%) and KwaZulu-Natal (47,1%).

Of all the provinces, Northern Province recorded the highest expanded unemployment rate among young females (63,2%) followed by Eastern Cape (59,6%) and North West (59,5%).

Expanded unemployment rates for young males in all the nine provinces were lower than those for females. The lowest expanded unemployment rate was recorded in Western Cape (18,5%), followed by Free State (26,9%) and Northern Cape (27,2%).

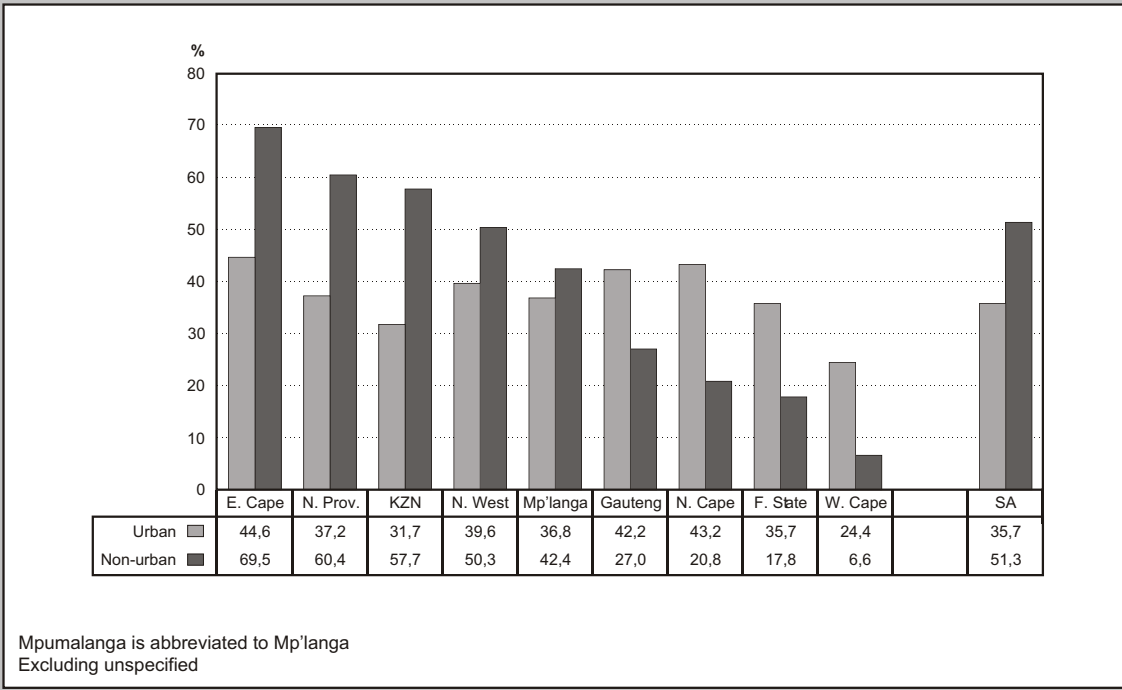
After Eastern Cape (51,5%), Northern Province had the second highest expanded unemployment rate (43,0%) for young males followed by KwaZulu-Natal (40,8%).

Figure 6.1 also shows that the five provinces with an average expanded youth unemployment rate higher than the national average of 40,8% were all part of the former homeland system, as was Free State (37,4%). A greater part of the territory that used to belong to the old homeland system was rural. Therefore, in addition to sex being a factor in the level of unemployment among the youth, the milieu, that is, whether people live in urban or non-urban areas, also appears to be influential.

This is confirmed when we look at Figure 6.2, which gives the provincial breakdown of youth unemployment by milieu. Nationally more than five in every ten economically active youth (51,3%) in non-urban areas were unemployed, compared to a lower proportion of 35,7% in urban areas.

Again the five provinces which reflect this national pattern of greater unemployment in non-urban areas were part of the old homeland system.

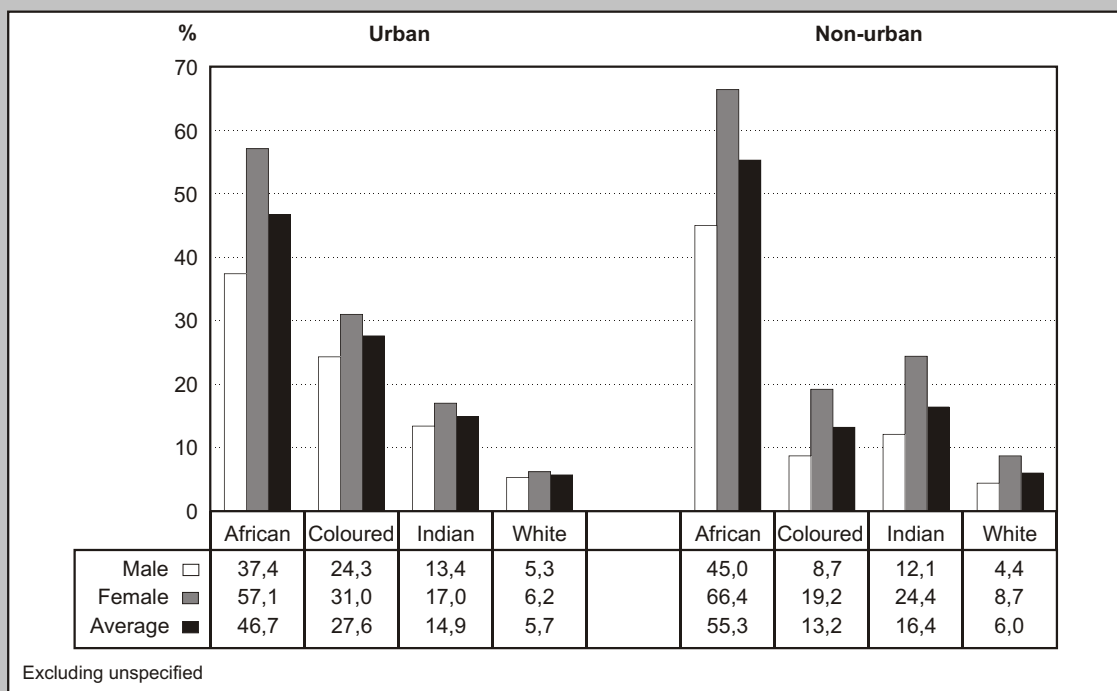
Figure 6.2: Unemployment (expanded definition) among youth by province and milieu



