



**FIRST DRAFT SECTOR SKILLS
PLAN
2026/27**

31 AUGUST 2025

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I. FOREWORD

The Wholesale and Retail Sector stands at a pivotal juncture. Structural inefficiencies, technological disruption, and rising socio-economic demands have converged to reshape the future of work and skills in our sector. This Draft Sector Skills Plan (SSP) offers a strategic and timely response, a roadmap that places skills development at the centre of sectoral renewal, enterprise resilience, and inclusive growth.

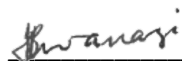
The sector continues to grapple with entrenched productivity challenges, worsened by a logistics crisis costing the economy an estimated R1 billion per day. Disruptions across freight, ports, and rail constrain trade flows and inflate operational costs. Coupled with a restrictive tariff regime, these dynamics deepen pressure on businesses, particularly SMMEs and informal traders. As the SSP shows, tackling these structural issues requires more than infrastructure upgrades, it demands a skills revolution aligned with systemic reform, innovation, and competitiveness. Our labour market realities are equally sobering. Persistent inequalities, youth unemployment, and regional disparities call for a shift towards district-based, locally responsive skills planning, fully aligned with the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP). Moreover, from urban Gauteng to rural provinces battling outmigration, the SSP proposes differentiated strategies that foster equity and economic inclusion.

We must stabilise foundational roles such as sales assistants and retail supervisors while preparing for a future defined by digital fluency, data-driven logistics, and sustainable retail practices. This dual focus responds to evolving sector needs and the NSDP's call for a skills system that is both agile and demand-led. At the same time, the SSP reflects the national policy emphasis on addressing youth unemployment and building social compacts that drive transformation through collaborative solutions. Equally, collaboration underpins this vision. The SSP highlights strategic partnerships with TVET and CET colleges, universities, industry bodies, and international stakeholders, including the establishment of Research Chairs and innovation hubs. These initiatives not only strengthen the sector's knowledge base, but also drive alignment with national priorities through evidence-led planning and sector intelligence.

In reaffirming our commitment to youth development, entrepreneurship, and the empowerment of marginalised groups, we envision a sector where every South African has access to meaningful economic opportunity. This plan also signals a decisive shift to outcomes-based planning under a robust Theory of Change, ensuring that our interventions are measurable, adaptive, and transformative.

This SSP is both a diagnostic and a declaration, an invitation to act. I urge all stakeholders to engage with its insights, align their efforts, and help build a workforce that is resilient, future-ready, and a driver of South Africa's inclusive economic recovery.

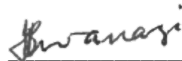
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Mr. Tom Mkhwanazi
 Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

01/08/2025

Date



Mr. Tom Mkhwanazi
 Accounting Authority

01/08/2025

Date

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The W&RSETA Sector Skills Plan has been developed in alignment with national plans such as the National Development Plan (NDP), National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and the Economic Reconstruction Recovery Plan (ERRP), among others. This plan aims to map out and plan for occupational skills needs in the wholesale and retail sectors. The executive summary highlights the key areas of the SSP as outlined in each chapter, noting the progress made in the annual update.

Chapter 1: highlights a sector overwhelmed by structural inefficiencies and logistical challenges, notably a deepening logistics crisis causing significant daily trade losses. While retail trade shows resilience, the wholesale and manufacturing-linked sub-sectors continue to contract, aggravating productivity losses and limiting sector agility. Employment instability and rising job discouragement coexist with persistent geographic and demographic inequities, emphasising the need for equity-centred workforce planning and leadership development to address uneven transformation.

Chapter 2 identifies a shift in skill demands driven by disruptive technologies and changing consumer behaviours. Emerging competencies such as digital fluency, e-commerce management, data analytics, and agile supply chain coordination are critical. However, existing training systems lag behind sector needs, hindered by misaligned curricula and limited workplace learning. The SETA's move towards modular, flexible learning pathways and district-level skills planning represents a necessary and innovative response to these challenges.

Chapter 3 reveals a dual imperative: stabilising foundational occupations like Sales Assistants and Retail Supervisors, which face retention and progression challenges, while simultaneously building advanced capabilities in emerging roles such as Cybersecurity Specialists and SHEQ Practitioners. Provincial disparities exacerbate skills shortages, with urban hubs competing for scarce digital talent and rural areas grappling with infrastructure deficits and youth outmigration. These findings underscore the urgency of regionally differentiated, demand-led skills planning and strengthened career guidance across the education system to support informed occupational choices and foster inclusive economic participation.

Chapter 4 emphasises the transformative role of strategic partnerships in driving sector renewal. Collaborations with entities like the NYDA and international programmes such as the China-South Africa e-commerce exchange extend the SETA's reach into global skills development arenas. The establishment of specialised Research Chairs linked to TVET and CET colleges decentralises research capacity and positions colleges as innovation hubs, enhancing sector responsiveness to both national priorities and local labour market conditions. Expanding formal international partnerships further reinforces this forward-looking orientation, despite the ongoing need to manage execution risks and maintain stakeholder alignment.

Chapter 5 reflects the SETA's operational maturation, demonstrated by surpassing targets in occupational learning, union capacitation, and strategic partnerships. Advances in addressing hard-to-fill vacancies and scaling research outputs mark progress towards demand-driven service delivery. Engagement with marginalised communities and informal enterprises aligns with national inclusion goals. The adoption of outcomes-based planning and a Theory of Change evidences a strategic commitment to impact measurement. Nevertheless, challenges remain in scaling 4IR qualifications and formalising informal businesses, highlighting areas for continuous improvement in delivery models and institutional capacity.

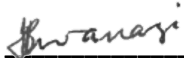
Finally, **Chapter 6 (SETA Strategic Priority Actions)**: The W&RSETA recommends interventions to address skills needs in the sector, derived from earlier chapters. This section will be reviewed and updated once fieldwork is completed.

This SSP identifies 7 key skills priorities for the W&R sector:

- 1. Advance the implementation of the Priority Skills Plan (PSP) through structured stakeholder engagement:** The Priority Skills Plan is intended to ensure that skills do not become a hindrance to economic growth and job creation. To guard against this, the SETA will identify key skills and occupations to support that will assist the labour market in the short term. Industry consultation to identify skills and develop priority skills necessary for economic growth and job creation within the digital economy.
- 2. Strengthen SMME, Cooperatives & Informal Traders Development for Inclusive Sector Growth:** These enterprises must be supported with skills development. Alternative and new training models, as well as more active engagement from SMMEs, are needed to meet the needs of SMMEs.
- 3. Address Youth Unemployment through Targeted Skills Development and Transition Pathways:** The retail sector provides significant temporary employment opportunities for the youth. The challenge is to convert these into permanent employment and encourage career development in the sector.
- 4. Enhance Responsiveness to Skills Demand and Supply:** The identification of Hard-To-Fill Vacancies (Occupational shortages) and skills gaps is a key deliverable of the SSP. This ensures that the SSP responds to the demands of the sector.
- 5. Drive the integration of Circular Economy principles (Green) to promote sustainable resource utilization:** The integration of circular economy principles in the wholesale and retail sectors fosters environmental sustainability, employment, entrepreneurship, and upskilling. By promoting circularity, we create job opportunities in specialised fields such as product repair and remanufacturing and enhance supply chain resilience by supporting local producers. Circular business models encourage entrepreneurial ventures in product leasing and resource recovery, transforming waste into valuable products. Upskilling initiatives focus on training in circular economy principles and developing entrepreneurial skills, driving economic growth while reducing environmental impact.
- 6. Advance Sector Transformation, including the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWD):** Despite progressive legislation and a commitment from the government, PWDs do not have the same opportunities as others. Therefore, the SETA needs to prioritise skills development interventions to improve access to training, education, and employment for PWD. The W&R sector remains untransformed. There is poor representation of Black, Indian, and Coloured individuals in top and senior management. The demographics of the sector (and broader country) are not reflected in the demographics of leadership positions.

7. **Align skills development with the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP):** The W&RSETA has undertaken several interventions to respond to the ERRP, including Capacitation Workshops and Trading Vouchers: ITAMED (Informal Traders and Micro Enterprises Development), Entrepreneurship Development Programme, SME Grant (Small and Micro Enterprise Grant).


Yours faithfully,



Mr. Tom Mkhwanazi
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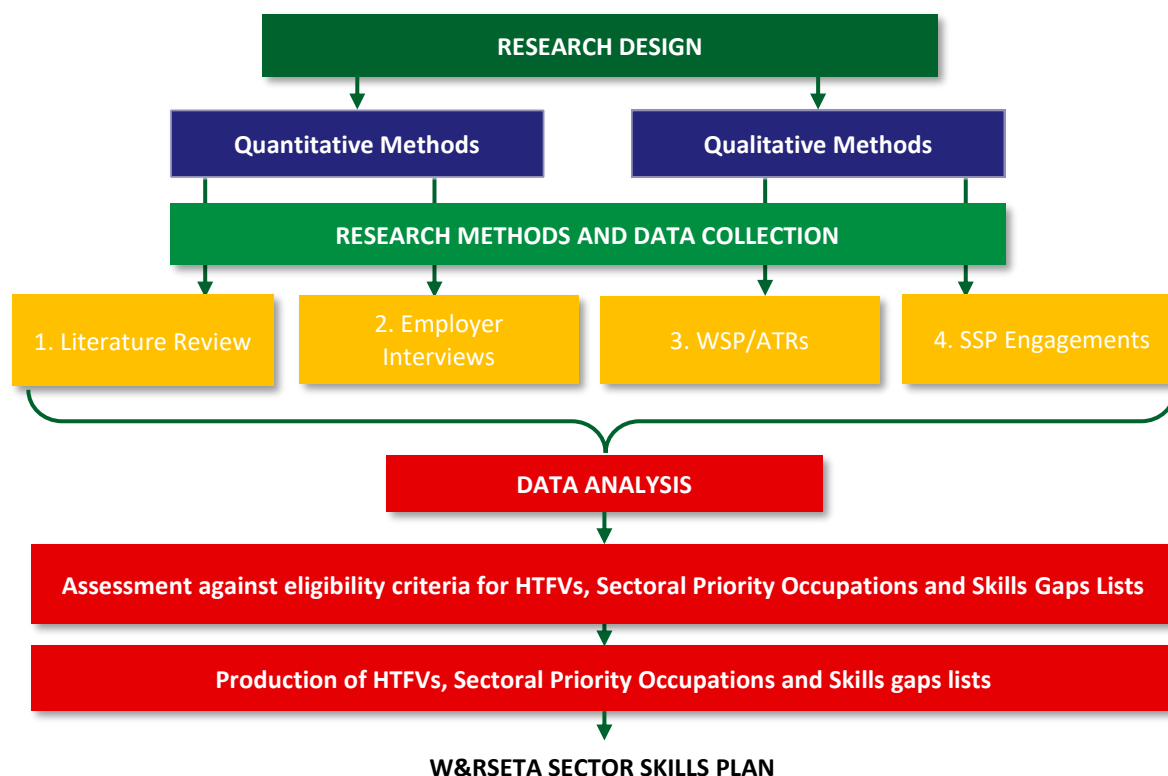
III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A multi-method research design was employed to develop the sector skills plan. This design uses qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect and analyse data for profiling the W&R sector, identifying change drivers, determining HTFVs, Skills Gaps, and Sectoral Priority Occupations, and devising skills development interventions.

Research Design and Methodology

The research design used for the SSP includes both qualitative and quantitative methods for research and data collection. Qualitative methods include relevant literature and responses from W&RSETA employer interviews. Quantitative methods entail WSP/ATR data (2023) and data obtained from SSP engagements with stakeholders within the W&R sector. The data obtained is then analysed and assessed against relevant eligibility criteria to form HTFVs, Sectoral Priority Occupation, and skills gaps lists. The different lists and data are used to create the relevant chapters of the Sector Skills Plan. The research design is as follows:

Figure 1: SSP Model/Research Methodology



i. Research Methodology

The research methodology used to determine critical, HTFVs and Sectoral Priority Occupations is intended to be inclusive, transparent, replicable, and simple to calculate. The methodology is designed to enable information to be incorporated year-on-year, without the need to redesign the process. By establishing a user-friendly framework for the identification and anticipation of HTFVs and Sectoral Priority Occupations, all companies, including micro-enterprises, participate in the research. The primary research methods used are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Primary Research Methods

Topic	Study design	Study objective	Data collection methods & tools	Sample size & Scope	Data sources & datasets	Time frame	Chapter informed
A comprehensive impact evaluation of W&RSETA strategic programmes: Towards addressing the imbalance (or not) between skills supply and demand	Mixed method	The primary aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of W&RSETA’s strategic skills development programmes in the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa, with a focus on workforce readiness, employability, and sectoral transformation.	Survey questionnaire (electronic/ online) Interview questions (virtual/ online interviews and focus groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bursary Recipients (2020–2024)- 103 total survey responses received • Industry Experts & Programme Coordinators- 5 e-focus groups (6–8 participants per group) • Approx 140 individuals engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W&RSETA Database: Beneficiary records (2020–2024), • Survey Dataset • Focus Group Transcripts • W&RSETA Programme Records 	Aug ' 24 - Mar ' 25	Chapters 3, 5 and 6
Technology Adoption in the South African Wholesale and Retail Sector: Strategies and Practices	Quantitative	Assess the extent and nature of adoption of 4IR and 5IR technologies within South Africa’s Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector, with a comparative perspective drawn from selected international cases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative Case Analysis • Semi-Structured Interviews • Desktop Research Interview • Questions (virtual/ online interviews and focus groups) 	<p>Total participants: 29 organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large enterprises: 19 - Medium-sized enterprises: 5 - Small enterprises: 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary data from direct interviews and FGDs with professionals in the W&R sector • Secondary data through desktop research, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - W&RSETA databases and sector reports. - Published academic and industry studies on 4IR/5IR technologies. - Global benchmarking reports (e.g., McKinsey, IDC, Gartner). 	June 24 ' 07 -November 24	Chapters 3, 5 and 6

Topic	Study design	Study objective	Data collection methods & tools	Sample size & Scope	Data sources & datasets	Time frame	Chapter informed
Unemployed W&RSETA-funded Beneficiaries – Tracer Study	Mixed method	This research investigated the effectiveness of W&R SETA training programmes in South Africa, analysing graduate employment rates, self-employment creation, and employer experiences to identify areas for improvement and propose a model to boost graduate success.	Survey questionnaire (electronic/ online) Interview questions (virtual/ online interviews and focus groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 243 Retailing graduates (placement programme participants) • 5 South African HEIs (graduate placement participating institutions, this included engagements with university staff e.g. financial aid office, departmental lecturers) 	In-person and targeted online group engagements were held with HEIs and employers from industries like FMCG, clothing, and fuel retail. The largest retailer focus group was in KZN.	Jan ' 24 -May ' 24	Chapters 3, 5 and 6
Transformation to advance business sustainability and resilience, with a focus on building entrepreneurship	Mixed method	This study explored business sustainability and resilience, focusing on entrepreneurship and skills improvement in the W&R Sector. It highlighted how resilient enterprises recover from shocks and sustain operations. Key traits of successful entrepreneurs include clear vision, resource networks, and technology adoption.	Survey questionnaire (electronic/ online) Interview questions (virtual/ online interviews and focus groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 261 Retailing graduates (placement programme participants) • 5 South African HEIs (graduate placement participating institutions, this included engagements with university staff e.g. financial aid office, departmental lecturers) • 30 Employers (companies participating in the placement programme, engagements with the programme managers). 	In-person and targeted online group engagements were held with HEIs and employers from industries like FMCG, clothing, and fuel retail. The largest retailer focus group was in KZN.	Aug ' 23 - Mar ' 24	Chapters 3 and 6
Impact Evaluation Tool: Beneficiaries of W&RSETA Programmes	Quantitative	The study aimed to assess the socio-economic status of bursars, graduate placements, and learnership recipients, evaluate the return on investment, and determine the programmes' effectiveness in improving employment prospects in the Wholesale and Retail sector. It provided data-driven insights to enhance future programme implementation and strengthen W&RSETA's responsiveness to labour market developments.	Survey questionnaire (electronic/ online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 608 Beneficiaries (bursars, graduates, and learnership recipients) 	Targeted Online Survey	Nov ' 22 - Aug ' 23	Chapter 3, 5 and 6

Topic	Study design	Study objective	Data collection methods & tools	Sample size & Scope	Data sources & datasets	Time frame	Chapter informed
A Pilot Exploration of Challenges Encountered by Retail Bursary Recipients in Higher Education Institutions	Mixed method	To explore challenges encountered by retail bursary recipients and examine dropout among these students.	In-depth, semi-structured interviews	• 20 Bursary recipients (unemployed Learners)	In-person and targeted online group engagements with students.	Sep '24	Chapter 3, 5 and 6
Skills for the Future	Mixed method	This research explores the future of retail jobs in South Africa, focusing on the new skills required due to technological changes. It assesses the W&R SETA's strategies to address these evolving needs and proposes a new model to help the W&R SETA develop future skills and keep the South African retail sector at the forefront.	Survey questionnaire (electronic/ online) Interview questions (virtual/ online interviews and focus groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 101 Beneficiaries of the W&R SETA Funding support • 5 South African HEIs (Universities and TVET colleges) • 30 Employers (companies participating in the placement programme) 	In-person and targeted online group engagements were held with HEIs and employers from industries like FMCG, clothing, and fuel retail. The largest retailer focus group was in KZN.	Nov '23 - Jan '24	Chapter 3

In addition to the above, the following primary research studies commissioned by the W&RSETA were reviewed as part of the process to strengthen the evidence base of the Sector Skills Plan (SSP). These studies covered a wide range of strategic themes, including post-COVID-19 technology adoption, township retail development, merchandising challenges, food safety competencies, workforce empowerment, bursary programme effectiveness, and waste management practices. Each of these studies provided sector-specific insights that enriched the understanding of shifting occupational demands, institutional capabilities, and workforce transformation needs within the wholesale and retail sector.

The findings from these studies were particularly useful in refining the SSP's approach to priority occupations, learning pathways, and programme responsiveness. They contributed to the identification of structural gaps in digital skills readiness, frontline workforce development, and environmental compliance areas increasingly critical for sector sustainability. Additionally, the insights from research on career mobility, equity in funding programmes, and informal economy integration supported more nuanced interventions aimed at enhancing inclusion, enterprise competitiveness, and alignment with broader national priorities such as the ERRP, NSDP, and NDP.

These research inputs were triangulated with key secondary datasets, including Stats SA's Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Trading Economics indicators, DHET's HEMIS data, and the 2025/26 WSP and ATR submissions to validate trends and ensure consistency across data points. This integration of primary and secondary evidence reinforced the SSP's analytical rigour, enabling the SETA to adopt a more demand-led, future-facing planning approach. Ultimately, the inclusion of these studies reflects the SETA's strategic commitment to research-informed decision-making and to ensuring that its skills development interventions remain contextually relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of the wholesale and retail sector.

ii. Data Analysis and Findings

Sector Profile (Chapter 1): Data from the literature review and WSP/ATR (2025/26) were used to construct the sector profile.

The following are some of the data used in this chapter:

- Statistics South Africa reports (incl. Gross Domestic Product: Fourth Quarter 2024/25).
- QLFS Q1 (2025/26).
- Statistical Release: Retail Trade Sales.
- Statistical Release: Wholesale Trade Sales.
- Draft W&RSETA Annual Report (2024/25).

Key Skills Change Drivers (Chapter 2): Data from the literature review and workshops were used to identify key skills issues, sector change drivers and alignment to National Strategy and Plans.

Occupational Shortages and Skills Gaps (Chapter 3): Data from the literature review, interviews and provincial engagements, WSP/ATR (2025/26) and HTFV survey used to establish HTFVs Sectoral Priority Occupations and skills gaps. The post-school education and training monitor report and TVETMIS and DHET National Examinations databases report are used as part of providing an analysis of the nature of supply.

SETA Partnerships (Chapter 4): Information gathered through an analysis of the existing and planned partnerships. The sector value chain analysis is being conducted as part of strengthening the outcomes and impact of W&RSETA partnerships.

SETA Monitoring and Evaluation (Chapter 5): An overview of W&R SETA's monitoring and evaluation approach towards improving performance and implementation of strategic priorities. The following are data sources used in updating this chapter:

1. Annual Report
2. Annual Performance Plan (APP)
3. M&E Framework
4. ERRP Survey Tool

SETA Prioritisation Skills Priority Actions (Chapter 6): This information from chapters one to five is consolidated in chapter six as findings and recommendations. The National Skill Development Plan (NSDP) outcomes are prioritised in the first year of implementation and are also reflected. The SETA strategic priorities are reflected in key priorities in the Integrated Development Plans. Below are the priority skills action:

1. Advance the implementation of the Priority Skills Plan (PSP) through structured stakeholder engagement
2. Strengthen SMME, Cooperatives & Informal Traders Development for Inclusive Sector Growth
3. Address Youth Unemployment through Targeted Skills Development and Transition Pathways
4. Enhance Responsiveness to Skills Demand and Supply
5. Drive the integration of Circular Economy principles (Green) to promote sustainable resource utilization
6. Advance Sector Transformation, including the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)
7. Align skills development with the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)

ACRONYMS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training	NDP	National Development Plan
AG	Auditor General	NEPF	National Evaluation Policy Framework
AI	Artificial Intelligence	NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
APP	Annual Performance Plan	NSF	National Skills Fund
AR	Annual Report	NTA	Namibia Training Authority
ATR	Annual Training Report	NMU	Nelson Mandela University
CEO	Chief Executive Officer	OFO	Organising Framework for Occupations
CET	Community Education and Training	PDI	Previously Disadvantaged Individual
CGCSA	Consumer Goods Council of South Africa	PLP	Pre-Vocational Training Programme
CHE	Council for Higher Education	POPIA	Protection of Personal Information Act
CoS	Centres of Specialisation	PPI	Producer Price Index
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019	PSET	Post-School Education and Training
CPI	Consumer Price Index	PSP	Priority Skills Plan
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research	PWD	People with Disabilities
CUT	Central University of Technology	QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
DG	Discretionary Grant	QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Statistics
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training	QPR	Quarterly Performance Reports
EEA	Employment Equity Act	RA	Retailers Association
ERRP	Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan	RMDP	Retail Management Development Programme
ETAR	End-Term Assessment Report	ROI	Return on Investment
FRA	Fuel Retailers Association South Africa	RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	SA	South Africa
Gen Z	Generation Z	SARS	South African Revenue Services
GETC	General Education and Training Certificate	SASQAF	South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework
GWMES	Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation	SDF	Skills Development Fund
HDI	Historically Disadvantaged Individuals	SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
HEI	Higher Education Institutes	SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System	SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
HET	Higher Education and Training	SME	Small and Micro Enterprises
HR	Human Resources	SMME	Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises
HTFV	Hard-To-Fill Vacancy	SSP	Sector Skills Programme
ICT	Information and Communication Technology	STATSSA	Statistics South Africa
ILDLP	International Leadership Development Programme	TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
IT	Information Technology	TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ITAMED	Informal Traders and Micro Enterprises Development	UJ	University of Johannesburg
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal	UNIZULU	University of Zululand
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation	W&R	Wholesale and Retail
MG	Mandatory Grant	W&RSETA	Wholesale and Retail SETA
MoM	Month-on-Month	WBL	Work-place Based Learning
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding	WIL	Work Integrated Learning
MTAR	Mid-Term Assessment Report	WP-PSET	White Paper for Post-School Education and Training
NC(V)	National Certificate (Vocational)	WSP	Workplace Skills Plan

1. CHAPTER ONE: SECTOR PROFILE

1.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the sector profile of the Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector, examining its size, scope, key role players, economic performance, and employer and labour market profile. Additionally, it provides a detailed economic outlook of the sector, concluding with implications for skills development. The input and research for this section include a literature review (such as reports on sector trends), data from the Workplace Skills Plan (WSP) and Annual Training Report (ATR), and statistical data released by Statistics South Africa.

1.2. Scope of Coverage

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) was established in 2000, in terms of the *Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 (as amended)*. This public entity is responsible for supporting skills development in the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector of South Africa through the implementation of learning programmes, disbursement of grants and monitoring of education and training as outlined in the Act, accompanying regulations and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP). The Wholesale trade deals with the bulk buying of goods from various manufacturers and the breaking down of this bulk into smaller quantities, which are then sold directly to consumers. *Retail* trade deals with the buying of goods from the wholesaler and selling of such goods to the consumer. The activities that fall within the scope of the wholesale and retail sector are demarcated according to Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. The scope of coverage of the W&RSETA in terms of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 is as follows:

Figure 2: Scope of Coverage

SIC Code	Trade Category
Major Division 6: Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles, Motorcycles and Personal and Household Goods; Hotels and Restaurants	
61000	Wholesale and commission trade, except for motor vehicles and motorcycles
61100	Wholesale trade on a fee or contract basis
61200	Wholesale trade in agricultural raw materials, livestock, food, beverages, and tobacco
61220	Wholesale trade in food, beverages, and tobacco
61310	Wholesale trade in textiles, clothing, and footwear
61391	Wholesale trade in household furniture requisites and appliances
61392	Wholesale trade in books and stationery
61393	Wholesale trade in precious stones, jewellery, and silverware
61394	Wholesale trade in pharmaceuticals, toiletries, and medical equipment
61420	Wholesale trade in metal and metal ores
61430	Wholesale trade in construction materials, hardware, plumbing and heating equipment
61501	Office machinery and equipment, including computers
61509	Other Machinery

SIC Code	Trade Category
61510	Sale of new parts and accessories excluding the retail sale of new motor vehicle parts and accessories
61901	General wholesale trade
61909	Other wholesale trade not elsewhere classified (nec)
Retail	
62000	Retail trade, except for motor vehicles and motorcycles; repair of personal and household goods
62110	Retail trade in non-specialised stores with food, beverages, and tobacco predominating
62190	Other retail sale in non-specialised stores
62201	Retail trade in fresh fruit and vegetables
62201	Retail trade in fresh fruit and vegetable
62202	Retail trade in meat and meat products
62203	Retail trade in bakery products
62204	Retail trade of beverages (bottle stores)
62209	Other retail trade in food, beverages, and tobacco (n.e.c)
62311	Retail of non-specialised medicines and pharmaceutical products other than pharmacists
62321	Retail trade in men's and boy's clothing
62322	Retail trade in ladies' and girls' clothing
62323	Retail trade by general outfitters and by dealers in piece goods, textiles, leather and travel accessories.
62324	Retail trade in shoes
62330	Retail trade in household furniture appliances, articles and equipment
62340	Retail trade-in hardware, paints and glass
62391	Retail trade in reading matter stationery
62392	Retail trade in jewellery, watches and clocks
62393	Retail trade in sports goods and entertainment requisites
62399	Retail Trade by other specialised stores
62400	Retail Trade in second hand good stores
63122	Retail sale of used motor vehicles
63310	Sale of new parts and accessories
63311	Sale of new tyres
63500	Retail sale of Automotive fuel
65000	Selling and retail of new plastic bags and plastic products
65001	Selling of Garage equipment
65002	Retail of baby clothing
65003	Retail of wooden doors
65004	Retail of beauty products
65005	Sale of marine equipment and everything to do with boats
65006	Retail of packing material

Source (Government Notice, No. 42589, Government Gazette, 22 July 2019)

1.3. Key Role Players

The following table provides the key role players in the Wholesale and Retail Sector, along with their roles and expertise:

Table 2: Key Role Players in The Wholesale and Retail Sector

Key Role Players	Roles & Areas of Expertise	NSDP Outcomes Alignment	ERRP Alignment	MTDP Linkages
Organised Employer		Outcome 1: Identify and increase production of occupations in high demand Outcome 2: Linking education and the workplace	Intervention One: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retailers Association (RA) • Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) • National Clothing Retail Federation (NCRF) • Black Business Council (BBC) • Enterprise Mentorship of South Africa (EMOSA) • Business Unity South Africa (BUSA) • Fuel Retailers Association (FRA) • South African Petroleum Retailers Association Retail Motor Industry Organisation • Wholesale & retail enterprises (small, medium & large) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represented equally on the committees of the W&RSETA • Represent & articulate employer (small, medium, & large) interests • Contribute to education & training, negotiations, marketing, finance, human resources & legal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging workplaces to enable them to provide increasingly relevant data on the skills of their existing workforce as well as projected skills needs, through relevant templates. • Engaging stakeholders (including but not limited to employers, labour, and government) to ascertain their perceptions of future trends in their sectors and the implications of these for the demand and supply interventions signals to steer the supply of skills. • Continuously exploring the implications of the findings from the workplace data and stakeholder engagement concerning sector trends and national policy priorities; and effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement to support ownership and participation among stakeholders which include social partners, individuals, employers, labour, providers, prospective learners, and the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating with employers to identify reskilling priorities and ensure demand-led occupational training pathways. • Supporting enterprise development by aligning skills supply with the needs of key retail subsectors, informal traders, and e-commerce platforms. • Contributing to sectoral recovery through workplace learning interventions that respond to COVID-19 disruptions and digital transition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informing provincial and national skills planning frameworks through structured employer insights and participation. • Mobilising employers to engage in joint strategic partnerships that support inclusive economic participation and employment growth. • Fostering employer-driven innovation for building a more competitive and agile retail workforce.
Training Providers		Outcome 4: Increase access to occupationally directed programmes Outcome 5: Support the growth of the public college system	Intervention One: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes:	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further Education & Training Committee; Higher Education & Training Committee • Association of Private Providers of Education Training & Development • Southern African Society for Cooperative Education • Universities • TVET Colleges • Private Training Providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Represent interests of training providers (public & private) • Contribute to education & training, quality assurance, & curriculum development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivering programmes across all sub-frameworks that support economic growth, job creation, & social development for workers, unemployed, & students • Facilitating workplace-based experience as part of qualifications, focusing on growth-supporting & employment-creating occupations • Supporting & prioritising CoS where possible. • Supporting TVET colleges in implementing occupationally directed programmes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting pathways to learning by increasing access to relevant qualifications across rural, urban, and peri-urban retail ecosystems. • Aligning post-school programmes with sector recovery efforts by prioritising qualifications for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing education-to-employment pathways through integrated curriculum design and collaboration with employers and SETA. • Supporting public college revitalisation by embedding occupational relevance and

Key Role Players	Roles & Areas of Expertise	NSDP Outcomes Alignment	ERRP Alignment	MTDP Linkages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Colleges 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forming partnerships with HEI & research institutions for an evidence-based understanding of skills demand & supply 	entry-level, digital, and green skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening provider readiness for blended and digital delivery modes in line with sector evolution. 	work readiness into delivery. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contributing to an adaptive skills ecosystem that supports national goals of inclusive growth and localised development.
Organised Labour		Outcome 7: Encourage and support worker-initiated training	Intervention One: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes:	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) Southern African Clothing & Textiles Workers Union (SACTWU) South African Commercial, Catering & Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU) Federal Council of Retail Allied Workers (FEDCRAW) Development Institute for Training, Support & Education for Labour (DITSEL) Entertainment Catering Commercial & Allied Workers Union (ECCAWUSA) National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (NUMSA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represented equally on the committees of the W&RSETA Represent & articulate worker interests Contribute to education & training, negotiations, public management & dispute resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skills levy institutions will work with trade unions in their sectors in identifying the required skills needs, especially in better understanding the sectors & implementing the relevant interventions Engaging stakeholders (including but not limited to employers, labour, & government) to ascertain their perceptions of future trends in their sectors & the implications of these for the demand & supply interventions signals to steer the supply of skills Trade unions & worker education & training initiatives to use the critical networks of their organisations (e.g., shop stewards & union officials) to educate their members & other workers to suit their needs and benefit the economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting just transition and decent work by enabling skills development for workers vulnerable to job displacement. Enhancing worker agency in transformation efforts through structured training and worker-led learning initiatives. Advancing social dialogue for consensus building in developing sector skills strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcing participatory sector governance by embedding organised labour in W&RSETA governance structures. Promoting worker inclusion in decision-making related to skills development and transformation planning. Strengthening pathways for re-skilling displaced workers, women, and youth in vulnerable segments of the retail sector.
W&RSETA Board		Outcome 3: Improving the level of skills in the South African workforce	Intervention One: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes:	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> W&RSETA Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To govern & control the W&RSETA by providing strategic direction & leadership To provide corporate governance guidance. To approve the W&RSETA SSP To approve the SP & budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the governance oversight, monitoring & evaluation mechanisms & capacity, with strong social partners' involvement Ensure actions are taken based on monitoring & evaluation findings to understand system strengths, challenges, & impacts Review the system when evidence shows obstacles to achieve agreed-upon outcomes, allowing the Minister to address non-performance or maladministration Introduce mechanisms for the Minister to direct SETAs when challenges arise Review the SETA Standard Constitution to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing institutional accountability and programme responsiveness to national economic priorities. Monitoring effectiveness of sector-wide recovery and development initiatives through real-time data use and evaluation. Strengthening coordination and accountability to drive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing evidence-based oversight and guidance to ensure strategic planning aligns with national and provincial targets. Driving alignment of sector skills interventions with public employment and enterprise development goals. Supporting adaptive governance models that

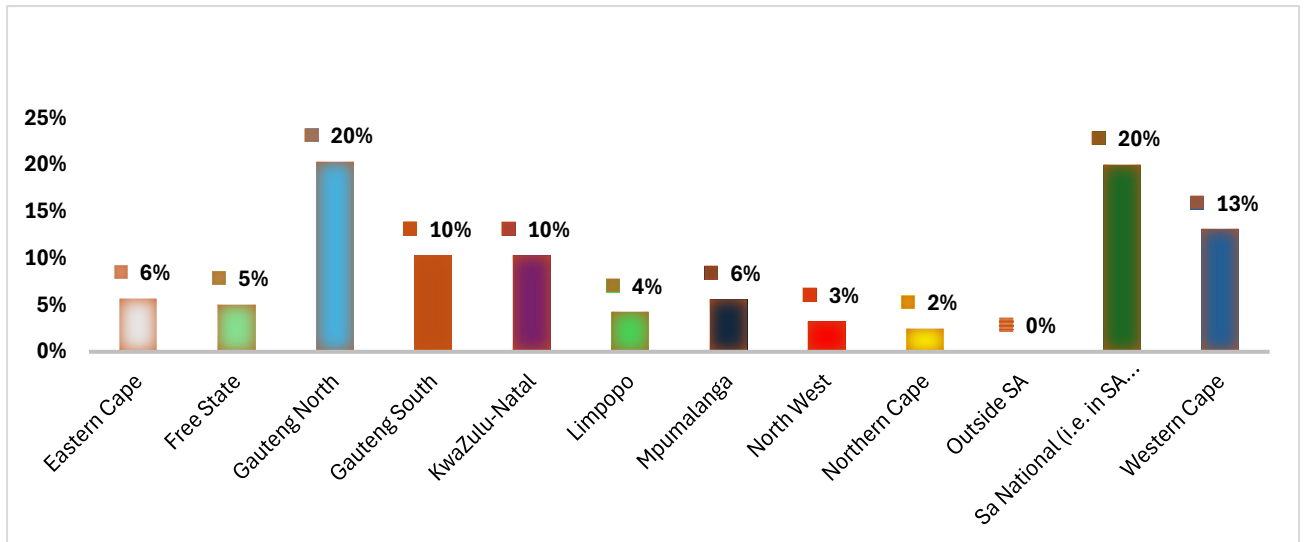
Sector Skills Plan (SSP): 2026/27

Key Role Players	Roles & Areas of Expertise	NSDP Outcomes Alignment	ERRP Alignment	MTDP Linkages
		<p>strengthen governance & accountability, considering sector nature & sub-sectors for effective decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define roles & responsibilities of the accounting authority, including conflict of interest policies, meeting guidelines, & remuneration rates 	<p>delivery of results and course-correct where necessary.</p>	<p>enable the W&RSETA to respond to future uncertainties.</p>
<p>Communities</p>		<p>Outcome 6: Skills development support for entrepreneurship and cooperative development Outcome 8: Support career development services</p>	<p>Intervention four: Access to targeted skills programmes</p> <p>Intervention seven: Retraining/up-skilling of employees to preserve jobs.</p>	<p>Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> South African Community at large 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represent interests of communities & co-operatives Contribute to education & training, small enterprise & co-operative development, & advancement of women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social partners will continue to play an active role, amongst others, in SETA Accounting Authorities & the NSA, these roles will be further elaborated in the Act & relevant Regulations with key responsibility for the implementation of the NSDP Career development services (including material) must be accessible to all, especially in rural areas & targeted beneficiaries Ensure that prospective learners & the public are aware of when & how to apply for programmes & have access to a simplified process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catalysing rural and township economies through skills support for micro-enterprises and informal traders. Enabling entrepreneurship and self-employment as key pillars of post-COVID recovery in underserved communities. Driving equitable access to learning by bringing SETA-funded programmes closer to communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empowering marginalised communities to access retail value chains through training and cooperative development. Supporting the creation of new economic actors and inclusive growth through targeted skills investment. Enhancing community-led innovation in retail distribution, logistics, and customer services sectors.

1.4. Employer Profile

As of 2025, there are 155,077 employers operating in South Africa’s wholesale and retail sector, reflecting the sector’s significant role in the national economy. A closer look at the levy data reveals that the sector is overwhelmingly composed of small enterprises (0–49 employees), which account for 62,475 employers or roughly 40% of the total. The below is gives a provincial comparison of employer profile.

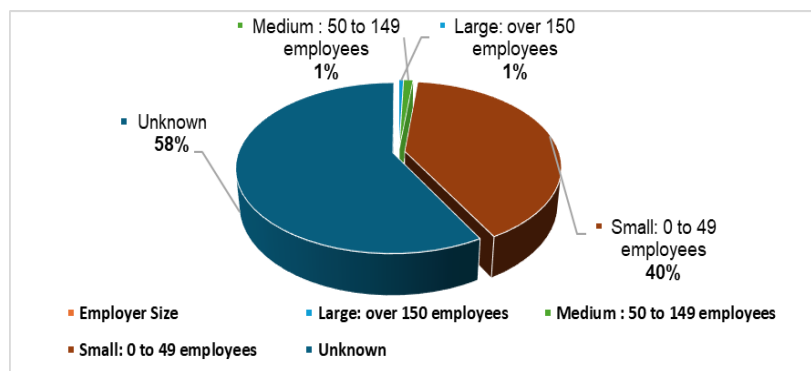
Figure 3: Employer provincial distribution



Source: SARS Levy data 2025

The above reveals significant concentration in key economic regions. Gauteng North (20%), SA National (20%), and Western Cape (13%) together account for over half of the sector, underscoring the dominance of metropolitan and urban centres in driving retail activity. Moreover, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng South, each at 10%, further reinforce the trend toward urban economic clustering. In contrast, provinces such as Northern Cape (2%), North West (3%), and Limpopo (4%) show relatively low representation, pointing to limited sector penetration and possible barriers to growth in rural and underserved areas. A notable concern is the high proportion (20%) of employers categorised under 'SA National', which refers to employers not linked to a specific province. This is largely attributed to administrative limitations in levy data, where employer records often lack updated or complete geographic information. Furthermore, it is imperative to also explore this picture by employee size, the below figure gives this highlight.

Figure 4: Employer distribution by size

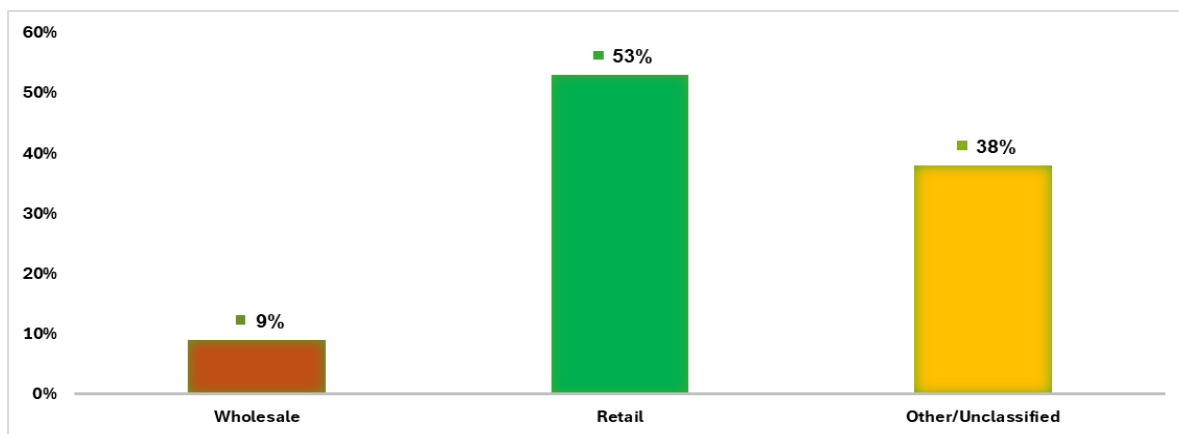


Source: SARS Levy data 2025

The above reveals a structure heavily dominated by small enterprises (0–49 employees), which constitute a significant portion of the overall employer base. Medium-sized (50–149 employees) and especially large employers (over 150 employees) account for a relatively small share in terms of numbers. However, while large employers are few, they contribute a substantial portion of the skills development levies. Again a concerning feature is the high number of employers classified under “unknown” size, pointing to gaps already stated earlier in registration, business profiling, or data integration systems.

Furthermore, from a sub sector perspective retail dominates with 53% of all employers, highlighting its central role in driving economic activity, consumer engagement, and employment. In contrast, wholesale accounts for only 9%, suggesting a more limited footprint, likely due to its capital-intensive nature and smaller number of large-scale operators. The sizeable 38% classified as “other/unclassified” points to a significant gap in employer categorization, which may include informal businesses, mixed operations. There is also element highlighted above attributed to administrative limitations in levy data.

Figure 5: Employer profile subsector distribution



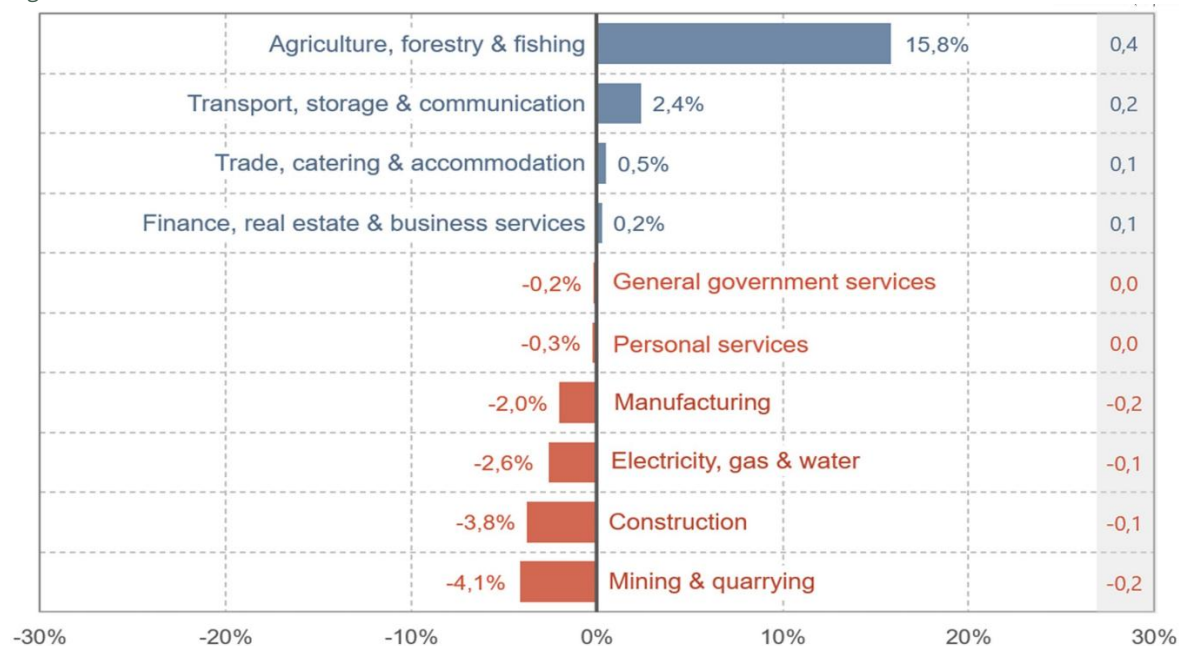
Source: SARS Levy data 2025

1.5. Labour Market Analysis

1.5.1 Economic Performance

This section provides an economic profile of the Wholesale and Retail (W&R) Sector, offering critical context for informed planning and skills development. South Africa’s economic landscape in early 2025 presents a mixed trajectory. In Q1 2025, South Africa’s economy recorded marginal growth of 0.1%, slowing notably from the 0.6% expansion in Q4 2024. This modest gain was largely underpinned by a 15.8% surge in agriculture, driven by favourable rainfall that boosted horticulture and animal production. Moreover, without agriculture, GDP would have contracted by 0.3%, reflecting underlying economic fragility. Positive contributions also came from the transport, storage, and communication sector, which benefited from improved land and air transport activity. On the demand side, household consumption, modestly stronger exports, and inventory drawdowns helped maintain economic momentum. The trade, catering, and accommodation industry a key employer within the wholesale and retail sector grew by 0.5%, reflecting increased activity in retail trade, motor sales, accommodation, and food services. (Statsa, 2025).

Figure 6: Performance of South Africa



Source: StatsSA Gross Domestic Product Q1:2025

Furthermore, several sectors continue to underperform. The mining sector contracted by 4.1%, driven by significant declines in platinum group metals, coal, gold, and copper. Manufacturing declined by 2.0%, particularly in petroleum and chemicals, food and beverages, and automotive production. In addition, only three manufacturing sub-sectors textiles and clothing, paper and publishing, and communication equipment recorded growth. The re-emergence of load shedding after nearly a year of stability further disrupted output, contributing to a 2.6% decline in electricity, gas, and water supply, the sharpest drop since Q3 2022. It becomes obvious that these structural inefficiencies continue to constrain industrial recovery and inhibit job creation in sectors critical to upstream supply chains within wholesale and retail, such as warehousing, logistics, and processing.
















1.5.2 W&R Sector Economic Performance

South Africa's retail trade sector continues to demonstrate resilience amid economic volatility. In Q4 2024, retail trade sales grew by 2.1%, primarily driven by general dealers and clothing and textile retailers. While this momentum accelerated in February 2025 with a 3.9% year-on-year increase, led by significant gains in textiles, clothing, footwear, and leather goods (15.7%) and general dealers (3.4%), growth moderated to 1.5% in March 2025 suggesting persistent, even though tempered, consumer activity. Despite this growth, segments such as food, beverages, and household goods showed declines, reflecting shifts in consumer spending. The motor trade sector also experienced gains during the quarter, contributing positively to overall economic performance. Similarly, rail passenger transport, tourist accommodation, and rail freight reported annual improvements, pointing to a broader, though uneven economic recovery (StatsSA, 2025).

The manufacturing sector contracted by 0.6% in Q4, reflecting reduced output in key sub-sectors such as metals, machinery, and motor vehicles (StatsSA, 2025). Mining also remained subdued, with weaker production in manganese and iron ore, while gains in platinum group metals and coal were insufficient to reverse the overall downturn. These trends reflect broader structural and operational constraints across value chains. The sustained contraction in both wholesale trade and manufacturing points to entrenched inefficiencies and systemic supply chain vulnerabilities. A key aggravating factor is South Africa's ongoing logistics crisis, which is estimated to cost the country R1 billion in trade losses daily.

This staggering figure highlights the scale of infrastructural bottlenecks undermining economic recovery, raising the cost of doing business, eroding investor confidence, and limiting the sector’s ability to respond to shifting demand patterns (Ministry Transport, 2025) The chart below tells this story.

Figure 7: Analysis of Economic Indicators: Trends Analysis

	y/y percentage change			m/m percentage change			3-month Dec-Feb
	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	
Mining production 	-2,6	-1,5	-9,6	-4,2	0,0	-4,4	-6,7
Manufacturing production 	-1,2	-3,2	-3,2	-2,3	0,4	0,3	-2,3
Electricity generation 	3,6	5,7	0,4	-1,6	0,4	-2,5	-2,1
Buildings completed (value) 	-1,0	-20,0	0,9	-3,3	-33,5	17,9	-15,6
Wholesale trade sales 	0,2	-0,8	-6,6	2,2	0,3	-1,2	0,9
Retail trade sales 	3,1	7,0	3,9	0,0	0,7	-1,3	1,3
Motor trade sales 	-4,0	0,3	-5,2	1,6	0,4	-2,4	1,7
Income from tourist accommodation 	12,8	16,6	12,2	-0,3	3,7	-1,7	1,9
Restaurants, catering & fast-food income 	-0,9	3,3	-0,5	1,3	-1,1	1,1	0,5
Rail transport: Freight payload 	2,2	7,2	6,8	5,1	0,9	1,0	4,6
Road transport: Freight payload 	-8,9	-7,0	-6,9	-0,4	2,0	0,2	1,4
Rail transport: Passenger journeys 	77,4	69,9	46,7	3,9	0,4	-5,4	1,3
Road transport: Passenger journeys 	-8,5	0,0	-6,6	3,6	7,0	-6,9	1,1
	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	
Consumer Price Index (CPI) 	3,2	3,2	2,7	0,3	0,9	0,4	
Producer Price Index (PPI) 	1,1	1,0	0,5	0,5	0,4	0,6	

Source: StatsSA Gross Domestic Product Q4:2024

Looking ahead, the retail industry is projected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.3% between 2025 and 2031. This growth trajectory is expected to be driven by a rising middle class, rapid urbanisation, and ongoing digital transformation across value chains. These drivers are reshaping how retailers engage consumers, optimise supply chains, and deliver experiences. However, this growth is not without challenges (Research, 2025). Moreover, the entrance of global retail giants such as Amazon into the South African market has intensified competition, forcing local players to rethink their business models. To remain viable and competitive, domestic retailers will need to adopt strategic innovations, enhance value differentiation, and invest in personalised, localised customer engagement strategies (Ferreira, 2025).