Comparing unemployment among the population groups

While the expanded unemployment rate among youth in South Africa stood at 40,9% in October 1996, there were significant variations among the youth in the different population groups in the country. For instance, as Figure 6.3 shows, the unemployment rate among economically active Africans in both urban (46,7%) and non-urban areas (55,3%) is higher than for other population groups, (e.g. coloureds: 27,6% urban; 13,2% non-urban).

Figure 6.3: Unemployment rate (expanded definition) among youth by milieu, population group and sex

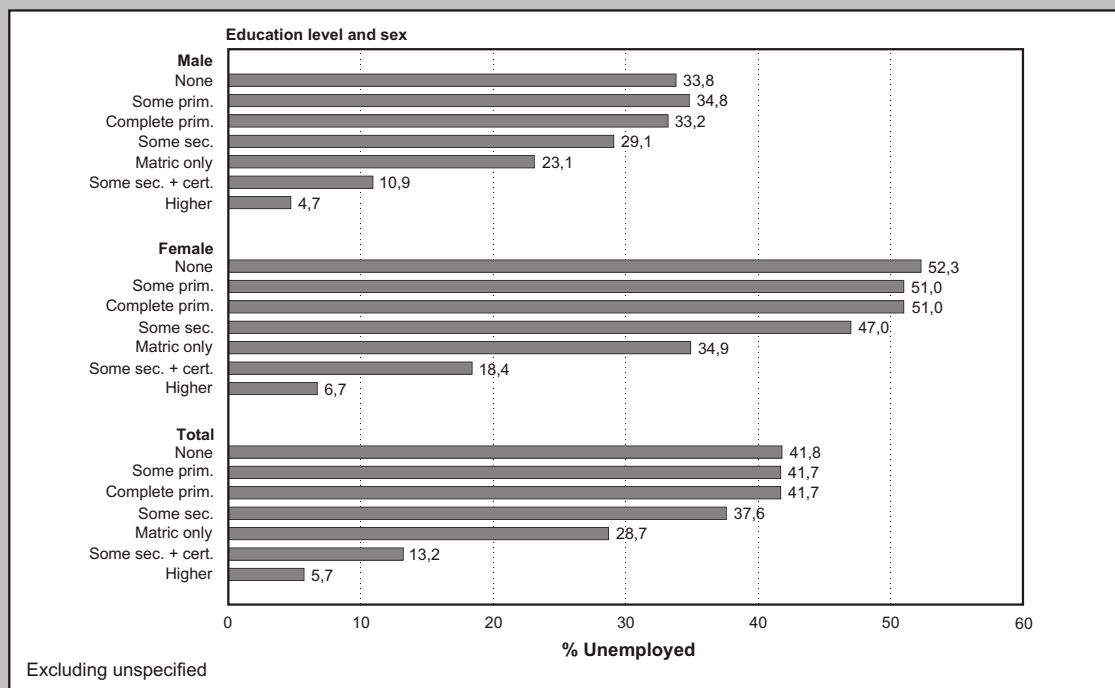


Unemployment and education

Education and gender had an impact on unemployment rates. Figure 6.4 below shows wide variations in unemployment rates between economically active male and female youth with similar education qualifications.

Proportionately fewer males than females across all educational levels indicated that they were unemployed in 1996.

Figure 6.4: Unemployment rate (expanded definition) of economically active youth by level of education and sex



While 33,8% of economically active male youth were unemployed, among females with similar educational status 52,3% were unemployed.

There is a difference of more than ten percentage points between the proportion of unemployed economically active male youth with matric only (23,1%) and their female counterparts (34,9%).

Implications

On average, the unemployment rate of 40,9% among youth in South Africa in October 1996 was high. Of the four population groups, Africans had the highest unemployment rate followed by coloureds.

Women in particular were highly affected by unemployment. Whereas about half (49,6%) of all young females who were economically active had no jobs, about 33,0% of young men were unemployed.

Such discrepancies also appeared between the provinces; for example Eastern Cape recorded an unemployment rate among youth of 55,6% while Western Cape recorded 22,3%.