1.5.3 Key Growth Rates in Retail Trades South Africa

Furthermore, the latest retail trade sales data (December 2024 – February 2025) paints a compelling picture of consumer demand patterns and shifting retail dynamics in South Africa. Total sales grew by 6.0% year-on-year, rising from R370.6 billion to R392.9 billion. General dealers who hold the largest share of retail trade at 47.2% led this growth with a 6.6% increase, contributing 3.1 percentage points to the overall change. Notably, textiles, clothing, footwear, and leather goods posted the strongest individual growth at 11.1%, underscoring continued consumer preference for apparel and fashion-related goods; this segment alone contributed 1.8 percentage points to the overall sales increase.

Pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and toiletries also recorded solid growth (6.6%), likely reflecting consistent consumer spending on health and wellness, while food, beverages, and tobacco in specialised stores grew modestly by 4.2%. In contrast, hardware, paint, and glass retailers showed no growth, and household furniture and appliances saw only marginal gains (2.6%), pointing to subdued

consumer interest in durable goods, possibly due to tighter credit conditions or waning housing market activity. These trends suggest an economy where consumers continue to prioritise essentials and personal goods, while discretionary spending on big-ticket or home-related items remains cautious. For the wholesale and retail sector, the data signals clear areas for strategic investment, particularly in fashion, health, and general merchandise, while also highlighting the need for adaptive strategies in underperforming segments (Statssa, 2025).

Table 3: Retail trade sales at current prices for the latest three months by type of retailer

Type of retailer	Dec 2023 -Feb 2024 (R million)	Weight (%)	Dec 2024 – Feb 2025 (R million)	% change between Dec 2023 – Feb 2024 and Dec 2024 – Feb 2025	Contribution (% points) to the total % change
General dealers	174 732	47,2	186 272	6,6	3,1
Food, beverages and tobacco in specialized stores	31 468	8,5	32 796	4,2	0,4
Pharmaceuticals and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries	27 351	7,4	29 169	6,6	0,5
Textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods	61 049	16,5	67 801	11,1	1,8
Household furniture, appliances and equipment	13 116	3,5	13 458	2,6	0,1
Hardware, paint and glass	26 238	7,1	26 225	0,0	0,0
All other retailers	36 622	9,9	37 200	1,6	0,2
Total	370 575	100,0	392 924	6,0	6,0

Source: STATSSA SA Retail Trade Sales (Preliminary) February 2025

1.5.4 Growth by Type of Wholesaler

The wholesale trade sector in South Africa is showing signs of deep structural strain, marked by erratic and mostly negative monthly growth between September 2024 and February 2025. Key categories such as fuels, food, and precious goods experienced sustained declines, reflecting weak industrial demand, volatile global markets, and shrinking consumer confidence. Modest gains in household goods and machinery were insufficient to offset widespread underperformance. The consistent contraction in fuel-related trade and erratic food and construction material sales point to broader economic pressures and a potential slowdown in infrastructure and energy sectors (Stats SA, 2025b)

This misalignment between retail resilience and wholesale contraction suggests a weakening in traditional supply chains, possibly driven by shifts towards direct procurement, digital disintermediation, or demand fragmentation. For the sector, this signals an urgent need for business model adaptation, enhanced agility, and upskilling in logistics, digital commerce, and data-driven inventory management. Without these shifts, the wholesale trade industry risks being outpaced by changing market dynamics and structural economic realignment (Stats SA, 2025b)

Figure 8: Contribution of type of dealer to the year-on-year percentage change in wholesale trade sales at current prices

Type of dealer	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25
Fee or contract basis	0,0	0,3	-0,4	0,5	1,2	0,5
Agricultural raw materials and livestock	-0,9	0,7	0,1	0,1	-0,1	0,0
Food, beverages and tobacco	0,0	2,1	0,5	1,6	-0,9	-1,3
Textiles, clothing and footwear	0,1	0,3	0,4	0,3	-0,1	-0,1
Other household goods except precious stones	1,0	0,6	0,2	1,4	1,2	0,8
Precious stones, jewellery and silverware	-1,0	-0,4	-0,3	0,2	-0,1	-0,6
Solid, liquid and gaseous fuels and related products	-8,7	-4,1	-9,9	-8,0	-3,1	-6,5
Metals and metal ores	0,4	0,3	-0,1	0,3	0,1	-0,1
Construction and building materials	-0,3	0,3	0,1	0,5	0,3	-0,4

Other intermediate products, waste and scrap	0,6	0,7	0,2	0,5	0,4	-0,3
Machinery, equipment and supplies	-0,8	0,2	-0,4	0,5	0,1	1,7
Other goods	1,5	0,9	0,3	1,1	0,6	-0,1
Total	-8,2	1,6	-9,4	-1,0	-0,4	-6,4

Source: STATSSA SA Wholesale Trade Sales (Preliminary) February 2025

1.5.5 Disposable income in South Africa

Disposable personal income in South Africa has demonstrated a steady and notable increase, rising from approximately 4.56 trillion ZAR in the fourth quarter of 2023 to about 4.80 trillion ZAR in the same quarter of 2024, reflecting a positive trajectory in household income levels. This upward trend is part of a long-term growth pattern, with the historical average since 1960 now approaching 995 billion ZAR, underscoring gradual economic progression over decades. While this growth signals improved financial capacity for many South Africans, it must be interpreted within the broader context of persistent structural challenges, including significant income inequality, high unemployment, and inflationary pressures that continue to erode real purchasing power for a substantial portion of the population (Trading economics, 2025). The figure below sheds light on the above.

Figure 9: Disposal Income 2021-2024



Source: tradingeconomics.com | South African Reserve Bank

The 2023 data further contextualise this by highlighting marginal improvements in consumer confidence as measured by the FNB/BER Consumer Confidence Index, which rose slightly in early 2024 amid easing inflation and reduced load-shedding but remained tempered by ongoing job losses and fuel price volatility. These complex dynamics reveal that while aggregate disposable income levels are rising, the benefits are unevenly distributed, making it imperative for policymakers to focus on equitable income distribution, targeted job creation, and fostering inclusive economic growth. Moreover, the tightening of fiscal policy, as indicated in the 2024 budget review, adds a layer of constraint on consumer spending capacity, especially among low-income households. Therefore, sustainable economic resilience and social cohesion will depend not only on continued income growth but also on addressing these multifaceted challenges through strategic investments, social support mechanisms, and structural reforms that ensure the broad sharing of economic gains across South African society (Trading economics, 2025).

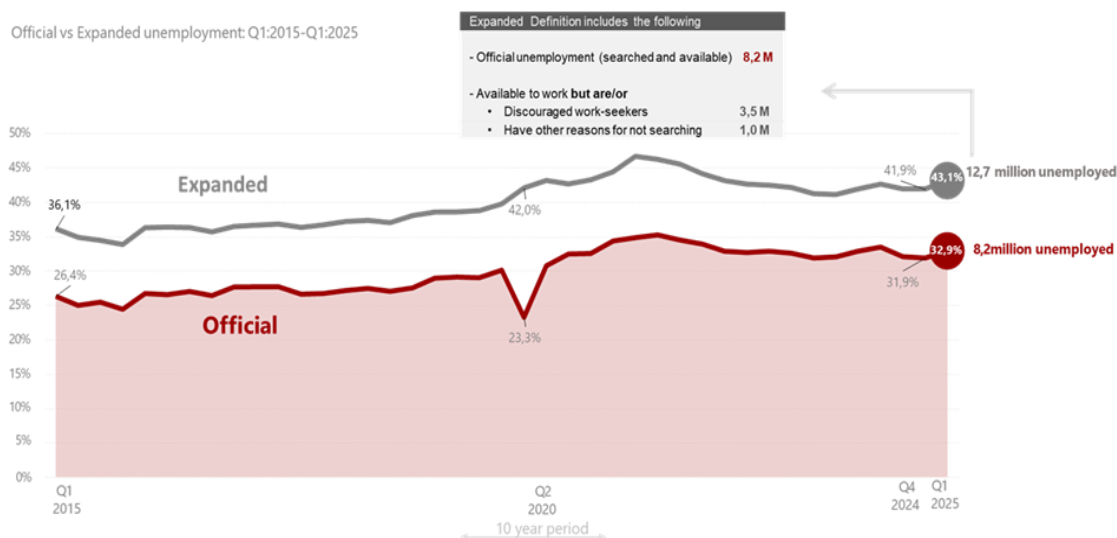
1.5.7 Key skills implications of economic performance

Furthermore, the above confirms that South Africa’s uneven economic performance underscores the complexity of labour market dynamics. The recognition that retail sector growth offers opportunities for modest job creation mainly in entry-level to mid-skill roles aligns well with observed consumer demand trends in textiles, general dealers, and health-related goods, which are more labour-intensive and accessible sectors. However, the critical point regarding underperformance in manufacturing and mining accurately underscores a major constraint on broader employment expansion, as these sectors typically absorb larger shares of medium to high-skill labour and provide vital linkages to the economy. The logistics crisis, with its substantial trade loss impact, exacerbates these challenges by raising operational costs and stifling the growth potential of smaller businesses, which are crucial for job creation and economic inclusion. This bottleneck reinforces the urgency for targeted workforce development, particularly in digital, e-commerce, and supply chain skills that not only address immediate sectoral demands, but also future-proof the labour market against continuing structural shifts and economic volatility.

1.5.8 Employee Profile

While the above details on the economic performance, in the first quarter of 2025, South Africa’s labour market faced renewed pressure, marked by a notable deterioration in employment indicators. The official unemployment rate rose to 32.9%, up by one percentage point from 31.9% in the previous quarter, reflecting the persistent strain in the job market. Employment numbers declined sharply, with 291,000 jobs lost, reducing the total number of employed individuals from 17.1 million in Q4 2024 to 16.8 million. At the same time, the number of unemployed persons rose by 237,000, pushing the total to 8.2 million. While the labour force shrank slightly by 54,000, this marginal decline hints at growing discouragement and a quiet retreat from active job-seeking. The number of discouraged work-seekers grew modestly by 7,000, but a more telling shift was the steep increase of 177,000 in those not economically active for reasons other than discouragement. This brought the total non-economically active population to 16.7 million, revealing an expanding segment of society increasingly disengaged from the economy. Most strikingly, the expanded unemployment rate, which includes discouraged job seekers, rose to 43.1% from 41.9%, exposing the full extent of South Africa’s deepening unemployment crisis and the complex socio-economic challenges facing the workforce (Stats SA, 2025a). Below is a graphical representation.

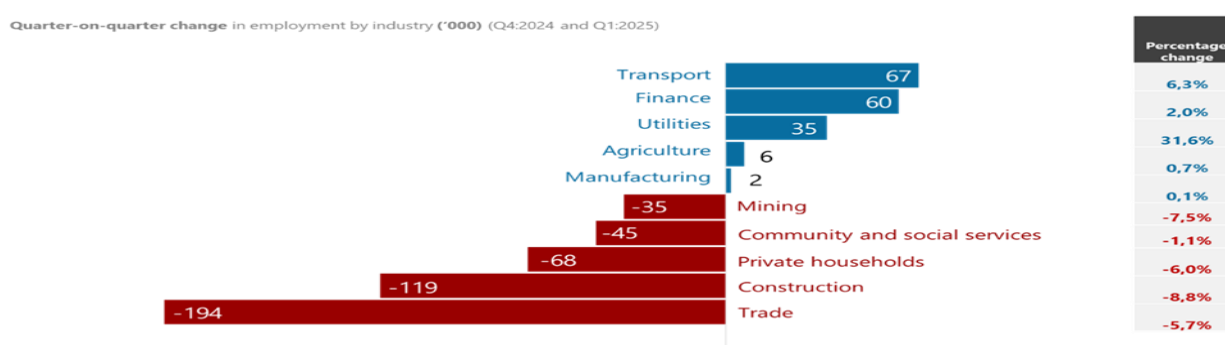
Figure 11: South African Labour Market overview



Source: Statistics SA QLFS Q1:2025

Furthermore, breaking down these statistics by industry, the trade sector encompassing wholesale and retail activities faced substantial job losses in the first quarter of 2025. In the first quarter of 2025, South Africa's labour market underwent significant shifts, marked by a net loss of 291,000 jobs, reducing total employment from 17.1 million to 16.8 million. This contraction highlights the continuing challenges faced by the economy in generating sustainable employment opportunities. The most pronounced declines occurred within the trade and construction sectors, both of which are critical to the country's economic fabric. The trade sector, encompassing wholesale and retail activities, shed approximately 119,000 jobs, largely due to persistent load shedding, subdued consumer demand, and waning business confidence. Meanwhile, the construction industry experienced an even steeper decline, losing around 194,000 jobs, an outcome tied to stalled infrastructure projects and diminished investment flows, underscoring the sector's vulnerability amid economic uncertainty (Stats SA, 2025a).

Figure 12: Quarter on Quarter change by Industry



Source: Statistics SA QLFS Q1:2025

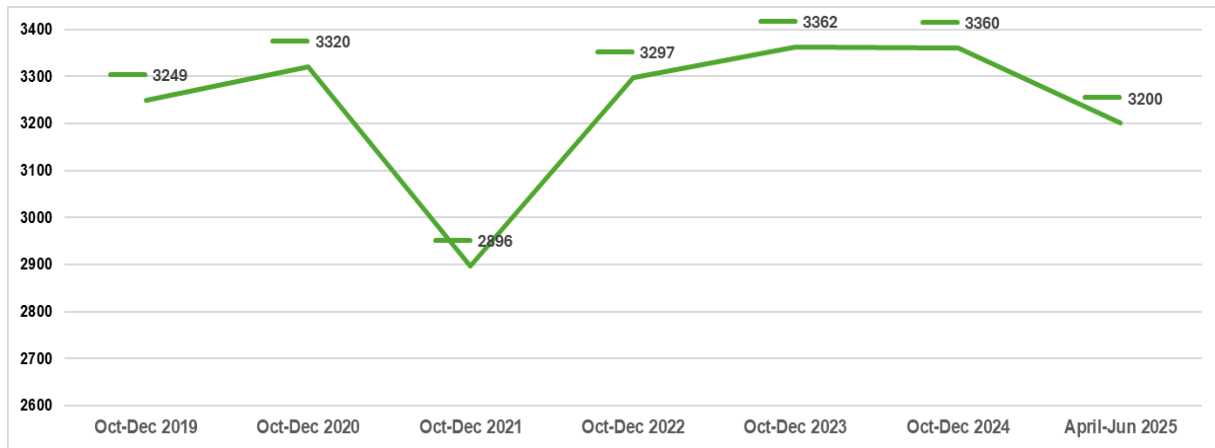
In contrast, the transport and finance sectors exhibited resilience, contributing positively to employment figures with gains of approximately 67,000 and 60,000 jobs respectively. These sectors represent potential anchors for economic growth and stability, signalling opportunities for targeted support and expansion to help offset losses elsewhere. Moreover, these employment trends illuminate the fragmented nature of South Africa's labour market recovery and reinforce the critical need for focused, strategic interventions. Prioritising revitalisation efforts in hard-hit sectors such as trade and construction, while simultaneously capitalising on growth in transport and finance, will be essential for fostering inclusive job creation and enhancing overall economic resilience (Stats SA, 2025a).

Understanding the dynamics of employment within the trade sector is essential. As of the fourth quarter of the 2024/25 financial year, the wholesale and retail trade sector in South Africa employed approximately 3.36 million people. This figure reflected a relatively stable employment level, demonstrating the sector's continued importance as one of the country's largest sources of jobs despite the persistent economic challenges faced nationally. The sector had shown resilience amid fluctuating consumer demand, supply chain disruptions, and broader economic pressures. However, the latest data from the first quarter of 2025 reveals a slight but notable decline in employment to around 3.2 million people, marking a loss of roughly 160,000 jobs in just one quarter (Stats SA, 2025a).

This decline suggests a loss of momentum in the sector's ability to sustain or grow employment levels, which may be influenced by seasonal factors, ongoing structural constraints, or broader macroeconomic uncertainties such as inflationary pressures, shifts in consumer spending, or changes in trade policies. It also signals potential vulnerabilities within certain subsectors, particularly retail that are more sensitive to economic cycles. The drop contrasts with the relatively steady employment

figures recorded in the previous quarter, highlighting the volatility and cyclical nature of employment trends in this sector. Below is a presentation of the trends around employment in the trade sector over the years.

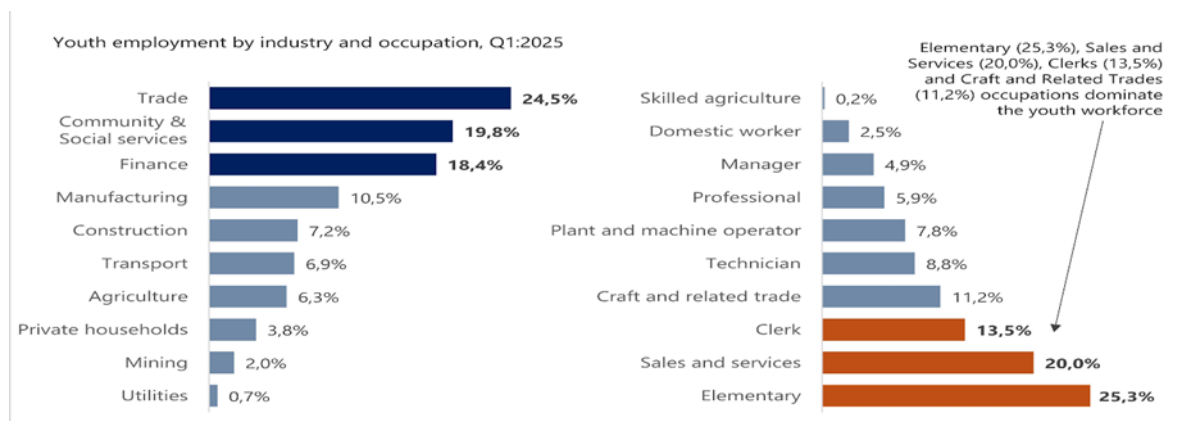
Figure 13: Number of employees in the trade sector ('000)



Source: STATSSA SA QLFS 4th Quarter 2019-2025

Despite this recent downturn, the wholesale and retail trade sector remain a pivotal component of South Africa's labour market, employing millions and supporting livelihoods across urban and rural areas. The decline emphasises the urgent need for policy responses and strategic interventions aimed at stabilising employment, encouraging business confidence, and promoting sector innovation, including embracing digital transformation and upskilling the workforce. In addition, addressing challenges such as informal trade dynamics, access to finance for small businesses, and improving supply chain efficiencies will be critical to reversing this trend and supporting sustainable job growth. Ultimately, while the sector's latest employment figures indicate a setback, they also highlight areas where targeted efforts can bolster recovery and resilience, ensuring the wholesale and retail trade sector continues to play a central role in South Africa's economic development and job creation efforts moving forward. Furthermore, from this perspective it becomes important to assess employment from a youth perspective. The below figure gives a perspective of employment by industry and occupation.

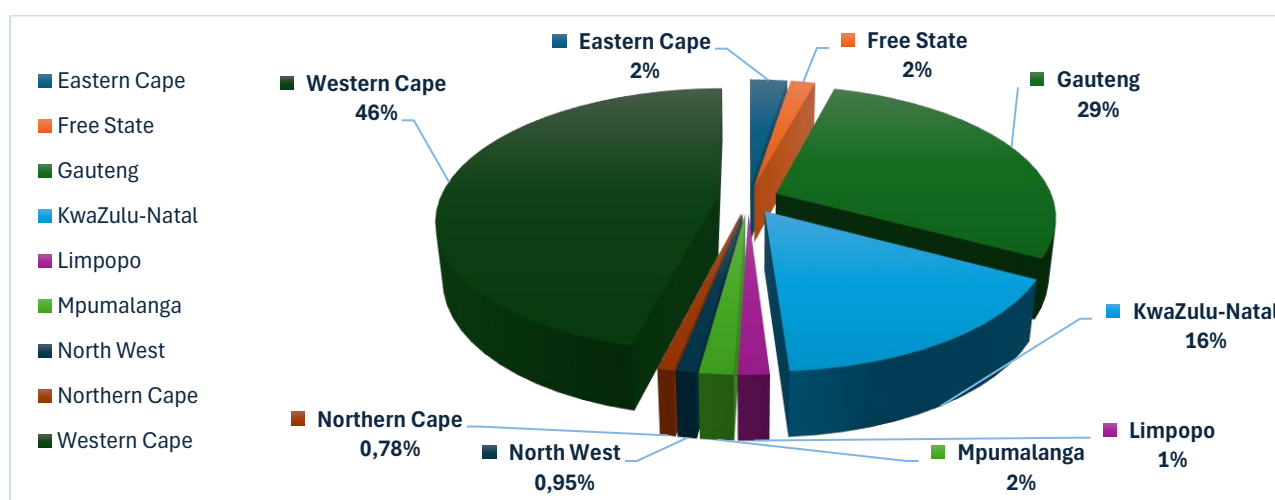
Figure 14: Employment by industry and occupation



Source: Statistics SA QLFS Q1:2025

Despite ongoing economic challenges, several sectors continue to offer critical entry points for youth employment in South Africa. In Q1:2025, the Trade industry which includes retail, wholesale, and hospitality remained the largest employer of young people, accounting for 24.5% of employed youth. This was followed by Community and Social Services (19.8%), Finance (18.4%), and Manufacturing (10.5%). However, the occupational distribution reveals a concentration of youth in low-skilled and service-based roles, with 25.3% employed in Elementary occupations, 20.0% in Sales and Services, 13.5% in Clerical positions, and 11.2% in Craft and Related Trades. These patterns point to a structural reliance on accessible, but often precarious roles with limited career mobility. While these sectors serve as vital gateways to employment, they highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to promote skills development, improve job quality, and expand opportunities in more stable and future oriented industries. While the above data directly represents employment gains in trade and retail, the below presents employment distribution by province.

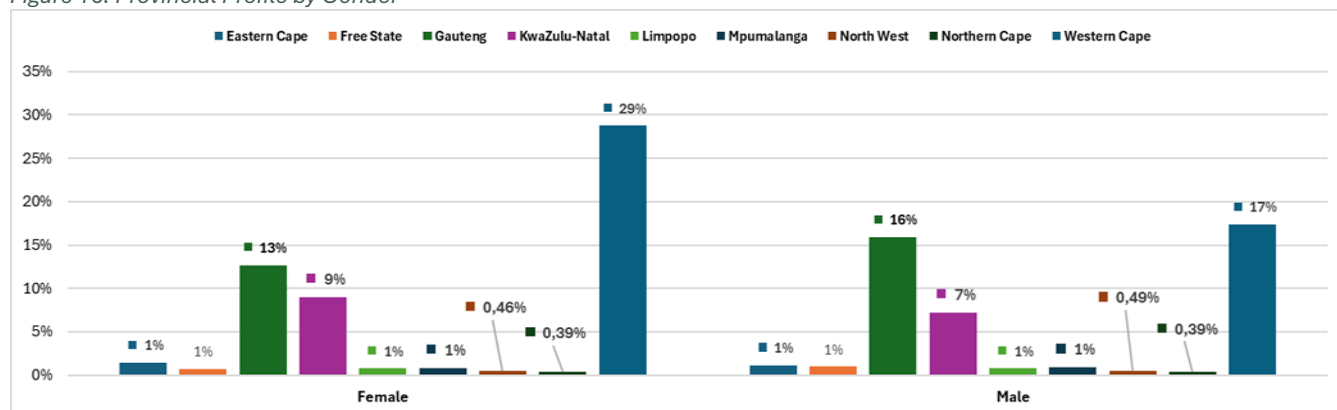
Figure 15: Employee Geographic Distribution



Source: WSP/ATR DATA, 2025

The above reveals a highly uneven geographic distribution of employees within the Wholesale and Retail sector, with notable concentrations in Western Cape (46%) and Gauteng (29%), collectively accounting for 75% of the sector’s reported workforce. This concentration underscores the centrality of these two provinces as economic hubs, Gauteng as the country’s primary commercial and logistics nucleus, and the Western Cape as a key tourism, trade, and consumer-driven region. Their dominance reflects factors such as urban population density, strong consumer markets, infrastructure advantages, and the presence of major retail headquarters, distribution centres, and shopping hubs. In contrast, KwaZulu-Natal as another economically significant province with a major port and a strong informal trading presence account for 16%, marking it as a secondary centre for wholesale and retail employment. The remainder of the provinces register marginal representation, with Eastern Cape (3%), Free State (2%), Limpopo (2%), and Mpumalanga (2%) collectively contributing only 9% of the workforce. The Northern Cape (0.78%) and North West (0.95%) reflect minimal participation, likely due to lower population density, fewer urban centres, and reduced commercial activity. This pattern reflects a concentration of employment opportunities in urbanised and economically advanced provinces, revealing a challenge of spatial inequality in sectoral employment where rural and less-developed provinces have limited exposure to formal retail and wholesale activities. Furthermore, below is the employment distribution by provincial and gender profile.

Figure 16: Provincial Profile by Gender



Source: WSP/ATR DATA, 2025

The gender and provincial distribution above reveal a clear pattern of both spatial and gender-based concentration of employment, reflecting broader structural and socio-economic dynamics. The Western Cape stands out with the highest proportion of female employees at 29%, significantly outpacing male representation at 17%, indicating a strong feminisation of the workforce in this province, likely driven by the prevalence of retail and customer-facing roles traditionally dominated by women. In contrast, Gauteng, the country’s commercial and logistics hub, employs more males (16%) than females (13%), suggesting a male-dominated presence in warehousing, logistics, and supply chain roles that typically require physical labour and are less gender-diverse. Moreover, KwaZulu-Natal reflects a smaller gender gap, with females at 9% and males at 7%, pointing to a balanced yet slightly feminised workforce, potentially influenced by the province’s mix of formal retail and informal trade. Across the remaining provinces : Eastern Cape, Free State, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, and Northern Cape both male and female employment is markedly low, ranging from 0.39% to 1%, this is likely due to limited formal employment opportunities.

The figure above reveals a discernible upward trajectory in both male and female employment figures over the years, though growth rates have varied significantly between the genders. At the outset, male employment was recorded at 343,000, notably trailing behind female employment, which stood higher at 438,000. Over the years, both categories experienced steady growth, with male employment peaking at 398,388 and female employment reaching 484,047. However, by the latest recorded year, male employment had declined slightly to 341,020, while female employment dropped to 469,216, reflecting a modest decline in both categories during the 2024/25 period. Analysing these trends highlights several critical insights of the overall growth in employment numbers, this suggests broader economic expansion and potential increased job opportunities across the sector. However, fluctuations in growth rates between males and females indicate differential impacts of economic cycles or sector-specific dynamics on each gender's employment prospects. Lastly, this disparity underscores ongoing challenges in achieving gender balance in the workforce, influenced by economic policies, industry trends, and societal norms. Furthermore, assessing this picture by racial profile and gender, the table below gives an interesting perspective.

Table 4: Racial and Gender Profile by Provincial Distribution

Province	Female				Male			
	African%	Coloured%	Indian %	White %	African%	Coloured%	Indian%	White%
Eastern Cape	2%	3%	1%	4%	2%	3%	0,48%	4%
Free State	1%	1%	0,17%	3%	2%	1%	0,26%	4%
Gauteng	23%	12%	28%	42%	36%	21%	36%	46%
KwaZulu-Natal	18%	6%	46%	8%	17%	5%	44%	8%
Limpopo	2%	0%	0,27%	1%	2%	0,05%	1%	1%

Mpumalanga	2%	0%	0,39%	3%	2%	0,11%	1%	3%
North West	1%	0%	0,24%	2%	1%	0,26%	0,42%	2%
Northern Cape	0%	3%	0,05%	1%	1%	3%	0,08%	1%
Western Cape	51%	75%	25%	36%	36%	67%	17%	32%

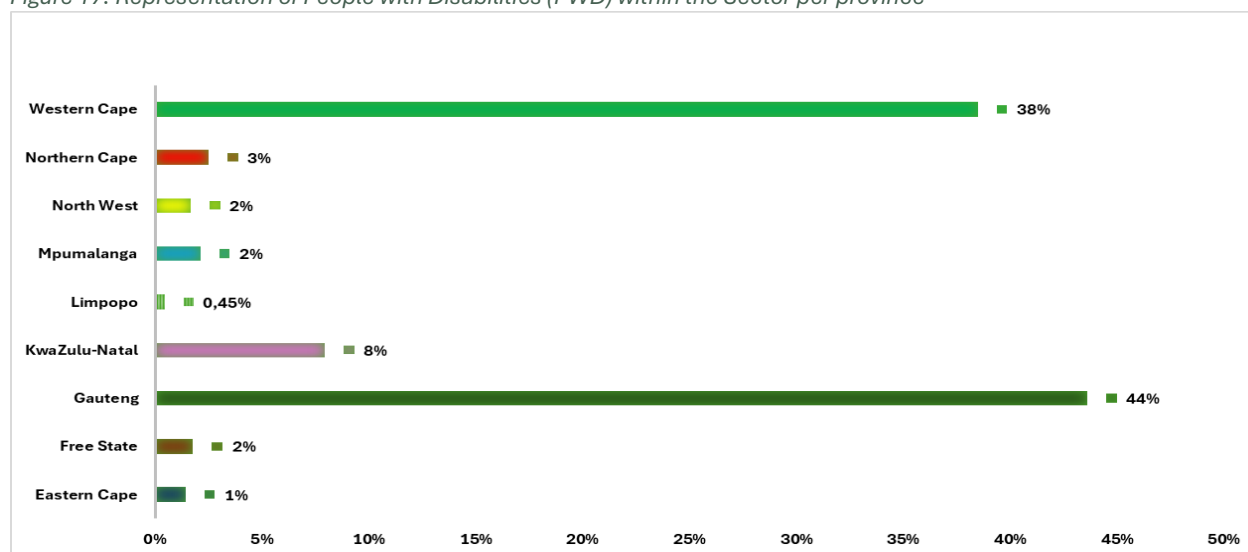
Source: WSP/ATR DATA, 2025

The above table reveals a complex interplay of race, gender, and geography, highlighting enduring structural patterns and regional inequalities. Gauteng and the Western Cape dominate employment across all population groups and genders, with the highest representation of White, Indian, and Coloured employees, particularly among males. In Gauteng, males from the African (36%), Indian (36%), and White (46%) population groups are significantly represented, indicating a relatively more diversified workforce. The Western Cape stands out with exceptionally high representation of Coloured females (75%) and Coloured males (67%), reflecting the province’s unique demographic profile and its strong integration of this group into retail employment.

In contrast, provinces such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, and the North West show markedly low employment figures across all race groups, suggesting limited sectoral activity or formal employment in these regions. Employment of Indian and White South Africans is largely concentrated in urban provinces (Gauteng, KZN, Western Cape), while African employees, particularly females, maintain a more modest, but consistent presence across most provinces. The data also reflects gender disparities, with male representation generally exceeding that of females across all race groups in high-employment provinces.

Furthermore, geographic distribution of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The figure below reveals a concerning disparity in the geographic distribution of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, with profound implications for equity and inclusive development. The data reveals that Gauteng (44%) and the Western Cape (38%) account for the vast majority of reported employees with disabilities, over 82% collectively suggesting that inclusion efforts are largely concentrated in economically advanced and urbanised regions. These provinces likely benefit from more structured employment environments, greater compliance with employment equity legislation, and better infrastructure to accommodate diverse employee needs. In contrast, provinces such as KwaZulu-Natal (8%), Free State, Mpumalanga, North West (each at 2%), Northern Cape (3%), Eastern Cape (1%), and Limpopo (0.45%) reflect significantly lower levels of representation.

Figure 17: Representation of People with Disabilities (PWD) within the Sector per province



Source: WSP/ATR DATA, 2025

While the above reflects on the representation of people with disabilities with the sector per province, the below reflects on employment profile in terms of Race and Gender Profile by OFO Major Group.

Table 5: Race and Gender Profile by OFO Major Group

OFO Major Group Code	Major Groups	Female				Male			
		African	Coloured	Indian	White	African	Coloured	Indian	White
2021-1	Clerical Support Workers	43,58%	10,49%	2,66%	4,73%	30,48%	4,52%	1,78%	1,75%
2021-2	Elementary Occupations	38,18%	6,68%	0,39%	0,37%	44,95%	7,28%	0,92%	1,21%
2021-3	Managers	26,17%	7,46%	3,56%	9,72%	23,64%	5,72%	5,74%	17,99%
2021-4	Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	7,53%	2,59%	0,22%	0,24%	73,82%	11,19%	2,10%	2,32%
2021-5	Professionals	21,05%	8,75%	4,95%	16,69%	17,97%	7,52%	5,56%	17,52%
2021-6	Service and Sales Workers	53,61%	7,85%	1,04%	1,26%	29,59%	4,20%	0,96%	1,49%
2021-7	Skilled Agricultural, Forestry, Fishery, Craft and Related Trades Workers	25,98%	4,34%	0,58%	0,61%	53,27%	7,60%	1,51%	6,11%
2021-8	Technicians and Associate Professionals	32,08%	9,23%	3,21%	8,82%	29,61%	6,05%	3,04%	7,95%

Source: WSP/ATR DATA, 2025

The above table reveals persistent transformation gaps across key occupational levels in the Wholesale and Retail Sector. African and Coloured individuals, particularly women, remain underrepresented in managerial and professional roles. For instance, African females comprise only 26.17% of managers, while White males account for a disproportionately high 17.99%, highlighting continued barriers to leadership access. This underscores the need to strengthen leadership development and succession planning programmes for historically marginalised groups. Moreover, Professional and technical roles also reflect racial and gender imbalances. White and Indian males and females remain significantly represented in professional roles, while African representation, despite some gains, lags. This calls for expanded access to advanced training, internships, and bursaries for African and Coloured youth to close the technical and professional skills gap and improve equitable career progression.

Furthermore, gender segmentation remains pronounced, with women dominating in clerical and service roles (e.g., African females represent 53.61% in service roles), and men overrepresented in technical and operational positions. These patterns perpetuate gendered income disparities and occupational stereotypes. This highlights that gender-mainstreaming strategies must be prioritised to enable women's inclusion in higher-paying and male-dominated roles, especially those linked to 4IR and innovation. Likewise, equity gaps in scarce and critical skills occupations, particularly those most aligned with future sectoral needs, demand targeted interventions. High-status roles remain racially skewed due to systemic barriers such as uneven educational access and regional training disparities. The sector must therefore invest in rural training infrastructure, improve TVET throughput, and ensure inclusive access to skills development programmes. The table below provides a snapshot of the number of people employed per age group.

Table 6: Number of Employed People Per Age Group ('000)

FY	Age 15-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64
2020/21	776	4298	4760	3656	1533
2021/22	778	4088	4665	3574	1439
2022/23	2634	7594	6926	4827	1707
2023/24	2705	7819	7196	5012	1887
2024/25	5800	Data not specified	Data not specified	Data not specified	Data not specified

Source: STATSSA QLFS Quarter 4: 2020/21-2024/25

The above reveals significant shifts across age cohorts in the labour market. Notably, the 15-24 age group experienced a dramatic increase in employed individuals, rising from 776,000 in 2020/21 to 5,800,000 in 2024/25, signalling a substantial influx of younger workers, possibly due to expanded entry-level opportunities or demographic changes. Moreover, for the 25-54 age brackets, employment numbers showed fluctuations, but generally maintained high levels, with peaks around 2023/24 reflecting a relatively stable core working-age population, although detailed data for 2024/25 is not available for these groups. On the other hand, the 55-64 cohort displayed a steady increase from 1,533,000 in 2020/21 to 1,887,000 in 2023/24, indicating extended workforce participation among older employees, possibly driven by delayed retirements or economic necessity. Overall, the data highlights evolving employment patterns, with strong youth engagement contrasting with consistent mid- to late-career employment, underscoring the need for targeted skills development and labour market policies to support diverse age groups and ensure sustainable workforce growth.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter offers a layered and forward-looking reflection on the Wholesale and Retail (W&R) sector's performance, highlighting both its persistent challenges and emerging opportunities. The analysis reveals a sector that, while grappling with longstanding infrastructure inefficiencies and labour market volatility, continues to show signs of resilience and adaptive capacity. Retail's dominance with 53% of employer representation reaffirms its pivotal role in employment generation and economic vitality, while the rise of small enterprises, accounting for 40% of employers, signals a welcome shift toward broader entrepreneurial inclusion and decentralised growth.

Notably, the chapter illustrates a growing commitment to spatial equity, with SETAs deliberately expanding programme delivery to rural and underserved areas. This trend, coupled with the sector's inherent accessibility and potential to support youth and women, reflects a deliberate move toward inclusion, transformation, and greater economic participation. The disparities in data classification and provincial concentration of employers, while revealing limitations in system reach, also point to clear opportunities for strengthening institutional intelligence and improving strategic targeting. Furthermore, crucially, the chapter underscores the urgent need to transition from reactive to anticipatory skills planning to one that aligns more intentionally with the evolving demands of the sector. The rising focus on digital capabilities, supply chain agility, financial literacy, and e-commerce reveals a sector gradually embracing future-fit competencies. These shifts are encouraging, as they indicate growing alignment between training investments and the capabilities required to navigate disruption.

In reflecting on these developments, it becomes clear that the sector is approaching a strategic tipping point. The groundwork has been laid for a more inclusive and dynamic skills ecosystem, what remains is to deepen this momentum by aligning programmes with the key Change Drivers that will define the sector's future. The next chapter will explore these drivers in detail, offering a roadmap for SETAs and stakeholders to craft responsive, impactful, and transformative strategic priorities.

2. CHAPTER TWO: KEY SKILLS CHANGE DRIVERS

2.1. Introduction

This chapter explores the multifaceted factors shaping the demand and supply of skills within the Wholesale and Retail sector. Drawing from an integrated analysis of current literature, employer surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups, it aims to surface the most salient drivers of change and evaluate the influence of national policy frameworks on skills dynamics. While the chapter identifies five prominent change drivers, it is important to note that these are not exhaustive. Rather, they represent a selection of key forces currently exerting significant influence on the sector's skills landscape, acknowledging that additional factors may emerge as the sector continues to evolve.

Factors influencing skills demand and supply in the Wholesale and Retail sector have been rigorously researched and validated through extensive stakeholder engagement. Key change drivers such as technological advancements and AI, shifting consumer behaviours towards e-commerce, economic challenges including inflation and freight crises, data privacy regulations like POPIA, and labour market and demographic shifts, particularly the rise of Gen Z-are reshaping skills requirements. These forces necessitate targeted, agile strategies for skills planning that respond to both immediate pressures and long-term sector transformation. Aligning these strategies with national policy frameworks, including the NSDP and ERRP, as well as broader plans like the National Development Plan and Industrial Policy Action Plan 3, is critical to ensure skills development remains relevant and impactful in a rapidly evolving context.

Input and research into this section include a literature review (e.g., reports written on sector trends), including, but not limited to:


- W&RSETA Strategic Plan, 2025/30
- The National Skills Development Plan (NSDP)
- The National Skills Accord
- The Industrial Policy Action Plan II
- The New Growth Path
- The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP)
- White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (WPPSET)
- The Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan
- Presidential Youth Employment Initiative
- Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP 2025-2029)


2.2. Factors Affecting Skills Demand and Supply

This section presents an in-depth analysis of the key change drivers shaping skills supply and demand in the Wholesale and Retail sector, highlighting their varied impacts, both enabling and constraining skills development. These drivers are not merely theoretical constructs, but have been systematically identified through a robust, multi-method research process. The process combined an extensive literature review focusing on economic trends, labour market shifts, and regulatory developments with primary data collection to ensure a holistic understanding.


Stakeholder engagement played a central role in validating these drivers. Industry associations, employers, academic institutions, and other key informants were consulted through interviews, focus groups, and one-on-one discussions, offering practical insights into the realities confronting the sector. These interactions surfaced critical issues, including persistent skill mismatches, the impact of technological disruption, and the need for agile workforce strategies. Moreover, Quantitative data drawn from stakeholder surveys and economic indicators provided evidence of shifting employment patterns, occupational shortages, and demographic trends, while qualitative insights from expert interviews added depth particularly in relation to evolving strategic priorities and innovations within the sector. Complementing these efforts, a policy analysis was undertaken to assess the influence of national frameworks such as the NSDP, ERRP, and sector-specific strategies on skills planning and implementation. Together, these methodological approaches have enabled a nuanced understanding of the forces driving change in the sector. Below are the key change drivers that affect skills supply and demand within the Wholesale and Retail sector.

Table 7: Key Skills Change Drivers

Change Driver	Change Driver Description	Demand-Related Implications for Skills Planning	Supply-Related Implications for Skills Planning	Occupational Shifts as a result of Change Drivers in the Wholesale & Retail Sector	Priority Actions by the SETA
<p>Technological Advancements & AI</p> 	<p>Continued digitalisation and automation in wholesale and retail are reshaping operations, especially in logistics, warehousing, and customer engagement. Freight system failures estimated to cost South Africa R1 billion per day underscore the need for digitally resilient supply chains.</p>	<p>There is increased demand for digital, logistics analytics, and AI-related competencies, particularly in managing real-time inventory, distribution networks, and customer data.</p>	<p>Current training offerings lag in integrating applied digital tools and sector-specific AI content. There is uneven access to digital learning, especially in rural or resource-constrained environments.</p>	<p>Emerging roles like Data Analysts, Cybersecurity Specialists, Web Designers, Digital Marketers, and E-commerce Project Managers reflect the sector’s shift toward automation and digitalisation. Meanwhile, traditional positions such as Retail Buyers and Customer Service Managers are evolving to incorporate new technologies and customer engagement methods. In contrast, roles like Data Capturers, Secretaries, Call Centre Agents, and Cashiers are declining due to AI and automation</p>	<p>The SETA will facilitate partnerships to support AI and digital skills curricula development, prioritising real-time logistics, inventory and e-commerce applications. It will drive regional digital access through public-private platforms and encourage work-integrated learning opportunities in logistics hubs and innovation centres.</p>

				streamlining inventory, marketing, and customer service, significantly reducing the demand for manual and clerical tasks.	
<p>Consumer Behaviour Changes</p> 	<p>Rising inflation, global tariff tensions, and import cost volatility, further exacerbated by domestic freight system breakdowns, have driven increased price sensitivity and value-consciousness among South African consumers. In response, major retailers have scaled up the use of rewards card programmes to drive loyalty, gather behavioural data, and offer personalised promotions. Consumers are also increasingly favouring ethical sourcing, local product availability, and seamless shopping experiences across digital and physical platforms.</p>	<p>Retailers now require employees skilled in interpreting consumer data, behavioural segmentation, and real-time campaign execution, particularly to support rewards and loyalty systems. There is growing demand for frontline staff who can adapt quickly to pricing shifts, engage customers across omnichannel platforms, and align with emerging trends such as green product preferences and socially responsible branding.</p>	<p>Most training content in the sector remains generic and outdated, failing to reflect the dynamic nature of consumer decision-making, especially in digitally driven contexts. Skills development programmes often exclude exposure to behavioural analytics, CRM systems, and personalised loyalty mechanisms, despite their prevalence in real-world retail settings. There is limited focus on local sourcing and sustainability-oriented customer engagement.</p>	<p>The shift to digital retail and online shopping is driving demand for hybrid, tech-enabled roles such as Visual Merchandisers, Digital Customer Experience (CX) Designers, and E-commerce Managers, who can curate seamless online and in-store experiences. Traditional roles like Shop Assistants and Sales Floor Staff are declining due to reduced foot traffic, while Retail Supervisors must now adapt to managing both physical and digital operations.</p>	<p>The SETA will prioritise updating retail qualifications and learning materials to include applied consumer behaviour analysis, use of CRM and loyalty platforms, and principles of ethical retailing. It will collaborate with major retailers to develop case-based training models using real loyalty programme data. Targeted support will also be offered to SMMEs to implement customer-centric models and build green value propositions within local retail ecosystems.</p>
<p>Economic Trends (Inflation, Recession, Freight Crisis)</p>	<p>South Africa's economy remains under strain due to persistent inflation and</p>	<p>Increased need for skills in operational cost analysis, alternative</p>	<p>Training programmes currently do not</p>	<p>Economic pressures such as inflation, recession, and supply chain disruptions</p>	<p>The SETA will update existing learning programmes by integrating practical modules on inventory planning, basic</p>

	<p>low growth. Freight network inefficiencies are now a daily national economic concern, along with international disruptions from the Ukraine war and tariff disputes, which continue to affect supply stability, import prices, and business confidence in the retail sector.</p>	<p>sourcing, stock strategy management, and resilience planning in volatile economic contexts.</p>	<p>reflect macroeconomic risk awareness or practical budgeting skills for retail operations under constrained economic conditions. There is limited accessibility to continuous professional development for small business operators.</p>	<p>have intensified the demand for roles like Supply Chain Analysts and Logistics Tech Coordinators, which are essential for improving efficiency and managing operational risks. At the same time, traditional support roles such as General Clerks and Service Station Attendants are in decline due to automation and reduced margins, while high-turnover positions like Call Centre Operators and Retail Buyers continue to experience instability as the complexity of sourcing and customer service grows without corresponding upskilling.</p>	<p>scenario analysis, and financial literacy relevant to small and medium retail operations. This will be done through collaboration with accredited training providers and curriculum developers. Additionally, the SETA will pilot a regional skills support programme in high-impact logistics corridors aimed at equipping communities most affected by freight logistics breakdowns with short courses in supply chain resilience, alternative distribution methods, and stock recovery practices.</p>
<p>Data Privacy & Protection (POPIA)</p>	<p>The expansion of digital transactions, remote customer engagement, and data analytics has increased the importance of data governance. POPIA enforcement has placed renewed pressure on businesses to handle data securely, amid rising cyber threats.</p>	<p>Demand for data protection compliance, cyber risk identification, and secure digital handling skills is increasing, especially in e-commerce environments and data-driven retail ecosystems.</p>	<p>There is limited availability of POPIA-aligned, sector-specific training. Many retail workers and managers lack awareness of compliant data practices and the legal obligations introduced by POPIA.</p>	<p>The growing emphasis on data protection and compliance driven by laws like POPIA has created demand for specialised roles such as Cybersecurity Specialists and Data Privacy Officers, who ensure the secure handling of customer information and regulatory adherence. At the same time, roles like the Customer Service Manager are evolving to incorporate compliance awareness and digital tools. In contrast, traditional positions such as the</p>	<p>The SETA will develop and roll out accessible POPIA and cybersecurity training frameworks, working with regulators to embed compliance culture across all subsectors. It will support SME retail operations in meeting data security requirements and develop shared awareness toolkits to address sector-wide vulnerabilities.</p>

				<p>Manual Records Clerk are becoming obsolete, as manual data handling is replaced by secure, automated systems.</p>	
<p>Labour Market & Demographic Shifts (incl. Gen Z)</p> 	<p>The increasing presence of Generation Z in the labour force brings expectations for flexibility, purpose-driven work, and digital tools. Youth unemployment remains high. Access to training and digital platforms is unequal across provinces, limiting broader youth inclusion in sector skills development.</p>	<p>There is demand for adaptive skills that support remote work, inclusive team environments, social media fluency, and digital engagement. Entrepreneurship and side-hustle cultures are also growing among young workers.</p>	<p>Traditional training pathways may not align with new expectations and learning styles. There is also a lack of flexible delivery models and mentorship schemes for young entrants. Provincial disparities in digital infrastructure continue to hinder equal access to skills development opportunities.</p>	<p>The rise of the Gen Z workforce is reshaping retail employment, with growing demand for purpose-driven, flexible, and digitally focused roles such as Social Media Strategists, Digital Content Creators, and Learning Experience Designers. These occupations reflect the sector's shift toward online engagement and experiential learning. Meanwhile, roles like Pharmacy Sales Assistants are evolving to require greater digital fluency and product knowledge. In contrast, the Traditional Shop Assistant role is declining due to reduced foot traffic and increased reliance on self-service and e-commerce platforms.</p>	<p>The SETA will expand youth-focused learning pathways using digital delivery and micro-credentials. It will support mentorship networks, entrepreneurship support services, and include inclusive leadership development. Provincial partnerships will be leveraged to bridge access and infrastructure gaps, especially in high-unemployment districts.</p>

Source: WSPs/ATRs, interviews, SSP Provincial Engagements, 2025

The above table highlights key structural and emerging drivers reshaping the wholesale and retail sector, each introducing complex and intersecting demands for skills planning. Technological disruption, especially AI and automation, is redefining roles in logistics, inventory, and customer service, requiring hybrid digital-operational skills and urgently addressing the rural-urban digital divide. Simultaneously, shifts in consumer behaviour driven by inflation, ethical values, and loyalty-driven data ecosystems necessitate applied competencies in behavioural analytics and digital engagement, which current curricula lack. Moreover, Persistent economic volatility, worsened by freight inefficiencies and global shocks, demands skills in risk management, cost analysis, and supply resilience. These are areas largely absent in existing training. Meanwhile, POPIA enforcement and rising cyber threats highlight the need for widespread upskilling in data governance and digital compliance, particularly among SMEs (Information Regulator SA, 2024). Moreover, generational workforce changes, especially

the entry of Gen Z, amplify demand for flexible, digital-first learning models and inclusive pathways, yet youth access remains uneven across provinces (Stats SA, 2025; NYDA, 2024).

2.3. Policy frameworks affecting skills demand and supply

South Africa's development trajectory is underpinned by the National Development Plan (NDP), which challenges the country to achieve sustained levels of economic growth through 2030. The W&RSETA's Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan are aligned with these key National policies and legislations. The table below summarises the national policies that guide the implementation of the SETA.

Table 8: Policy Frameworks Affecting Skills Demand and Supply

National Strategy / Policy	Demand-Side Skills Implications	Supply-Side Skills Implications	Measures the W&RSETA has put in place in support of National Strategies
National Development Plan (NDP) 2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a need for a capable, inclusive and skilled workforce that supports economic growth. - Strong focus on youth employment, entrepreneurship, and reduction of poverty and inequality. - Sectoral expansion (e.g. retail, services) will require a digitally literate and customer-responsive workforce. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of inclusive and relevant occupational qualifications. - Increased access to skills development for youth, women, and people with disabilities (PWDs). - Design of learning interventions that promote employability, entrepreneurship, and resilience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanded skills development programmes for unemployed youth and SMMEs, prioritising township and rural economies. - Strengthened partnerships with TVET colleges and universities to deliver relevant occupational qualifications. - Implemented the District Development Model to improve regional access to training and support services.
National Skills Development Plan (NSDP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased demand for demand-led skills aligned with Occupationally Directed Qualifications (OQSF). - Greater focus on equity, quality, and inclusiveness in the provision of skills development opportunities. - Enhanced role of SETAs in conducting credible sectoral research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of occupational qualifications that meet industry needs and national priorities. - Strengthening of articulation, recognition of prior learning (RPL), and lifelong learning mechanisms. - Focus on inclusive and high-impact programmes for priority groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commissions annual Sector Skills Plan (SSP) updates and research on evolving occupations. - Continuously aligns Discretionary Grant (DG) windows to prioritise occupational shortages and transformation. - Partnered with other SETAs and institutions for joint research and programme delivery.
Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Significant upskilling and reskilling needs for displaced workers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusion of e-commerce, logistics, and digital competencies in learning content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Launched short-term digital and entrepreneurial training aligned to ERRP sectors.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accelerated digital transformation and e-commerce expansion in retail. - Increasing need for local production and support of SMMEs and the informal economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of shorter, modular, and agile training options for rapid deployment. - Integration of entrepreneurial development modules. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established responsive and flexible skills programmes for informal traders. - Prioritised funding for vulnerable workers affected by sectoral shifts.
Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2025–2029	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Projected growth of 4IR-related and digitally enabled occupations. - Persistent youth unemployment and skills mismatch. - Demand for resilient workers in a volatile and globalised economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revision of curricula to embed 4IR technologies (e.g. AI, robotics, big data in retail). - Alignment of training to national employment targets and industry transitions. - Increased focus on soft skills (problem-solving, adaptability, digital literacy). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduced micro-credentials and occupational skill sets aligned with future work scenarios. - Funded 4IR skills academies and digital transition initiatives within retail chains and SMMEs. - Strengthened labour market intelligence systems to monitor occupational demand.
National Skills Accord	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing need for workplace-based learning (WBL), internships, and learnerships.- Urgency to improve employability and absorption of graduates and trainees. - Sector employers must increase training opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitation of quality WBL and placement opportunities in the sector. - Curriculum alignment with practical industry needs. - Engagement with employers to expand training commitments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mandated employer participation in workplace learning across funding windows. - Developed sector WBL framework aligned to Accord targets. - Conducted periodic audits of employer WBL capacity.
Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demand for sector-specific technical and practical skills. - Emphasis on innovation, green economy, and localisation. - Anticipated growth in value chain integration (e.g. packaging, logistics, e-retail). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alignment of occupational qualifications with industrial priorities. - Promotion of cross-sectoral qualifications (e.g. retail + manufacturing + logistics). - Support for technology-intensive and environmentally sustainable skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developed partnerships for hybrid training. - Incentivised innovation-linked training aligned to green retail and local product development. - Funded pilot projects in sustainable retail models (e.g. reuse, minimal waste retailing).
New Growth Path (NGP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New job drivers from infrastructure development, rural development, and green economy. - Growing need for support to community-based enterprises and cooperatives. - Increased pressure to reduce inequality and support township economies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of responsive, location-specific training models. - Capacity building for micro-enterprises and co-operatives in the retail sector. - Inclusion of financial literacy, digital tools, and market access training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provided support for community retail incubation hubs and SMME networks. - Rolled out informal trader training with progression pathways. - Facilitated municipal and provincial-level partnerships for grassroots program delivery.

<p>White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased demand for integrated, flexible and lifelong learning pathways. - Emphasis on articulation, recognition of learning, and linkages across education systems.- Improved system responsiveness and quality assurance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthening articulation between TVET, universities, and occupational qualifications. - Mainstreaming Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and modular learning. - Alignment of quality assurance and certification mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnered with QCTO and providers to promote modular learning and RPL. - Developed career progression pathways for informal workers. - Improved digital infrastructure for flexible learning access.
<p>Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Growing need for entry-level, transferable and future-ready skills among youth. - Weak school-to-work transitions and low absorption into formal work.- - High NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on entry-level skills, digital literacy, and life skills. - Increased access to career guidance and work exposure. - Stronger collaboration with employers for youth pathways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanded YES and PYEI-aligned programmes across provinces. - Monitored placement, progression, and long-term employment impact.

2.4. Measures the SETA has put in place in support of National Strategies and Plans, including the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan and its Skills Strategy

The SETA has consistently aligned its programmes and investments with key national frameworks, including the National Development Plan (NDP 2030), National Skills Development Plan (NSDP), Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP), Presidential Youth Employment Intervention (PYEI), and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (PSET). In line with the NDP and NSDP’s emphasis on inclusive economic participation and sectoral equity, the SETA has expanded access to rural and township-based learnerships, entrepreneurship training, and bursaries, particularly targeting youth, women, and persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, responding to the ERRP’s focus on economic recovery and SMME development, interventions such as the ITAMED initiative, SME Grant, and entrepreneurship programmes have supported informal traders and self-employment pathways. In the same breath, the Youth Unemployment Project, under the PYEI, has enabled structured transitions from learning to earning through workplace-based learning and exposure. Likewise, in response to the NSDP and Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) imperatives for future-ready skills and resilience, the SETA has invested in aligned occupational qualifications and micro-learning models. Partnerships with TVETs, CETs, and universities, alongside infrastructure investments and modular training, reflect alignment with the PSET White Paper’s goals for articulation, flexibility, and system responsiveness. Moreover, cross-sectoral initiatives in e-commerce, green retail, and logistics directly support the Industrial Policy Action Plan (IPAP) and the New Growth Path (NGP) by driving innovation, localisation, and sustainability. These collective interventions illustrate a coherent and forward-looking response to the evolving socio-economic and labour market demands of the wholesale and retail sector.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter provided a focused analysis of the evolving skills landscape in the Wholesale and Retail sector, shaped by disruptive innovation and technologies, shifting consumer behaviours towards e-commerce, economic uncertainty, and uneven education-to-employment linkages. These forces are redefining the sector's value chain and placing new demands on workforce capabilities, particularly around digital fluency, customer experience, and operational agility. Moreover, stakeholder engagements surfaced critical concerns regarding the relevance of existing training programmes, limited workplace exposure opportunities, and the need for more adaptable and inclusive skills development models.

To begin addressing the mismatch between existing training offerings and the evolving needs of the sector, the SETA is prioritising deeper collaboration with industry stakeholders to improve access to structured workplace learning and exposure to artisanal and occupational pathways, particularly for youth, women, and historically disadvantaged groups. In doing so, the SETA is also shifting toward more flexible learning and development models, including modular and stackable qualifications, which support lifelong learning and allow workers to upskill or reskill in line with emerging roles across the value chain. Furthermore, the piloting of district-level skills planning represents a strategic move toward more decentralised and responsive planning processes, thus enabling a finer understanding of regional skills gaps, local economic priorities, and employer capacity.

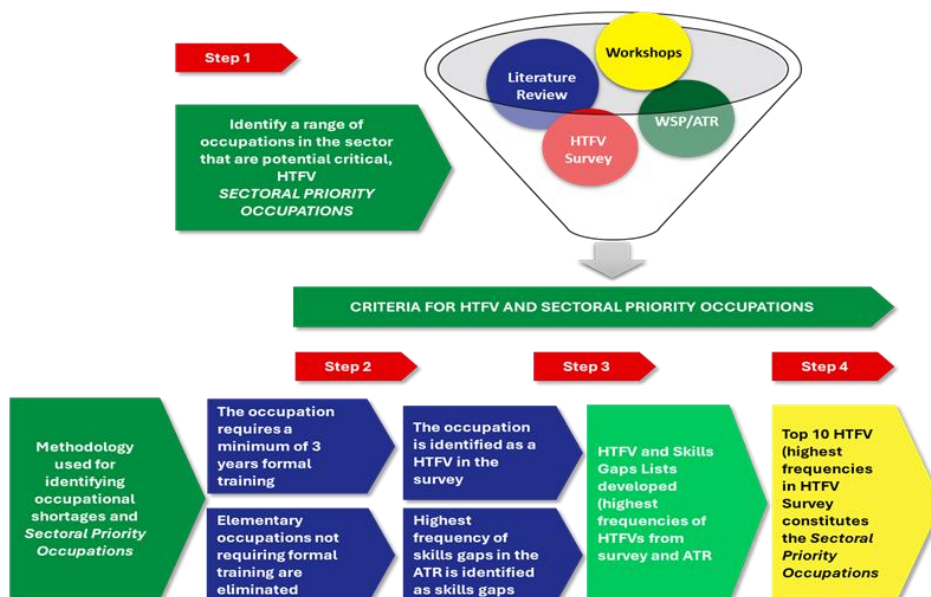
3. CHAPTER THREE: SECTORAL SKILLS DEMAND AND SUPPLY ANALYSIS

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined the factors influencing the demand and supply of skills in the Wholesale and Retail sector, highlighting its evolving nature and the need for innovative strategies to stay competitive. This section will explore the current state and dynamics of the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa, addressing various challenges and factors it encounters. The sector has been a fundamental component of the South African economy, serving as a major source of employment and a vital channel for distributing goods and services, ensuring access to a wide range of products such as food, clothing, electronics, and household essentials.

This chapter analyses sector vacancies to foster workforce planning and skills development, identifying key sub-sectors within the Wholesale and Retail sectors that are experiencing significant vacancies and require priority intervention. It addresses the issue of skills gaps and focuses on programmes that support sector innovation and skills demand, highlighting initiatives like hackathons and incubators that foster an innovative culture. Additionally, this chapter emphasises the importance of emerging technologies and the need for skills development that meets the demands of the evolving marketplace. Furthermore, it explores the extent and nature of demand for skilled labour in the W&R sector and assesses the type and extent of training available to the sector. To compile the Sectoral Priority Occupations list and identify occupational shortages, an analysis of WSP submissions by employers was conducted. Despite some limitations in the WSPs, such as vague descriptions of occupations, key informant interviews with industry stakeholders were conducted to complement the WSP information. Respondents were asked to identify key hard-to-fill vacancies (HTFVs) and skills gaps in the sector. To further validate the collected information, a continuous process of data collection was pursued through online surveys and focus groups. A triangulation methodology using various sources ensured a valid picture of skills demand and supply in the sector. Below are the methodology and criteria used to compile the critical, Hard-to-fill Occupations in the context of W&R SETA.

Figure 18: HTFVs/Sectoral Priority Occupations Methodology and Criteria



The above in simple means that:

Step One: Involves identifying the range of occupations for the Hard-to-Fill Vacancies (HTFV), Sectoral Priority Occupations, and skills gaps lists through a combination of workshops, thorough literature reviews, and the administration of a structured survey.

Step Two: Involves an elimination process that employs four specific eligibility criteria: (1) occupations requiring a minimum of three years of formal training; (2) exclusion of elementary occupations; (3) administration of the survey; and (4) identification of skills gaps as reported in Annual Training Reports (ATRs).

Step Three: involves incorporating occupations with frequencies above the median into the HTFV list after the elimination process. Similarly, skills gaps with frequencies above the median, as identified in the ATRs, are included in the Skills Gaps List.

Step Four: Involves designating the top ten occupations with the highest frequencies on the HTFV list as the Sectoral Priority Occupations.

3.2. Sectoral Occupational Demand (Hard-To-Fill Vacancies)

The table below presents the hard-to-fill occupations along with the reasons provided by stakeholders. The WSP/ATR data was validated through surveys, interviews and focus groups.

Table 9: Hard to Fill Vacancies

Occupation Title	OFO Code(s)	Vacancies	Reasons for hard to fill vacancies
Sales Assistant / Retail Assistant	2021-522301 / 522301	1334	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wages often fall below a liveable threshold, leading to low retention and few new entrants. - Perceived as low-status or temporary work. - Limits continuity and discourages experienced candidates.
Retail Supervisor	2021-522201	1154	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often project-based or short-term, which affects job security. - Inconsistent compensation discourages career development in this field. - Few structured training or certification opportunities in promotional marketing.
Retail General Manager	2021-142103	833	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many applicants lack formal business/retail management qualifications. - Inadequate exposure to multi-store operations and modern retail systems (e.g., ERP, inventory tech). - Demands strong leadership, decision-making, and financial skills which is scarce in applicants.
Shelf Filler	2021-833401	687	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wages often fall below a liveable threshold, leading to low retention and few new entrants. - Perceived as low-status or temporary work. - Limits continuity and discourages experienced candidates.
Retail Store Manager	2021-142103-2	618	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of qualifications: Few applicants have retail-specific diplomas/degrees. - Leadership and compliance gaps: Role requires HR, sales, logistics, and regulatory knowledge - Few candidates are well-rounded. - Job stress and long hours Discourages qualified applicants.
SHE Manager / Occupational Safety Practitioner / Officer	2021-121206-1 / 2021-226302	611	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Candidates with combined safety, health, environmental, and quality expertise are rare. - Unsuitable job location: Many roles are in remote or industrial zones, which limits uptake.- - Rapid changes in SHE legislation demand continuous upskilling.

Butcher	2021-681103	541	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The need to adhere to food safety, traceability, and hygiene standards increases training demands and discourages informal or under-skilled candidates. - Young people often view butchery as physically demanding, outdated, and lacking upward mobility. - Many experienced butchers are nearing retirement, and there are few young entrants to replace them. - Employers require both technical skills (e.g., meat cutting, hygiene) and customer service, but these combined competencies are hard to find. - Relatively low wages: Compared to the effort and skills required, the compensation may not be competitive. - These challenges are further exacerbated in semi-rural provinces, where training infrastructure is either weak or non-existent. In some areas, there are no accredited training providers available to offer the necessary qualifications or upskilling support, severely limiting local capacity-building efforts. - Compounding this issue is the misalignment of the current butchery qualification, which resides with an unrelated SETA. This administrative misplacement has hindered curriculum relevance, responsiveness, and effective sectoral support.
Visual Merchandiser	2021-343203	534	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often seen as a peripheral or "soft" function within the retail hierarchy, leading to poor career visibility. - Mismatch between what TVETs and universities offer vs. what the sector needs, especially in combining retail trends with digital design and customer engagement.
Retail Buyer	2021-332301	510	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Requires analytical, negotiation, and forecasting skills which is often underdeveloped in applicants. - Understanding product cycles, supplier networks, and seasonal buying is crucial, but often lacking. - Pressure to meet margins and turnover targets deters some candidates.
Sales Person / Consultant	2021-522301-14	419	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commission-based pay models deter potential candidates. - Demands strong interpersonal skills, product knowledge, and resilience to rejection. - Traditional sales roles are declining while demand for hybrid/tech-enabled roles are increasing.
Sales Promotion Officer	2021-243103-8	254	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Often project-based or short-term, which affects job security. - Inconsistent compensation discourages career development in this field. - Few structured training or certification opportunities in promotional marketing.

Source: WSP/ATR WSP/ATR DATA 2025; SSP Survey; Employer Interviews; SSP Provincial Engagements

The above table reveals acute and persistent challenges in filling key occupations across the wholesale and retail sector, underscoring systemic issues of skills mismatch, job unattractiveness, and structural constraints in the labour market. The most affected occupations : Sales Assistants, Retail Supervisors, Retail General Managers, Shelf Fillers, Retail Store Managers, and SHE Managers are hindered by a complex interplay of low wages, job insecurity, limited career development pathways, and misalignment between training outputs and sector needs. Sales Assistants (1,334 vacancies) and Shelf Fillers (687 vacancies) are widely regarded as low-status or transitional roles, marked by poor remuneration and limited career progression. This perception erodes continuity and deters experienced talent, resulting in high turnover and persistent shortages.

On the other hand, Retail Supervisors (1,154 vacancies) and Sales Promotion Officers (254 vacancies) face instability due to their short-term, project-based nature and lack of formalised career trajectories, discouraging long-term commitment. Moreover, Retail General Managers (833 vacancies) and Store Managers (618 vacancies) require multi-faceted competencies ranging from leadership and financial acumen to compliance and systems knowledge that are in short supply within the current workforce. Most applicants lack retail-specific qualifications and exposure to integrated business systems (e.g., ERP), while the high stress and long hours associated with these roles further dissuade qualified professionals from entering or remaining in the field. Moreover, the role of SHE Managers (611 vacancies) is further complicated by evolving legislative requirements, the need for multi-disciplinary expertise, and location-specific limitations, particularly in remote or industrial zones. Similarly, Butchers (541 vacancies) are increasingly difficult to source due to a combination of physical job

demands, food safety compliance pressures, and the aging demographic of current professionals factors that collectively disincentivise new entrants, particularly youth.

Meanwhile, Visual Merchandisers (534 vacancies) and Retail Buyers (510 vacancies) suffer from poor career visibility and disconnects between academic offerings and industry expectations, especially in blending retail intelligence with data analytics, digital fluency, and trend responsiveness. Lastly, the Sales Person/Consultant role (419 vacancies) is impacted by the shift from traditional face-to-face selling to hybrid and digital platforms, requiring a new mix of interpersonal and tech-enabled skills not yet widespread in the sector. Furthermore the below is a mapping of occupations, that have been consistently identified as hard to fill over the years.

Table 10: mapping of occupations, that have been consistently identified as hard to fill over the years.

Occupation Title	OFO Code(s)	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Key Reasons for Hard-to-Fill Status
Sales Assistant / Retail Assistant	2021-522301	X	X	X	X	X	Low wages, limited career progression, perceived as entry-level/temporary, high turnover.
Retail Supervisor	2021-522201	X	X	X	X	X	Lack of supervisory training, inconsistent employment terms, limited mentorship and growth pathways.
Retail Store Manager	2021-142103-2	X	X	X	X	X	Requires multi-role proficiency (HR, logistics, compliance), high pressure and long hours deter applicants.
Retail General Manager	2021-142103	X	X	X	X	X	Scarce leadership and strategic retail skills; limited exposure to modern systems and operations.
Retail Buyer	2021-332301	X	X	X	X	X	Analytical, forecasting, and procurement skills lacking, poor alignment with digital and ethical sourcing trends.
SHE Manager / Occupational Safety Practitioner	2021-121206-1 / 226302	–	X	X	X	X	High demand for integrated SHEQ skills, roles in remote areas, rapid regulatory shifts require continuous upskilling.
Butcher	2021-681103	X	X	X	X	X	Aging workforce, unappealing image to youth, hygiene compliance, and low pay vs. skill effort.
Shelf Filler	2021-833401	X	X	X	X	X	Perceived as low-skilled, physically demanding, with low wages and no clear career advancement path.
Visual Merchandiser	2021-343203	–	X	X	X	X	Disconnect between training and industry needs. The role is undervalued, insufficient digital skills for hybrid environments.
Sales Person / Consultant	2021-522301-14	X	X	X	X	X	Declining traditional sales models, high interpersonal skill demands, and commission-based structure limits appeal.
Sales Promotion Officer	2021-243103-8	X	X	X	X	X	Short-term contracts. no structured training, unstable compensation makes it unattractive as a long-term career.

Source: SSPs 2021/22-202

The table offers a critical longitudinal view of persistent skills shortages within the Sector, underscoring systemic labour market constraints. A consistent pattern emerges across occupations such as Sales Assistants, Retail Supervisors, Store and General Managers, Buyers, and Butchers, which remain hard-to-fill due to structural challenges, including inadequate remuneration, limited career mobility, and persistent training and skills gaps. These occupations reflect a broader issue of sectoral undervaluation of frontline and mid-tier roles, often perceived as transitional or low-status, thereby undermining talent attraction and retention. Moreover, the emergence of roles such as SHE Managers and Visual Merchandisers from 2022/23 onwards points to evolving sectoral demands aligned to regulatory compliance, sustainability imperatives, and digital retail transformation. These shifts reflect the changing nature of work and highlight the mismatch between existing training supply and emerging occupational requirements, particularly in hybrid and digitally enabled environments.

3.2.1 2025/26 Trends in Vacancies Across the Provinces

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of job vacancies across South African provinces, emphasising the key factors contributing to these vacancies. The analysis highlights primary causes, including lack of relevant experience, inadequate qualifications, insufficient remuneration, unsuitable job locations, and challenging working hours. Focusing on data from the 2025/26 period, this examination reveals distinct provincial employment patterns that reflect the unique economic contexts and strategic priorities of each region.

These trends offer valuable insights into the evolving labour market dynamics shaped by global economic shifts, local policy reforms, and sector-specific developments. Understanding these patterns is essential for designing targeted interventions to close workforce gaps and align skills development initiatives with both provincial and national objectives. The table below offers a clear overview to support this analysis.

Table 11: Job Vacancies across Provinces

Reason	EC	FS	GP	KZN	LP	MP	NW	NC	WC	Total Vacancy
Equity Consideration	0	24	4929	236	8	0	5	0	0	5202
Lack of relevant experience	0	170	0	870	245	676	21	0	203	2185
Lack of relevant qualifications	0	0	0	907	0	468	64	34	1050	2523
Poor remuneration	0	4	146	259	0	3	0	11	0	423
Unsuitable job location	0	0	348	152	0	23	8	23	0	554
Unsuitable working hours	0	0	38	21	0	21	13	8	241	342

SOURCE: WSP/ATR DATA 2025/26

The vacancy data reveals pronounced disparities in recruitment challenges across South African provinces, with the most prominent issues centred around a lack of relevant experience and qualifications. Gauteng and the Western Cape stand out with the highest total vacancy numbers, primarily driven by challenges related to skills and experience deficiencies. This pattern reflects their larger and more complex job markets, where demand for skilled professionals is significantly higher. Conversely, provinces such as the North West and Northern Cape report fewer vacancies, alongside less intense issues concerning qualifications and experience.

Poor remuneration and unsuitable job locations also emerge as important contributors to recruitment difficulties, particularly in the Western Cape and Free State. These factors underscore the critical role of competitive compensation and geographic accessibility in attracting and retaining talent, especially in regions with elevated vacancy levels. Moreover, the variation in vacancy patterns across provinces can be understood through several interrelated factors:

- **Economic Activity and Industry Composition:**

Provinces with diversified and dynamic economies, notably Gauteng and the Western Cape, display higher vacancy rates due to their substantial demand for skilled labour across multiple sectors. These provinces serve as economic hubs with extensive service, financial, and industrial sectors, thus requiring a broad range of competencies. On the other hand, provinces with less diversified economies, or those reliant on specific industries, encounter difficulties both in generating employment and filling existing roles. For example, Limpopo's shift from industrial and construction-based employment toward service-oriented jobs in retail and consumer services represents a strategic realignment aimed at economic diversification and reducing reliance on traditional sectors. This transition aligns with broader national priorities to foster resilient and inclusive economic growth.

- **Skill Mismatch and Changing Industry Requirements:**

Furthermore, a significant driver of vacancies within the sector is the persistent mismatch between the skills possessed by the available workforce and those required by employers. The sector is undergoing a rapid transformation driven by technological advancements, including the integration of digital platforms, e-commerce systems, automation in warehousing and logistics, and data-driven customer engagement strategies. Additionally, the growing emphasis on sustainability and ethical consumerism is reshaping operational practices from sourcing and packaging to waste management and supply chain transparency.

These shifts demand a new calibre of workforce equipped with digital literacy, data analytics capabilities, customer experience design, and green retail competencies. However, many job seekers, particularly in provinces where traditional retail functions have dominated, still lack the qualifications, experience, and adaptive skills to meet these evolving demands. The deficit is especially pronounced in rural and under-resourced regions where access to relevant upskilling opportunities remains limited.

- **Migration Patterns and Brain Drain:**

Provinces experiencing substantial out-migration of skilled workers face exacerbated vacancy challenges. Talented individuals often relocate to provinces or countries offering superior job opportunities and remuneration, leaving behind a depleted talent pool. Urban centers like Gauteng and the Western Cape continue to attract specialised and managerial professionals due to their complex economic ecosystems and dynamic labour markets. Conversely, more rural provinces such as Mpumalanga and Northern Cape predominantly offer roles in sectors like logistics, agriculture, and basic retail, reflecting their economic structure and resource base. These regional contrasts emphasise the need for localised strategies to leverage provincial strengths and address specific labour market needs.

- **Education and Training Infrastructure:**

Provinces such as Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, despite being economically advanced, face persistent challenges in filling vacancies due to a lack of relevant qualifications and experience, pointing to a misalignment between education outputs and industry demands. High vacancy figures in regions like the Western Cape and Mpumalanga further underscore the shortage of sector-relevant skills, particularly in areas such as digital retail, inventory management, and customer analytics. Conversely, lower vacancy numbers in provinces with limited retail activity may mask deeper structural issues, including weak skills pipelines and limited access to specialised training. These patterns reflect the urgent need for responsive, industry-aligned education and training systems that can equip the workforce with the evolving competencies required by a rapidly transforming retail landscape.

- **Economic Development and Investment:**

Provinces such as Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, which are economic hubs, show high vacancy numbers, particularly in areas of equity consideration, qualifications, and experience, indicating both greater job creation and intensified competition for suitably skilled workers. In contrast, provinces with limited economic activity, such as the Northern Cape and North West, report fewer vacancies, but still face challenges related to poor remuneration and unsuitable working conditions, pointing to structural limitations in attracting and retaining talent. The emergence of roles related to sustainability and consumer protection, especially in Mpumalanga, signals a growing shift towards green retail practices and compliance-driven operations.

Table 12: New and Emerging Occupations

SETA name	Period	Occupation Code	Occupation	Interventions Planned	NQF Level	NQF Aligned (Y/N)	Qty needed	Qty to be supported	Rationale (digitisation or national strategy and specify the national strategy)
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-252101	Data Analyst	Bursary (Diploma/Degree), Learnership	6	Y	12	10	The growing digitisation of the wholesale and retail sector has amplified the demand for data analytics skills to support real-time inventory management, consumer behaviour tracking, targeted marketing, and supply chain optimisation. As retailers increasingly rely on data-driven strategies to remain competitive and responsive to shifting market trends, Data Analysts have become essential to unlocking actionable insights from vast data streams. This occupation is directly responsive to the sector's evolving operational models, including e-commerce integration and omni-channel retailing, where data intelligence is a critical enabler of efficiency, agility, and personalised customer engagement
					7				
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-121206	Safety, Health & Environmental (SHE) Manager	Bursary (Diploma/Postgraduate),	6	Y	6	5	Sustainability, environmental compliance, and workplace safety are becoming increasingly critical in the wholesale and retail sector, particularly in provinces experiencing rapid retail expansion and infrastructure growth. As consumer and regulatory expectations rise, retail operations must adopt more robust health, safety, and environmental (HSE) management systems. This occupational need is driven by sectoral imperatives to ensure compliance with environmental legislation, occupational health standards, and sustainable operational practices.
					7				
					8				
				Internship	6	N			
7									
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-216604	Web Designer / Digital Marketing Specialist	Bursary (Degree/Postgraduate),	7	Y	10	8	The accelerating digital transformation across the sector necessitates skilled web design and digital marketing professionals who can drive online visibility, enhance customer engagement, and optimise omnichannel experiences. As consumer behaviour shifts toward e-commerce and mobile platforms, retailers require expertise in web
					8				
				Short Courses	6	N			

									interface design, UX/UI, SEO, and digital campaign management to remain competitive.
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-121905	E-commerce/ Project Manager	Bursary (Diploma/Degree)	6	Y	9	8	The rapid growth and evolution of online retail platforms have transformed traditional business models, requiring seamless integration of technology, logistics, customer experience, and data analytics. This shift has significantly increased the demand for capable E-commerce Project Managers who can plan, implement, and oversee complex digital retail initiatives. These professionals play a pivotal role in aligning business objectives with technological advancements, ensuring that online platforms are not only operationally efficient, but also responsive to changing consumer behaviours. This demand is further reinforced by 4IR, which emphasizes the convergence of physical and digital systems.
					7				
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-2021-252901	Cybersecurity/ICT Security Specialist	Bursary (Diploma/Degree), Learnership	6	Y	8	7	Protecting digital assets is critical as retail expands online, aligned to 4IR, NSDP, and National Digital and Future Skills Strategy.
W&R SETA	2026/27	2021-343203	Merchandiser / Visual Sales Assistant	Short Courses	5	Y	12	10	The rapid growth of omni-channel retail has positioned skilled merchandisers and visual sales assistants as emerging occupations vital to delivering seamless customer experiences across both physical and digital platforms. These professionals play a crucial role in aligning product presentation, inventory management, and in-store as well as online visual appeal with evolving consumer expectations. Their expertise supports the sector’s digitization goals by bridging traditional retail methods with innovative digital strategies, ensuring competitiveness in a fast-changing market landscape. This growing importance is consistent with the sector’s evolution and national priorities to modernise retail through integrated, customer-centric approaches.
					6	N			

SOURCE: WSP/ATR WSP/ATR DATA 2025; SSP Survey; Employer Interviews; SSP Provincial Engagement

The above reflects a shift driven by digitisation, automation, and evolving consumer expectations. Industry interactions consistently highlight a pressing demand for digital capabilities, particularly in occupations such as Data Analysts, Web Designers, and ICT Project Managers. These roles are no longer peripheral, but central to retail operations as businesses pivot towards data-driven decision-making, personalised consumer engagement, and omnichannel delivery models. Retailers, from major chains to agile SMMEs, are seeking talent who can translate large data sets into actionable insights, design intuitive digital storefronts, and manage complex digital projects. This trend affirms the alignment of these occupations with strategic national frameworks such as the NSDP and the National Digital and Future Skills Strategy, making their development not only sector-relevant but nationally imperative.

Simultaneously, occupations traditionally under-recognised, like Merchandisers, Visual Sales Assistants, and Sales/Marketing Directors, are being redefined in response to the sector's technological transformation. Industry voices suggest that while these roles have long existed, their digital evolution is what now renders them “emerging.” For example, merchandisers are expected to coordinate not only floor plans and in-store visuals, but also support digital inventory systems and online catalogues. Likewise, sales and marketing leaders must now harness digital tools, consumer data, and social analytics to develop adaptive, omnichannel strategies. These shifts demand a re-engineering of traditional skills pipelines to accommodate integrated, future-facing competencies, thus validating the W&RSETA’s planned interventions through bursaries and learnerships across NQF levels.

Additionally, the emergence of roles such as Cybersecurity/ICT Security Specialists and E-commerce Project Managers speaks to the sector’s expanding digital risk landscape and operational complexity. Industry stakeholders have raised concerns about data security, regulatory compliance, and the capacity to implement secure and scalable online platforms. These challenges are particularly pronounced among mid-sized and expanding retailers who now require in-house digital risk managers and operational integrators. These occupations represent the sector’s growing reliance on tech-enabled leadership and underline the necessity for structured learning pathways supported by NQF-aligned interventions to address the skills deficit in cybersecurity and digital project oversight. Taken together, these developments affirm that the SETA’s proactive identification and support of these roles is both responsive and forward-looking, ensuring the sector’s resilience, competitiveness, and alignment with national priorities. While the above highlights are new and emerging occupations, the table below focuses on high-turnover, high-demand occupations.

Table 13: High Demand, High Turnover Occupations

Occupation	OFO Code	Vacancies	Reason
Call or phone Centre Operator	2021-422301	74	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This role requires excellent communication, problem-solving, and technical skills to manage customer queries efficiently. A large portion of candidates lack experience with CRM systems, call handling protocols, and conflict resolution, which leads to poor job performance and early exits. - High stress levels, repetitive tasks, and customer dissatisfaction exacerbate turnover, especially when inexperienced staff are not adequately trained or supported. - The entry barrier for this role is low, so many hires are fresh to the industry, resulting in high churn due to the steep learning curve.
Retail Buyer	2021-332301	61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Buyers must have strong negotiation, market analysis, and supply chain management experience. Many candidates lack exposure to supplier relationship management, forecasting, and inventory control. - Most are inexperienced in analysing market trends or consumer preferences often results in poor purchasing decisions, affecting business profitability and prompting replacement. - The evolving landscape of retail buying, with an emphasis on digital procurement and ethical sourcing, demands updated skills that many applicants do not yet possess.
Retail Supervisor	2021-522201	58	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supervisory roles require a balance of operational knowledge and people management. Many candidates promoted from sales roles lack formal supervisory experience, leading to ineffective team leadership and increased staff turnover. - Supervisors must handle conflict resolution, performance monitoring, and training delivery, skills that are often underdeveloped, causing job dissatisfaction and vacancy recurrence. - Limited mentorship or formal development programs contribute to the gap in experience.

Customer Service Manager	2021-122105	55	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This senior role requires extensive experience in customer relations strategies, team leadership, and handling escalations. Many candidates lack proven track records in managing customer service teams or developing service improvement initiatives.
General Clerk	2021-411101	53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Entry-level clerical roles require basic administrative skills such as data entry, filing, and document management. Many candidates lack experience with office software suites, organisational processes, and time management. - Clerical work is often viewed as routine and low-skilled, leading to low engagement and frequent job changes among inexperienced workers.
Service Station Attendant	2021-524501	48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The physical demands, irregular shifts, and safety risks coupled with inadequate training increase turnover.
Pharmacy Sales Assistant	2021-332208	48	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sales assistants in pharmacies must understand product knowledge, health regulations, and customer confidentiality. Many lack prior retail or health sector experience. - Inexperience in handling sensitive products and navigating regulatory compliance leads to performance issues.

SOURCE: WSP/ATR WSP/ATR DATA 2025/26; SSP Survey; Employer Interviews; SSP Provincial Engagements

The high turnover in key wholesale and retail occupations due to a lack of relevant experience highlights a critical skills mismatch between workforce supply and sectoral demands. This persistent gap signals deeper systemic challenges, including inadequate vocational training, insufficient workplace exposure, and limited investment in continuous professional development. As the sector evolves in response to digitalisation, customer-centric service models, and operational efficiency imperatives, the inability to retain competent staff undermines productivity, service quality, and long-term sustainability. Addressing this issue requires a strategic shift toward structured work-integrated learning, targeted upskilling programs, and stronger industry-education partnerships to ensure the workforce is not only employable but capable of adapting to dynamic retail environments.

3.3. Occupations that are becoming obsolete

Furthermore, as the wholesale and retail sector rapidly evolves in response to technological advancement, automation, and changing consumer behaviours, several traditional occupations are at risk of becoming obsolete. The growing integration of self-service technologies, digital platforms, and artificial intelligence is reshaping operational models and reducing the need for routine, manual, and customer-facing roles. The table below outlines key occupations within the sector that are facing obsolescence, along with the reasons driving their decline:

Table 14: Occupations that are becoming obsolete

Occupation	OFO Code	Reason for Obsolescence in the Wholesale & Retail Sector
Cashier/Checkout Operator	2021-523101	The growing adoption of self-checkout systems, mobile payment platforms, and automated kiosks is significantly reducing the reliance on manual checkout staff within the sector. As consumer preferences shift toward faster, contactless, and more convenient transaction methods, retailers are increasingly investing in automation to enhance operational efficiency and reduce labour costs. In parallel, the implementation of automated cash handling technologies such as cash guard tills has effectively eliminated the need for manual cash reconciliation and issuing. These systems minimise human error and streamline front-end processes, rendering traditional roles like cashiers and till operators increasingly redundant in modern retail environments.
Shop Assistant	2021-522301	The shift towards e-commerce and self-service retail reduces in-store foot traffic and the need for personal assistance. Customers often research and purchase products online independently, decreasing demand for traditional sales floor staff.
Data Capturer	2021-413201	Automation and AI technologies increasingly handle routine data entry, inventory updates, and administrative tasks with higher speed and accuracy. This shift reduces demand for manual data-capturing roles, especially in retail stock and sales records management.

Secretary / Receptionist	2021-422601	Digital communication tools, AI scheduling assistants, and workflow automation streamline administrative support, reducing reliance on traditional secretarial roles. Virtual reception and automated call handling systems further reduce demand for human receptionists.
Call or Contact Centre Agent	2021-422206	Automated customer service platforms, AI chatbots, and interactive voice response systems handle many routine inquiries and support functions more efficiently, lowering the need for human operators in call centres and customer contact roles within retail.

SOURCE: WSP/ATR WSP/ATR DATA 2025/26; SSP Survey; Employer Interviews; SSP Provincial Engagements

The gradual disappearance of these occupations points to a critical inflexion point for the wholesale and retail sector, where technological advancement is not merely enhancing operations, but fundamentally altering workforce structures. The diminishing demand for roles such as cashiers, shop assistants, and call centre staff underscores a strategic pivot towards automation, data-driven decision-making, and digital customer engagement. While these changes promise increased productivity and streamlined processes, they also expose a widening gap between current workforce capabilities and future skill demands. This transition necessitates a reimagining of workforce development strategies, emphasising adaptability, continuous learning, and the cultivation of digital fluency to ensure that the sector’s human capital remains relevant and resilient amid ongoing disruption

3.4. Skills Gaps

The wholesale and retail sector is situated within a dynamic and fast-evolving landscape, driven by rapid technological advancement, shifting consumer expectations, and emerging business models. This constant flux has amplified the skills mismatch between what employers need and what job seekers or current employees can offer. As a result, businesses struggle to source appropriately skilled personnel, while many individuals face barriers to employment or career advancement due to inadequate or outdated competencies. The accelerating adoption of technologies such as e-commerce platforms, digital payment systems, and automated inventory management has created an urgent demand for specialised technical skills, particularly in roles like IT Security Specialists and Computer Network and Systems Engineers, where certified expertise is essential to ensure secure and efficient retail operations.

Simultaneously, the proliferation of 4IR technologies has intensified this gap. As veteran employees with experience in legacy retail systems retire or exit the workforce, the sector is confronted with a dual challenge: sustaining older systems and processes while rapidly integrating cutting-edge innovations. This has created a void in both legacy and emerging technological domains, as new entrants often lack institutional knowledge, and demand for emerging digital capabilities continues to outpace supply. Furthermore, critical skills deficits extend beyond technical roles, with widespread shortages in management, leadership, and customer service competencies. Moreover, skills gaps are no longer confined to technical areas, they now span middle management, data analytics, compliance, and digital engagement. Moreover, traditional education and training systems are struggling to keep pace, leaving graduates underprepared for real-world demands. In response, businesses are turning to hybrid training models, internal academies, and structured mentorship to quickly upskill their workforce. Multiskilling, adaptability, and emotional intelligence have become core attributes for workers, as job roles blur and the sector demands agility across both customer-facing and backend functions.

Small and medium enterprises, central to sector growth, face compounded challenges due to limited resources and rigid training structures. In addition, stakeholders in the sector have expressed that there is a pressing need for simplified, flexible learning pathways that address practical skills such as compliance, financial literacy, and digital fluency, especially for youth and informal traders. At the same time, leadership development has emerged as a strategic imperative, with businesses seeking

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to strengthen internal pipelines for store and field management. As automation and AI reshape operations, the sector must embrace innovative, inclusive approaches to skills development to build a future-ready workforce capable of thriving in a fast-evolving and digitally driven environment. The following table outlines specific occupations where these gaps are most pronounced, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated and forward-looking training and development strategies.

Table 15: Skills Gaps by Major Occupation Group

Occupation	Management & Leadership Skills	Technical Skills	Operational Efficiency Skills	Design Thinking Skills	Health & Safety Skills	Warehouse Management Skills	Digital & 4IR Skills	System Skills	Financial Skills
Managers									
2021-142103 Retail General Manager	X		X	X			X	X	X
2021-132402 Logistics Manager	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
2021-122102 Sales Manager	X			X			X		X
2021-121905 Programme or Project Manager	X		X	X			X	X	X
Professionals									
2021-251201 Software Developer		X		X			X	X	
2021-251101 ICT Systems Analyst		X		X			X	X	
2021-332302 Purchasing Officer			X	X				X	X
2021-243103 Marketing Practitioner	X			X			X	X	
2021-226302 SHE&Q Practitioner					X		X	X	
2021-226301 Environmental Health Officer					X			X	
2021-242101 Management Consultant	X		X	X			X	X	X
Technical & Associate Professionals			X	X			X	X	X
2021-334103 Call Centre Team Leader	X		X				X	X	
2021-343203 Visual Merchandiser	X			X			X	X	
2021-332301 Retail Buyer				X			X	X	X
2021-331201 Credit or Loans Officer								X	X
Clerical Support Workers									
2021-432103 Order Clerk / Officer			X				X	X	

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2021-432101 Stock Clerk / Officer			X		X	X	X	X	
Services & Sales Workers			X					X	X
2021-522303 Parts Assistant Manager	X			X					X
2021-523101 Checkout Operator			X				X	X	
2021-523102 Office Cashier								X	X
Craft & Related Trades Workers			X						
2021-681103 Butcher			X		X				
2021-684305 Quality Controller			X				X	X	
Plant & Machine Operators			X			X			
Elementary Occupations									
2021-833401 Shelf Filler			X						
2021-832102 Meat Packer			X		X				

SOURCE: WSP/ATR WSP/ATR data 2025/26; SSP Survey; Employer Interviews; SSP Provincial Engagements

The above offers a clear lens into the evolving dynamics of the sector, underscoring a decisive shift towards digital transformation, operational agility, and innovation-led growth. Digital and 4IR skills have become pervasive across occupational categories, signalling a sector-wide integration of technology from front-line roles to strategic management. This points to an urgent need for inclusive digital upskilling to prevent marginalisation of lower-skilled or older workers. Equally, operational efficiency is emerging as a performance imperative, particularly in logistics, sales, and clerical functions, where agility, process optimisation, and lean thinking are being prioritised to respond to supply chain disruptions and consumer demand shifts. Moreover, design thinking skills, once confined to creative fields, are now viewed as a competitive advantage, extending to roles in marketing, project management, and even visual merchandising. This evolution reflects a broader sectoral transformation towards experience-driven, customer-centric models that require not only technical proficiency but also empathy and innovation.

In parallel, system skills and financial acumen are becoming core competencies across both professional and support roles, illustrating a move toward integrated business platforms, data-informed decision-making, and enhanced accountability at all levels. Warehouse and logistics functions, for instance, now demand a combination of technical know-how, system navigation, and digital literacy, while even traditional roles such as buyers and cashiers are expected to possess financial awareness. On the other hand, Health and safety remain critical, even though less centralised, with growing emphasis on embedding compliance into daily operations. These developments reveal a flattening of traditional skill hierarchies, with multitasking becoming the norm rather than the exception. Collectively, these trends point to a sector undergoing profound transformation, one that requires responsive, agile workforce development strategies.

3.5. Extent and Nature of Skills Supply

This section examines the skills provision for universities and TVET colleges.

3.5.1. Enrolment in Post-School Education and Training Institutions

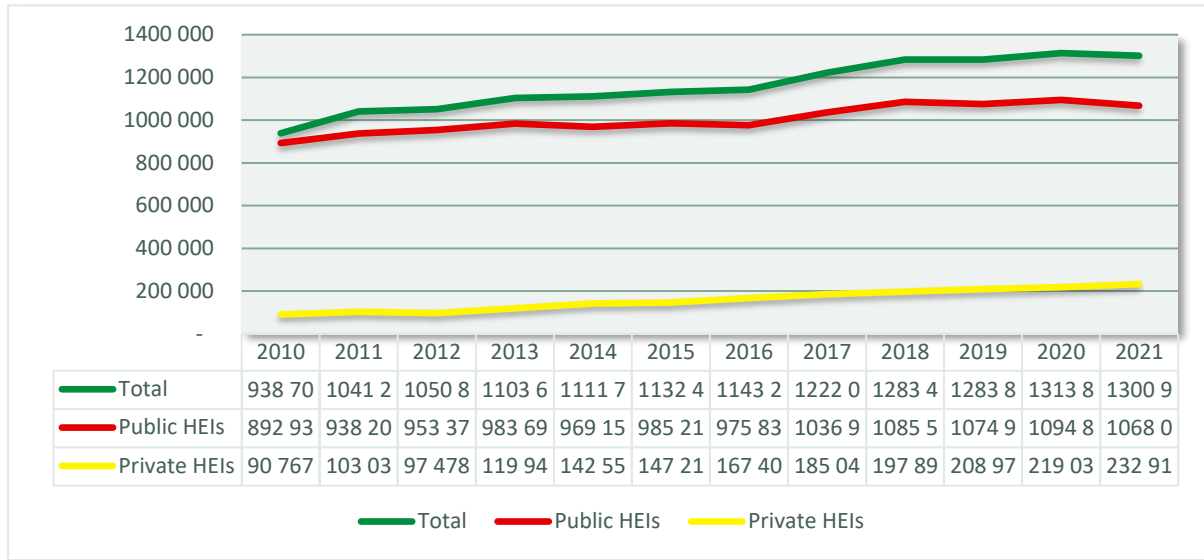
In 2021, the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system in South Africa comprised 342 institutions, including 26 public and 124 private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), 50 Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, 133 private colleges, and 9 Community Education and Training (CET) colleges. Public and private HEIs enrolled a total of 1.3 million students, with public HEIs accounting for 1,068,046 students and private HEIs for 232,915. TVET colleges experienced a 30.2% enrolment increase, reaching 589,083 students, with the National Development Plan (NDP) aiming for 2.5 million students by 2030. CET colleges enrolled 143,031 students, targeting 1 million by 2030. Private colleges enrolled 85,787 students, emphasising new registration requirements focused on Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) accreditation.

Graduation rates indicate the sector's potential for workforce development. Public HEIs awarded degrees to 233,257 graduates, with significant representation in Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET), Business and Management, and Education. Private HEIs saw a notable increase in graduates, particularly in bachelor's degrees and Higher Certificates. TVET colleges had 47,750 students complete key exit levels, while private colleges recorded 9,848 completions. CET colleges saw 25,780 students complete the GETC: ABET Level 4 qualification. These graduates represent a crucial talent pool for the wholesale and retail sector, bringing skills in business management, technical fields, and education.

The wholesale and retail sector can leverage these educational trends to address future skills needs. Developing training programmes focused on customer service excellence and specialised supply chain management will enhance operational efficiency and customer satisfaction. Continuous skills upgrades and re-skilling initiatives are essential to keep pace with technological advancements and market changes. Collaboration with educational institutions through internships, apprenticeships, and industry-academic partnerships can ensure that students gain practical experience and industry-relevant skills, effectively bridging the skills gap. Funding from the Skills Levy Fund, which disbursed R19.0 billion with significant allocations to SETAs and the National Skills Fund (NSF), presents an opportunity for targeted investment in training programmes. These funds can support sector-specific certifications, continuous professional development courses, and community-based training programmes, building a local talent pipeline. By focusing on strategic skills development and leveraging available resources, the wholesale and retail sector can enhance workforce competence, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction, ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness.

From 2010 to 2021, student enrolment in public and private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa exhibited notable trends, especially in the years 2019, 2020, and 2021. In 2019, total enrolment in HEIs was 1,283,890, which increased to 1,313,839 in 2020, and then slightly decreased to 1,300,961 in 2021. Public HEIs had 1,074,912 students in 2019, growing to 1,094,808 in 2020, before dropping to 1,068,046 in 2021. This shows a slight decline from the peak in 2020, but still maintains higher numbers than in 2019.

Figure 19: Number of Students Enrolled in Public and Private HEIs, 2010-2021



Source: Statistics on PSET South Africa (2023)

Conversely, private HEIs exhibited a consistent upward trend in enrolment numbers during the same period. In 2019, private HEIs enrolled 208,978 students, increasing to 219,031 in 2020, and further to 232,915 in 2021. This steady rise in private HEI enrolments highlights a growing interest and capacity in the private education sector, contrasting with the minor fluctuations seen in public HEIs. These trends indicate a shifting landscape in higher education, where private institutions are increasingly becoming a significant alternative for students.

Table 16: PSET Enrolment in South Africa




Institution	Enrolment
TVET	589 083
Universities	1 068 046
Private HEIs	232 915
Total	1 890 044

Source: Statistics on PSET South Africa (2023)

The table above shows the distribution of student enrolments across various higher education institutions in South Africa in 2021, this totalled 1,890,044. Public universities had the highest number of enrolments, with 1,068,046 students, accounting for approximately 56.5% of the total. This dominant share underscores the central role public universities play in the higher education sector, reflecting a significant preference for university education within the public sector. Meanwhile, TVET colleges enrolled 589,083 students, making up about 31.2% of the total. This substantial enrolment highlights the importance of vocational education in providing practical skills and training to a large segment of the student population.

Private higher education institutions, with 232,915 students, represented about 12.3% of total enrolments. Although smaller in comparison to public universities and TVET colleges, private HEIs remain crucial in offering specialised and diverse educational opportunities. The strategic implications of these enrolment patterns are significant. The dominance of public universities suggests a need for continuous investment in maintaining and enhancing their capacity and quality. The strong presence of TVET colleges indicates the critical role of vocational training in meeting labour market demands, necessitating ongoing support and development. The steady growth of private HEIs highlights their increasing importance in the educational landscape, suggesting opportunities for partnerships and innovations to complement public offerings and address niche educational needs. The table below addresses the enrolment in TVET colleges.

Table 17: Enrolment in TVET Colleges, 2020-2022

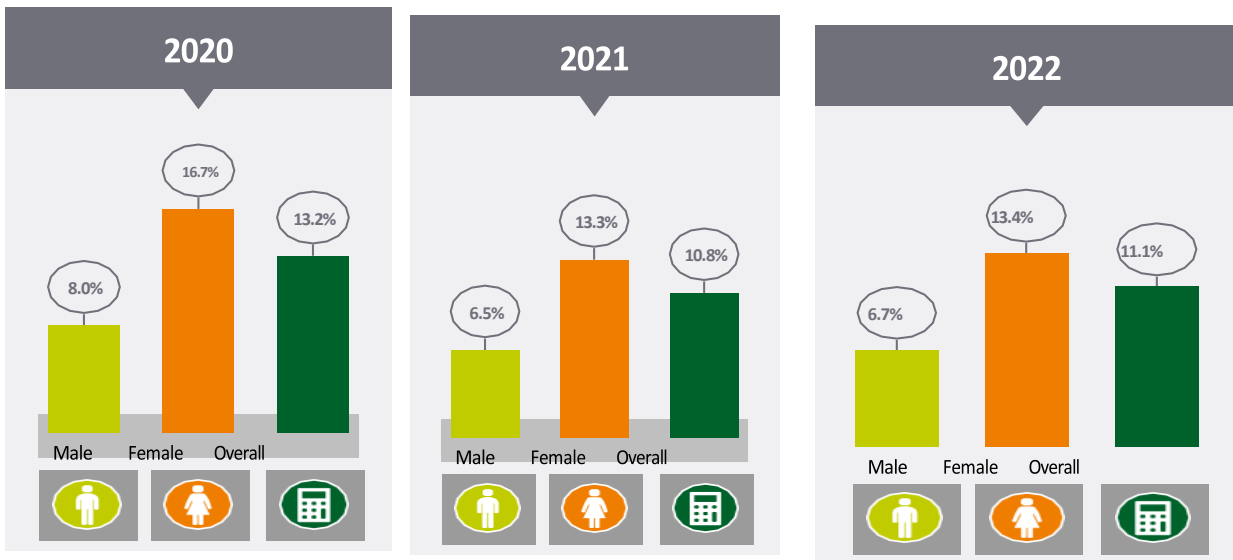
				
PROGRAMME TYPE		NUMBER ENROLLED (NC(V)2, 2020)	NUMBER COMPLETED (NC(V)4, 2022)	THROUGHPUT RATE (%)
1	Drawing Office Practice	94	—	—
2	Electrical Infrastructure and Construction	8 189	265	3.2%
3	Information Technology and Computer Science	3 875	200	5.2%
4	Process Plant Operations	225	12	5.3%
5	Civil Engineering and Building Construction	4 952	304	6.1%
6	Engineering and Related Design	8 662	566	6.5%
7	Mechatronics	463	35	7.6%
8	Marketing	2 431	215	8.8%
9	Safety in Society	1 990	203	10.2%
10	Finance, Economics and Accounting	3 606	382	10.6%
11	Hospitality	3 837	428	11.2%
12	Management	2 974	373	12.5%
13	Primary Agriculture	1 821	244	13.4%
14	Transport and Logistics	1 988	310	15.6%
15	Tourism	4 242	692	16.3%
16	Office Administration	11 913	2 290	19.2%
17	Education and Development	1 600	381	23.8%
18	Primary Health	384	101	26.3%
Total		63 246	7 001	11.1

Source: TVETMIS and DHET National Examinations databases (2024)

The 2022 NC(V) throughput data reveal a deeply concerning trend that has far-reaching implications for the sector. Out of 63,246 students enrolled in NC(V) Level 2 programmes in 2020, only 7,001 progressed to complete Level 4 by 2022, reflecting an overall throughput rate of just 11.1%. This low completion rate severely undermines the TVET system’s ability to produce a reliable pipeline of skilled, work-ready graduates. Key programmes that align closely with the W&R sector’s needs such as Marketing (8.8%), Finance, Economics and Accounting (10.6%), Management (12.5%), and Transport and Logistics (15.6%) show especially low throughput, meaning the sector faces a shrinking pool of qualified young talent at a time when digitalisation, customer-centricity, and operational efficiency are becoming more critical. Moreover, the dismal 5.2% completion rate in Information Technology and Computer Science, a key enabler of e-commerce and digital systems, is particularly problematic as the sector embraces 4IR technologies.

Furthermore, the contrast between high enrolment numbers and poor completion, such as in Office Administration, with nearly 12,000 enrolled, but only 2,290 completions, highlights a misalignment between investment in education and actual workforce outcomes. These inefficiencies suggest gaps in learner support, institutional performance, and curriculum relevance, which collectively weaken the sector’s human capital development. Unless addressed, these challenges will continue to stifle the sector’s ability to transform and remain competitive. The W&R sector must therefore work more closely with TVET institutions to co-create relevant curricula, improve learner retention, and ensure that graduates are equipped with both foundational and emerging skills. Bridging programmes, mentorship, and early warning systems are critical to supporting learners, while strategic investment in TVET partnerships can help reverse this trajectory and foster a more resilient, future-fit workforce. The following reflects on the overall throughput rate by gender.

Figure 20: Overall throughput rate by gender, 2019–2022



Source: TVETMIS and DHET National Examinations databases (2024)

The NC(V) throughput data highlights a significant gender gap in learner progression, with female students consistently outperforming their male counterparts. In 2022, the throughput rate for females stood at 13.4%, nearly double that of males, who recorded a rate of only 6.7% and 2.3 percentage points above the overall average of 11.1%. This persistent disparity suggests that female learners are more likely to complete their vocational programmes, which has important implications for the wholesale and retail (W&R) sector. On one hand, this trend presents an opportunity to harness a growing pool of skilled young women who demonstrate resilience and commitment, particularly in areas aligned with retail operations, finance, administration, and customer engagement skills essential to the evolving needs of the sector. On the other hand, the consistently lower throughput among male learners signals a growing concern for inclusive skills development. If the sector fails to address the challenges facing young men, such as disengagement, lack of support structures, and limited exposure to career pathways, it risks a future workforce that is not only gender-imbalanced but also short of the broader diversity needed to drive innovation and responsiveness in a digitally transforming retail environment.

Furthermore, in terms of CET enrolment the below reflection shows a clear female dominance, with women making up 70.9% of the total 120,081 learners. This trend is especially strong in non-formal programmes (80.5%), occupational qualifications (77.6%), and GETC Level 4 (74.2%), suggesting that women are more engaged in skills development. Moreover, the AET Levels 1–3 show more balanced enrolment, the gender gap widens at higher levels. This highlights a need for targeted strategies to increase male participation, ensuring more inclusive and gender-balanced access to CET programmes.

Table 18: students enrolled in CET colleges by programme and gender, 2023

Programme	Female	Male	Female	Male
AET Level 1	501	524	48.9%	51.1%
AET Level 2	1 191	905	56.8%	43.2%
AET Level 3	1 882	1 798	51.1%	48.9%
GETC: ABET Level 4 (NQF Level 1)	37 897	13 199	74.2%	25.8%
Grade 12 (NQF Level 4)	37 591	17 062	68.8%	31.2%

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Non-formal programmes	5 081	1 229	80.5%	19.5%
Occupational Qualifications	948	273	77.6%	22.4%
Total	85 091	34 990	70.9%	29.1%

Source: CETMIS 2023, data extracted in April 2025.

In terms of CET completions, the below table shows that from 2019 to 2023, CET completions declined sharply, with completion rates dropping from 77.2% in 2019 to just 39.2% in 2023. This trend reflects significant challenges in learner retention, academic support, and system performance. While the impact of COVID-19 played a major role from 2020 onward, persistent issues such as poor foundational skills, limited resources, and socio-economic barriers continue to affect outcomes.

Table 19: CET completions

Year	Number registered	Number wrote	Number completed	Completion rate
2019	75 980	53 945	41 638	77.2%
2020	64 726	39 340	22 764	57.9%
2021	58 262	42 179	19 417	*46.0%
2022	41 586	25 314	10 383	41.0%
2023	43 253	26 894	10 535	39.2%

Source: DHET National Examinations Database, November 2023.

While the above paints a picture of CET enrolments and completions the table below addresses TVET college registration and completion in N6 qualifications. Assessing the completions component, in 2021, 45,651 students took the examinations for the N6 part-qualification, with 28,685 completing the qualification, resulting in a 62.8% completion rate. Most of these students were enrolled in programmes such as Public Management, Management Assistant, Engineering Studies, Financial Management, and Business Management. Notably, the highest number of students completed their N6 part-qualifications in Public Management (4,554), followed by Financial Management (4,018), Management Assistant (3,560), Human Resource Management (3,226), and Business Management (3,085). These completion rates underscore the effectiveness and popularity of these programmes within TVET colleges.

Table 20: TVET Colleges Registration and Completion in N6 Qualifications

Report 191 N6 Programmes	Female				Male				Total			
	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate
N6: Art and Design	110	106	85	80%	132	115	88	77%	242	221	173	78%
N6: Business Management	4 057	3 662	2 212	60%	1 521	1 376	873	63%	5 578	5 038	3 085	61%
N6: Educare	202	190	164	86%	51	43	37	86%	253	233	201	86%
N6: Clothing Production	3 204	3 032	2 611	86%	138	122	105	86%	3 342	3 154	2 716	86%
N6: Engineering Studies	3 192	2 767	969	35%	3 196	2 724	1 072	39%	6 388	5 491	2 041	37%
N6: Farming Management	799	765	450	59%	455	420	270	64%	1 254	1 185	720	61%
N6: Financial Management	4 297	3 952	2 949	75%	1 521	1 369	1 069	78%	5 818	5 321	4 018	76%
N6: Hospital & Catering Service	1 556	1 439	1 078	75%	423	387	290	75%	1 979	1 826	1 368	75%
N6: Human Resource Management	4 188	3 952	2 450	64%	1 350	1 224	776	63%	5 538	5 076	3 226	64%
N6: Legal Secretary	407	343	141	41%	94	80	31	39%	501	423	172	41%
N6: Management Assistant	6 406	5 583	2 999	54%	1 263	1 077	561	52%	7 669	6 660	3 560	54%
N6: Marketing Management	1 462	1 283	789	62%	713	607	371	61%	2 175	1 890	1 160	61%
N6: Medical Secretary	172	124	86	69%	16	9	6	67%	188	133	92	69%
N6: Popular Music: Composition	1	1	1	100%	5	2	2	100%	6	3	3	100%
N6: Popular Music: Performance	52	45	38	84%	44	38	38	100%	96	83	76	92%
N6: Popular Music: Studio Work	11	9	9	100%	49	39	36	92%	60	48	45	94%

Report 191 N6 Programmes	Female				Male				Total			
	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate	Registered	Wrote	Completed	Completion Rate
N6: Public Management	5 542	5 125	3 425	67%	1 862	1 692	1 129	67%	7 404	6 817	4 554	67%
N6: Public Relations	242	228	97	43%	64	56	18	32%	306	284	115	41%
N6: Tourism	1 562	1 286	995	77%	627	479	365	76%	2 189	1 765	1 360	77%
Total	37 462	33 792	21 548	64%	13 524	11 859	7 137	60%	50 986	45 651	28 685	63%

Source: DHET statistics on PSET in South Africa (2023)

Moreover, gender distribution in N6 part-qualification examinations reveals that three-quarters of the students were female (33,792 or 74.0%), while males constituted 26.0% (11,859). Female students had a slightly higher completion rate of 63.8% compared to 60.2% for male students. The majority of female completions were in Public Management, Management Assistant, Financial Management, Educare, Human Resources Management, and Business Management programmes. For male students, the highest completions were in Public Management, Engineering Studies, Management Assistant, Business Management, and Human Resources Management. The largest gender differences were noted in the Educare, Management Assistant, and Public Management programmes, with significantly more female completions compared to males. Conversely, males had higher completions in Engineering Studies compared to females.

From 2014 to 2020, undergraduate enrolments consistently surpassed those of postgraduate and other qualifications by more than 50%. In 2014, there were 247,247 undergraduate students compared to below 110,000 postgraduate and other students. By 2020, undergraduate enrolments increased to approximately 279,368, while postgraduate and other enrolments were 89,411 and 3,809, respectively. Although there was a rising trend in postgraduate enrolments from 2014 to 2019, a slight decline was observed in 2020. This trend suggests steady growth in undergraduate education, while postgraduate studies experienced fluctuations, indicating potential areas for strategic focus to boost higher-level qualifications and address the evolving educational demands. The tables below highlight the relevant university enrolments and completions.

Table 21: University Enrolments by Qualification, 2019-2023

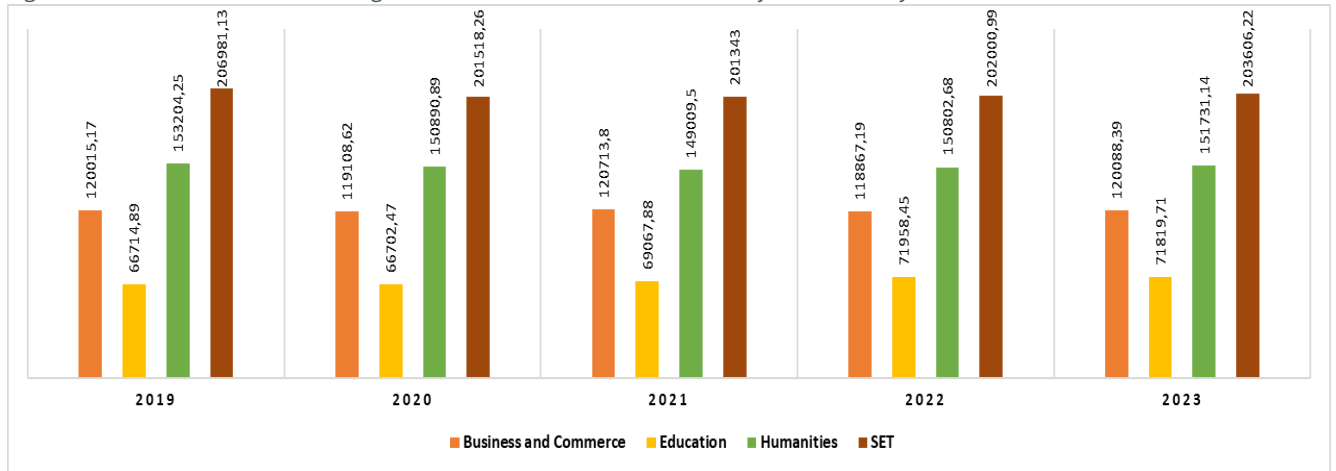
Year	Undergraduate	Postgraduate
2019	282 133	95 631
2020	279 368	89 411
2021	455 559	84 574
2022	458 819	84 809
2023	462 114	85 130

Source: Stellenbosch University, Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics | DHET HEMIS Peer Data (2023)

The enrolment data from 2019 to 2023 reflect broader national trends in undergraduate and postgraduate participation in higher education, not limited to the wholesale and retail sector. Undergraduate enrolments increased significantly from 282,133 in 2019 to 462,114 in 2023, demonstrating a substantial expansion in access to higher education and a growing pool of foundational qualifications across various fields of study. Conversely, postgraduate enrolments remained relatively flat, decreasing from 95,631 in 2019 to around 85,130 in 2023, suggesting limited progression beyond undergraduate studies. While these figures are aggregated across all disciplines and sectors, they offer valuable insight for the wholesale and retail sector, which stands to benefit from the larger undergraduate talent pool, particularly in business, commerce, and logistics-related programmes. However, the slow growth in postgraduate participation presents a broader challenge

for developing advanced skills and strategic capabilities needed to drive innovation, leadership, and sectoral transformation. This highlights the need for the wholesale and retail sector to engage proactively with higher education institutions to promote career pathways, offer experiential learning opportunities, and invest in postgraduate funding and mentorship. The figure below highlights stats by field of study.

Figure 21: Post Graduate and Undergraduate enrolments in Universities by Field of study

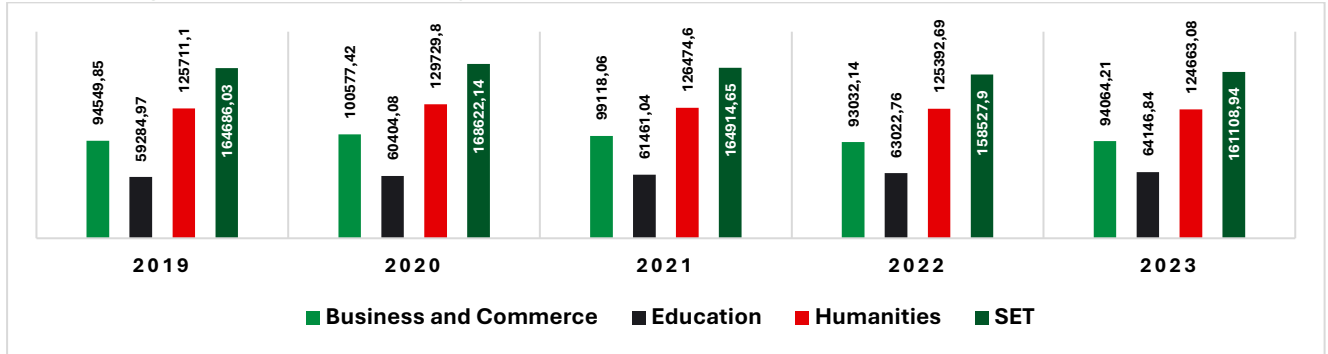


Source: Stellenbosch University, Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics|DHET HEMIS Peer Data (2023)

The enrolment trends across Business and Commerce, Education, Humanities, Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) from 2019 to 2023 have important implications for the wholesale and retail sector’s future skills landscape. The consistently high and stable enrolment in Business and Commerce averages around 120,000 students annually, which signals a sustained pipeline of graduates equipped with core competencies in finance, marketing, supply chain management, and entrepreneurship. These are foundational skillsets that align directly with the sector’s need for effective operational management, customer service excellence, and agile retail strategies. The gradual increase in Education enrolments may not seem directly aligned to wholesale and retail at first glance, but it reinforces the sector’s long-term interest in workplace learning, skills development, and professional training capacity, which are vital for upskilling employees in a fast-evolving environment. The decline and plateauing of Humanities enrolments suggest a reduced influx of graduates with generalist skills, which may affect the sector’s access to adaptable talent in areas such as communication, ethics, and customer engagement, which are key attributes in retail.

Meanwhile, the stable and slightly growing enrolment in SET disciplines represents a crucial opportunity for the sector to harness data analytics, automation, logistics, and digital innovation, particularly in response to e-commerce growth and 4IR transitions. For the sector, these patterns underscore the need to strengthen partnerships with higher education institutions, align workplace-based learning to these trends, and proactively shape curricula through sectoral input to ensure graduates are not only technically capable but industry-ready. The table below shows completions for Postgraduate and undergraduate students in universities from 2019 to 2023.

Table 22: Postgraduate enrolments and completions in universities



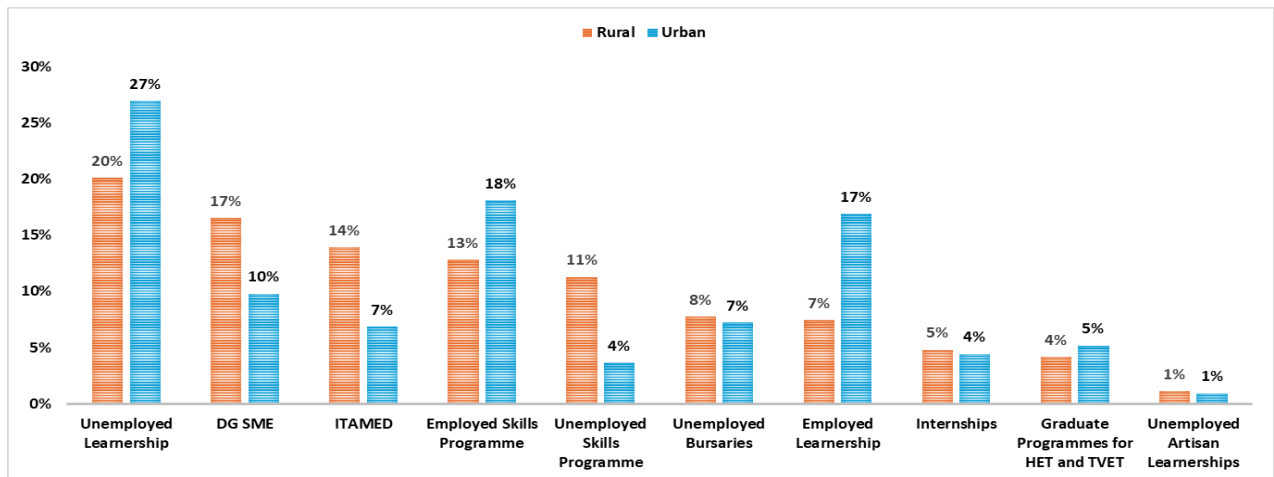
Source: Stellenbosch University, Division for Institutional Strategy, Research and Analytics | DHET HEMIS Peer Data (2023)

The completion figures by field of study from 2019 to 2023 provide critical insights into the graduate output available to the wholesale and retail sector, highlighting both opportunities and potential challenges for workforce development. Business and Commerce completions have remained relatively steady, peaking at over 100,500 in 2020 before stabilising at around 94,000 by 2023. This consistent completion rate ensures a steady supply of graduates skilled in essential business functions such as finance, marketing, supply chain, and management core areas that directly influence retail operations, customer experience, and supply chain efficiency.

The steady increase in Education completions, rising from approximately 59,300 in 2019 to over 64,000 in 2023, strengthens the sector’s capacity for internal skills development and training, as qualified educators are crucial for designing and delivering effective workplace learning and upskilling initiatives for retail employees. Despite having the highest absolute numbers, Humanities completions have seen a gradual decline from their peak of nearly 130,000 in 2020 to about 124,600 in 2023, potentially signalling a reduced pipeline of graduates with critical soft skills such as communication, cultural understanding, and problem-solving that are invaluable for customer engagement, conflict resolution, and leadership within retail settings. Meanwhile, Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) completions experienced a peak in 2020 with over 168,600 graduates, but declined to around 161,100 by 2023. Given the wholesale and retail sector’s growing reliance on technological innovation, data analytics, and automation to drive efficiency and respond to the digital economy, this slight decline highlights an urgent need for targeted investment in STEM education and collaboration with academic institutions to replenish and grow the technical talent pool.

Furthermore, below is a picture of SETA programmes over the years. The below reflects encouraging progress in the geographic reach of SETA programmes, with notable efforts to extend access to rural communities. Programmes aimed at the unemployed such as unemployed learnerships (20% rural) and skills programmes (11% rural) demonstrate a commendable rural presence, affirming SETAs’ commitment to supporting those furthest from economic opportunities. Similarly, DG SME support (17% rural) reflects a deliberate focus on stimulating entrepreneurship and small business growth in rural areas, which is essential for local economic development. In addition, Urban areas, as expected, show higher participation in employed programmes such as employed learnerships (17%) and skills programmes (18%), driven by greater employer presence and established infrastructure. However, the relatively balanced spread across several programmes including bursaries (8% rural vs. 7% urban) and graduate placements for HET and TVET (4% vs. 5%) suggests growing alignment between rural and urban opportunities. While artisan development and internships remain low overall. The below gives this is illustration.

Figure 22: W&R SETA programmes over the years-2019/20-2022/23



Source: W&RSETA Power BI Dashboard, 2024

3.6. Supply side challenges

The persistent supply-side challenges in the sector stem from a convergence of systemic, institutional, and socio-economic factors that hinder the development of a robust and inclusive skills pipeline. At the heart of the issue is the fragmented coordination between education and training institutions, employers, and SETAs, which results in a mismatch between what is taught and what the sector actually needs, particularly in areas such as digital, analytical, and logistics skills. Stakeholders have expressed that there is poor foundational education outcomes, especially in underserved and rural areas, limit learners’ progression into higher levels of training. The declining CET completions, for example, are less a reflection of learner potential and more a result of under-resourced institutions, outdated curricula, insufficient learner support, and a lack of meaningful articulation pathways into formal employment or further education. Moreover, this is exacerbated by social barriers such as poverty, food insecurity, and limited access to digital infrastructure, which disproportionately affect young people and women in low-income communities.

In TVET colleges, the rigidity of programme structures, lack of industry exposure, and inadequate workplace-based learning opportunities continue to suppress throughput and employability. Moreover, gendered societal expectations and stereotyping often influence career choices and programme enrolment, leading to uneven participation and retention particularly among male learners, who may also face social pressure to enter the labour market prematurely due to financial burdens. In addition, compounding these institutional inefficiencies is the slow pace of employer formalisation and data integration. The large number of unclassified or informally operating employers limits the visibility of actual skills demand, making it difficult for SETAs to plan interventions with precision. Furthermore, policy inertia and siloed implementation across departments (Basic Education, Higher Education, Labour, and Trade) delay reforms that could create seamless, learner-centred transitions across the skills continuum.

3.7. Sectoral Priority Occupations and Interventions (PIVOTAL)

The identification of Sectoral Priority Occupations (SPOs) is grounded in a rigorous, evidence-based, and consultative process that reflects a strategic departure from traditional supply-driven skills planning toward a demand-led framework. This process employed a multi-method approach, combining a thorough literature review with extensive provincial stakeholder engagements, targeted employer interviews, and broad-based surveys, thereby ensuring that occupational prioritisation is anchored in diverse and credible data sources. The integration of Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) was particularly critical, as these employer-submitted documents provided granular, real-time labour market intelligence through specific inquiries into hard-to-fill vacancies (HTFVs) and vacancy volumes over a recent 12-month period. By ranking occupations according to the frequency of HTFVs, the SETA ensured that resource allocation is tightly aligned with the sector's most pressing skills shortages, effectively filtering out declining or obsolete roles. This analytical rigour was complemented by a comprehensive consultative validation phase involving provincial sessions and stakeholder feedback mechanisms, which provided contextual nuance, addressing regional disparities, systemic challenges such as poor TVET throughput, and workforce transformation imperatives related to gender and digital skills inclusion. The prioritisation process also explicitly accounted for broader sectoral trends, including the displacement of traditional retail roles by technological innovation and the rising demand for customer-centric, technical, and digital competencies. The culmination of this evidence-informed and stakeholder-validated methodology was a SPO list, which has been approved by the Accounting Authority, with the Chief Executive Officer acting in this capacity. This carefully calibrated approach ensures that the SETA's skills development interventions are responsive, targeted, and capable of fostering sustainable employment outcomes while supporting sector transformation and economic competitiveness. Below is the top 10 Sectoral Priority Occupations (SPOs) list.

Table 23: Sectoral Priority Occupations and Interventions (PIVOTAL) List

SETA	Period	Occupation Code	Occupation	Specialisation / Alternative Title	Intervention Planned by the SETA	NQF Level(s)	NQF Aligned	Qty Needed (Vacancies)	Qty to be Supported
W&R SETA	2026/27	142103	Retail General Manager	Retail Store Manager	Bursary (Certificate/Diploma)	6	Y	833	350
					Bursary (Degree/Postgraduate)	7	Y		
						8			
W&R SETA	2026/27	681103	Blockman / Butcher	Biltong Maker, Sausage Maker, Smallgoods Maker	Work Integrated Learning / Learning Programmes	3	Y	541	210
						4			
						5			
W&R SETA	2026/27	226302	SHE&Q Practitioner	OSH Advisor / Coordinator / Officer / Professional	Bursary (Certificate / Diploma / Degree)	5	Y	611	130
						6			

						7			
W&R SETA	2026/27	251201	Software Developer	Software Architect, Engineer, ICT Risk Specialist	Internship	6	N	240	170
					Certification	5	Y		
					Bursary (Diploma / Degree)	6			
						7			
W&R SETA	2026/27	42103-2	Retail Store Manager	Shop Owner, Local Fisheries Dev Officer, etc.	Bursary (Diploma), Learning Programmes	5	Y	618	275
						6			
W&R SETA	2026/27	343203	Visual Merchandiser	Display Decorator	Internship	6	N	534	250
					Certification	5	Y		
						6			
W&R SETA	2026/27	332201	Commercial Sales Representative	Canvasser, After-sales Adviser, Commercial Traveller	Bursary (Diploma / Degree), Learning Programmes	3	Y	412	210
						4			
						6			
						7			
W&R SETA	2026/27	251102	Data Scientist	N/A	Internship	7	N	56	66
					Bursary (Diploma / Degree)	6	Y		
						7			
W&R SETA	2026/27	332301	Retail Buyer	Merchandise Planner, General / Company Buyer	Bursary (Diploma / Degree), Learning Programme	5	Y	50	60
						6			
						7			
W&R SETA	2026/27	121905	Programme/Project Manager	Digital Transformation Project Manager, Skills Development Manager	Bursary (Degree/Postgraduate)	7	Y	30	50
						8			

The Sector Priority Occupations list reflects a nuanced understanding of the wholesale and retail sector's evolving workforce needs. It underscores a strong and persistent demand for operational and frontline roles, including retail general managers, blockmen/butchers, store managers, and commercial sales representatives. These roles remain integral to the functioning of retail environments, particularly where customer engagement, stock flow, and store-level operations create value. Their continued relevance suggests that the sector, whilst modernising, retains a deep reliance on in-person service and practical expertise within physical retail spaces. At the same time, the prioritisation of emerging and digitally driven occupations, such as software developers, data scientists, and digital project managers, signals a sector in transition. Retail businesses are increasingly leveraging data analytics, e-commerce systems, and digital infrastructure to enhance competitiveness and operational efficiency. These shifts reflect a growing recognition that technology is not peripheral but central to the future of retail. Consequently, the demand for talent capable of designing, implementing, and managing digital systems is expected to accelerate.

Equally, the emergence of roles such as SHE&Q practitioners highlights an increased emphasis on workplace safety, compliance, and sustainable operations. This aligns with wider shifts in consumer and regulatory expectations, suggesting that the sector must cultivate skills that not only support growth but also ensure resilience, ethical conduct, and long-term sustainability. The inclusion of visual merchandising as a priority occupation further illustrates how traditional roles are being redefined by technology and evolving consumer experiences. There is a growing need for creativity, digital design, and strategic display planning to create immersive retail environments requiring skills that blend artistic sensibility with digital proficiency. The spectrum of NQF levels across these occupations points to the need for layered, flexible learning pathways that support both entry-level access and career progression. It also reflects the diversity of skills required, ranging from technical and vocational learning to advanced qualifications, suggesting that future skills planning must support differentiated entry points while building long-term capability.

Overall, the occupational profile signals a sector that is both stabilising and modernising. Future planning must therefore be anticipatory, balancing foundational skills with readiness for digital disruption. Training interventions will need to be agile, evidence-informed, and closely aligned to labour market trends, ensuring that learning investments translate into meaningful employment and enterprise impact. This represents an opportunity to reconfigure skills development as both a driver of sector competitiveness and a catalyst for inclusive economic participation.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter provided a comprehensive analysis of the Sector's demand for skilled labour, aiming to enhance workforce planning and skills development. The findings highlight the sector's urgent need to balance stabilising foundational roles with accelerating capabilities aligned to digital transformation, sustainability, and regulatory compliance. Emerging occupations such as Cybersecurity Specialists, E-commerce Project Managers, and SHEQ Practitioners exemplify the sector's increasing complexity and the necessity for cross-disciplinary skills and agile learning pathways. At the same time, persistent recruitment challenges in core roles like Sales Assistants, Shelf Fillers, and Retail Supervisors expose structural issues around job attractiveness, career progression, and the mismatch between training outputs and labour market needs. Addressing these challenges requires integrated workforce strategies that support both operational continuity and future readiness.

Moreover, significant provincial disparities in vacancy rates and skills shortages call for tailored, region-specific interventions. Economic hubs such as Gauteng and the Western Cape face intense demand for experienced and digitally proficient professionals, while more rural provinces struggle with limited access to relevant training and talent retention. This complexity demands sustained collaboration between industry, education providers, and government agencies, with the SETA playing a central role in driving responsive and inclusive skills development. Workforce planning must be data-driven, forward-looking, and inclusive of vulnerable groups, particularly youth and those in underserved areas. Ultimately, skills development should be recognised not as a compliance obligation, but as a strategic investment in building a resilient, competitive, and future-ready wholesale and retail sector that contributes to South Africa's inclusive economic growth. Lastly, Addressing demand-side priorities must go hand in hand with overcoming persistent supply-side challenges that limit the sector's skills potential. Structural issues in education such as low completion rates, weak pathways, and limited rural access reduce the availability of qualified graduates. Without focused efforts to strengthen institutions, support learners, and better align training with labour market needs, skills gaps will remain. A holistic strategy combining demand-driven planning with supply-side reforms is vital to develop an agile, inclusive, and future-ready workforce.

4. CHAPTER FOUR: SETA PARTNERSHIPS

4.1. Introduction

While Chapter 3 explored the extent and nature of demand for skilled labour, the skills gaps that exist and the training available in the W&R sector. This section explores partnerships within the W&R SETA and responds to the mandate of the Skills Development Act of 1998, which encourages SETAs, as agents of skills development, to establish partnerships with both the public and private sectors. Through these partnerships, the SETA responds to the NSDP outcomes and ERRP interventions and other national priorities which seek to ensure that South Africa has adequate, appropriate and high-quality skills that contribute towards economic growth, employment creation and social development. The chapter presents an analysis of current partnerships, highlighting their successes and limitations. Additionally, it explores planned partnerships aimed at further promoting skills development.

4.2. SETA’s Approach to Partnership

The SETA’s partnership model, illustrated below, is a stakeholder-driven approach that begins with research as a strategic foundation for strategic planning, ensuring alignment of strategic objectives with potential partners. Stakeholders initiate special projects that respond to sector objectives, and key priority areas are identified in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). An official is then nominated to oversee the MOU, finalising the implementation plan and contributing to the research agenda. Regular communication on sector priorities ensures continuous strategic alignment. This model has been pivotal in integrating sector stakeholders into W&RSETA's skills development interventions and implementation, fostering collaborative growth and alignment.

Figure 23: Successful Partner Model



4.3. Strategic Partnerships

The table below presents the SETA’s strategic partnerships, highlighting the efforts to ensure that training and skills development initiatives are aligned with the current needs and trends of the industry.

Table 24: Strategic Partnerships

1. National Youth Development Agency (NYDA)	
Nature of partnership (Duration/ term of partnership)	March 1, 2025 – February 28, 2028
Objectives of Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a strategic co-funding partnership to implement youth-targeted business support and development interventions. Facilitate access to start-up and business growth funding for youth-owned enterprises in the wholesale and retail sector. Strengthen entrepreneurship capacity among young people through training, mentorship, and access to business infrastructure. Promote inclusive economic participation by addressing youth unemployment and fostering sustainable youth-led enterprises. Align efforts with national youth development priorities and ensure synergies with other post-school education and training (PSET) programmes.
Value add of the partnership	This partnership brings catalytic investment in youth entrepreneurship, enhancing the reach and impact of W&RSETA's transformation agenda. By leveraging NYDA's funding infrastructure and youth development expertise, the collaboration enables broader access to business opportunities, fosters sustainable livelihoods, and strengthens the pipeline of empowered, economically active youth within the wholesale and retail sector.
2. Chinese Culture and International Education Exchange Centre (CCIEEC).	
Nature of partnership (Duration/ term of partnership)	March 2025– February 28, 2026
Objectives of Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate an international exchange programme for 50 TVET students focused on entrepreneurship and technical skills development. Enhance participants' capabilities in online business and e-commerce sectors through exposure to global best practices. Promote cross-cultural learning and collaboration to broaden students' perspectives and readiness for the digital economy. Strengthen the pipeline of skilled youth equipped for emerging opportunities within wholesale and retail sectors, particularly in digital commerce.
Value add of the partnership	This partnership broadens the skills development landscape by providing TVET students with international exposure and specialised training in e-commerce and online business, critical growth areas for the wholesale and retail sector. It enhances the competitiveness and adaptability of future workforce entrants by equipping them with globally relevant entrepreneurial and technical competencies, thereby contributing to sector innovation and digital transformation. The cross-cultural dimension also fosters global networks and intercultural skills, which are essential in an increasingly connected economy.

Source: W&R SETA Commitment Registers, 2024

The partnership between the SETA and NYDA from 2025 to 2028 represents a strategic and much-needed intervention to tackle persistent youth unemployment and economic marginalisation within the wholesale and retail sector. By combining co-funding with comprehensive support including training, mentorship, and access to business infrastructure, the collaboration goes beyond financial aid to build the capacity and sustainability of youth-owned enterprises. This integrated approach aligns closely with national youth development priorities and post-school education programmes, creating a seamless pathway from skills acquisition to entrepreneurial success. Importantly, it shifts the narrative around youth from passive recipients of support to active drivers of economic growth, fostering innovation and diversifying the sector’s business landscape. Moreover, while promising, the partnership’s success will rely heavily on effective execution, continuous monitoring, and ensuring

inclusivity so that vulnerable and marginalised youth are equally empowered, thereby contributing to a more resilient and transformed wholesale and retail sector.

Furthermore, the partnership with the CCIEEC introduces a vital international dimension to skills development in the wholesale and retail sector, particularly by focusing on entrepreneurship and technical skills in online business and e-commerce. This initiative equips TVET students with globally relevant competencies and exposure to innovative practices, addressing the sector’s urgent need to adapt to digital transformation and evolving consumer behaviours. By fostering cross-cultural learning and broadening students’ perspectives, the partnership not only enhances individual employability but also contributes to building a more dynamic, digitally savvy workforce capable of driving sector growth and competitiveness. Ultimately, this collaboration signals a progressive shift towards embracing global interconnectedness and digital innovation as key drivers for sustainable development in wholesale and retail. In addition, the SETA is planning to deepen its strategic engagement with research institutions through the expansion of research chair partnerships in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. This new specialised research chair model is designed to position Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges and Community Education and Training (CET) institutions at the centre of applied research, innovation, and sector-driven inquiry. By embedding research within these institutions, the model aims to localise knowledge production, strengthen institutional capacity, and ensure that the skills ecosystem is both inclusive and responsive to community and regional development priorities.

4.4. Education and Training Delivery Partnerships

The table below highlights partnerships with education and training institutions. This list is not exhaustive but provides a snapshot of some of the SETA’s collaborations in this category.

Table 25: Education and Training Delivery Partnership

Institution/ partner organisation	Nature of partnership	Objectives of partnership	Value of partnership
1. University of Limpopo (UL)	20 Jun '23 – 31 Mar '28	To enhance the sector’s development, the SETA aims to strengthen research capacity and contribute to the Research Agenda, ensuring rigorous quality assurance. Concurrently, it supports SMEs and informal traders while promoting innovation and entrepreneurship. Additionally, the SETA provides career guidance, development programs, and graduate placement opportunities. It facilitates skills transfer in data management and analysis and supports programs for people with disabilities. Moreover, it offers bursaries and scholarships to unemployed individuals pursuing retail and related qualifications, aligning with sector needs.	Development of a robust knowledge base, informed policy-making, and evidence-based strategies for addressing industry challenges and opportunities.
2. North West University (NWU)	3 April '23 – 31 Mar '27	The initiative aims to advance research and strengthen capacity through collaborative projects and quality assurance. Additionally, it supports SMEs and informal traders while promoting innovation that aligns with the W&R sector priorities. To further enhance impact, the program provides career guidance and graduate placement opportunities, with a particular focus on	Building research capacity ensures ongoing, high-quality research output that can drive innovation and improve industry practices.

Institution/ partner organisation	Nature of partnership	Objectives of partnership	Value of partnership
		skills transfer in data management. Furthermore, it offers bursaries for unemployed individuals pursuing retail-related studies and supports programs for people with disabilities, ensuring comprehensive support across various needs.	
3. Department of higher Education and Training, Science and Technology	1 Dec '21 – 31 Mar '25	The objective of this initiative is to address sector-specific challenges in skill development. By expanding the pool of artisans with industry-specific experience and training, the collaboration not only creates valuable employment opportunities through portable skills but also encourages self-employment, thereby enhancing the sector's overall growth and resilience. Additionally, it aims to strengthen research capacity, contribute to the Research Agenda, and ensure quality assurance. The initiative supports SMEs and informal traders while promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in line with W&R sector priorities. Furthermore, it provides career guidance, development programs, and graduate placement opportunities, alongside offering bursaries for unemployed individuals pursuing retail and related qualifications that meet sector needs.	Enhances industry competitiveness by developing a skilled workforce, addressing sector-specific skill challenges, increasing employment opportunities, and fostering entrepreneurship.
4. Nelson Mandela University Trust (NMUT)	3 May '23 – 1 Jan '28	The objective of this initiative is to address sector-specific challenges in skill development. By expanding the pool of artisans with industry-specific experience and training, the collaboration not only creates valuable employment opportunities through portable skills but also encourages self-employment, thereby enhancing the sector's overall growth and resilience. Additionally, it aims to strengthen research capacity, contribute to the Research Agenda, and ensure quality assurance. The initiative supports SMEs and informal traders while promoting innovation and entrepreneurship in line with W&R sector priorities. Furthermore, it provides career guidance, development programs, and graduate placement opportunities, alongside offering bursaries for unemployed individuals pursuing retail and related qualifications that meet sector needs.	This partnership adds value by fostering research, skills transfer, SME support, career guidance, and inclusive education initiatives.
5. Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	28 Aug '23 – 28 Aug '28	The focus is on promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, and ICT-related qualifications that align with the W&R sector's priorities. To support this, bursaries are provided for unemployed individuals pursuing retail and related qualifications that meet sector needs. Additionally, efforts are made to support inclusivity by funding programs for people with disabilities in TUT qualifications. Furthermore, the initiative facilitates skills transfer and collaborative research while responding to sector change drivers through ongoing innovation.	This partnership adds value by fostering innovation, skills transfer, inclusivity, education funding, and responsive research initiatives.
6. North Link TVET College	14 Nov '23 – 14 Nov '28	To address evolving industry needs, the focus is on conducting research into innovation, labour market trends, and TVET growth, particularly regarding skills and curriculum updates. Additionally, planning and facilitating skills demand and supply initiatives, including apprenticeship programs in partnership with SETAs, is essential. Collaborating on entrepreneurship funding and initiatives, with an emphasis on innovation and the green economy, further supports sector development. Moreover, enhancing inter-SETA collaboration and capacity-building programs for TVET facilitators and industry professionals will strengthen overall effectiveness and adaptability.	Adds value by aligning education and training with industry needs through collaboration and innovation.

Institution/ partner organisation	Nature of partnership	Objectives of partnership	Value of partnership
7. Namibia Training Authority	24 Feb '24 – 31 Mar '27	The partnership aims to mutually develop and plan collaborative research, educational, and training projects, ensuring alignment with standard policies and budgetary constraints. By working together, technical expertise and capacity building in areas such as TVET advocacy will be provided. This collaborative approach not only supports effective project planning but also ensures that all activities are conducted within the framework of established policies and financial considerations.	Joint research on retail innovation, 4th industrial revolution retail trends and curriculum development.
8. Capricorn TVET College	26 Jun '24 – 26 Jun '29	To address evolving industry needs, the focus is on conducting research into innovation, labour market trends, and TVET growth, particularly regarding skills and curriculum updates. Additionally, planning and facilitating skills demand and supply initiatives, including apprenticeship programs in partnership with SETAs, is essential. Collaborating on entrepreneurship funding and initiatives, with an emphasis on innovation and the green economy, further supports sector development. Moreover, enhancing inter-SETA collaboration and capacity-building programs for TVET facilitators and industry professionals will strengthen overall effectiveness and adaptability.	The partnership adds value by advancing skills, innovation, apprenticeships, and sector collaboration.

Source : W&R SETA Commitment Registers, 2024

4.5. Professional body and Industry Partnerships

To ensure that training and educational programmes are tailored to meet the current demands and standards of the industry, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of the workforce the SETA has identified professional body and industry partnerships, these can be seen below.

Table 26: Professional Body and Industry Partnerships

Institution/ partner organisation	Nature of partnership	Objectives of partnership	Value of partnership
1. Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)	23 May '19 (renewed annually)	To promote industry collaborative research around evidence-based skills planning and innovation.	The value lies in bringing joint research focus on Innovation.

Source : W&R SETA Commitment Registers, 2023

The above partnerships with the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and The Innovation Hub Management Company are of paramount strategic importance. The collaboration with the CSIR, initiated on May 23, 2019, and subject to annual renewal, is predicated on a robust framework of industry-focused research aimed at advancing evidence-based skills planning and fostering innovation. This alliance is instrumental in enhancing the sector's adaptability and competitive positioning by aligning scientific inquiry with practical industry requirements. Concurrently, the engagement with The Innovation Hub Management Company, spanning from September 05, 2022, to September 05, 2027, is dedicated to addressing critical needs such as bolstering entrepreneurship and spearheading technological advancements through structured incubation programmes. This partnership is pivotal in driving sector-wide innovation, rejuvenating townships, and generating employment opportunities for youth within the digital and green sectors. Collectively, these strategic alliances effectively bridge the gap between research and industry application, stimulate entrepreneurial development, and catalyse technological progress.

4.5.1. Successes and Failures

The following outlines the key successful partnerships established by W&RSETA, the reasons behind their success, the challenges faced, and the measures identified to strengthen these partnerships moving forward. The successful partnerships include collaborations with the Namibia Training Authority (NTA), Central University of Technology (CUT), University of Venda (UNIVEN), University of Zululand (UNIZULU), and MICT SETA. These partnerships have thrived due to the identification of key priority areas in the Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), clear allocation of roles and responsibilities with nominated officials, finalised implementation plans, active participation in updating and developing the research agenda, and regular communication on sector priorities. However, challenges have included delays in finalising implementation plans, limited participation in the research agenda updates, and the absence of a dedicated official to address MOU-related matters. To strengthen these partnerships, the W&RSETA is aiming to prioritise the signing of implementation plans for all finalised MOUs and establish regular communication and discussion channels through dedicated committees. Prioritising such partnerships will be essential for W&RSETA as they facilitate the alignment of training programmes with industry needs, promote resource sharing, and enhance the overall effectiveness of skills development initiatives. Moreover, below are the general successes and failures experienced by partnerships.

Table 27: Successes and Failures

Category	Successes	Challenges and Areas for Strengthening
1. Education and Training Delivery Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Partnerships enabled access to academic funding across various qualification levels (Diploma to PhD). - Training efforts aligned with sectoral skills needs. - Improved engagement between education providers and sector actors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementation plans were sometimes delayed, impacting delivery timelines. - Limited timeframes constrained deeper execution of strategic initiatives such as sector leadership programmes.
2. Strategic Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Multiple MOUs established to support sectoral transformation, enterprise development, and innovation. - MOUs reflected clearly defined priorities, responsibilities, and mutual intent. - Foundations laid for structured collaboration mechanisms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Absence of designated focal points in some instances delayed implementation. - Regular coordination mechanisms were lacking, resulting in missed alignment opportunities.
3. Professional Body and Industry Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthened collaboration with industry stakeholders led to more responsive skills development interventions. - Partnerships facilitated information exchange and practical input into sector strategies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Formal engagement on agenda setting and programme alignment was inconsistent. - Delayed rollout of key collaborative platforms limited potential impact.

<p>4. Research Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some partners actively contributed to research agenda formulation and delivery. - Research Chairs supported the production of sector-relevant insights, producing 15 Research reports in the 2024/5 financial year. - Sector-led research was initiated to inform strategic direction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participation in research agenda updates varied across institutions. - Coordination structures for collaborative research (e.g., syndicates) experienced delays. - Research uptake and dissemination mechanisms remain uneven.
<p>5. International Partnerships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The organisation expanded its global learning horizon through formalised international collaboration. - Benchmarking and knowledge exchange opportunities were created. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - External factors such as travel restrictions disrupted partnership activity. - Long-term sustainability mechanisms for international partnerships need to be better embedded.

4.6. Planned Partnerships

The following depicts planned partnerships.

Table 28: Planned Partnerships

Name of Institutions	Objective	Duration
<p>Botswana Institute for Technology and Research (Botswana)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing on sector research. • Joint Research on innovation • Entrepreneurship development initiatives 	<p>Planning Phase</p>
<p>Technology Innovation Agency (TIA)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing on ICT innovation and entrepreneurship development 	<p>Planning Phase</p>
<p>Sedibeng TVET College</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing on sector research. • Joint Research on innovation and tracer studies 	<p>Planning Phase</p>
<p>Moses Kotane Institute (MKI)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sharing on ICT innovation and entrepreneurship development. • Joint Research on innovation and tracer studies. 	<p>Planning Phase</p>

The upcoming partnerships with the Botswana Institute for Technology and Research, Ravensburg University, and the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) represent a strategic leap forward for the Wholesale and Retail sector. Collaborating with Botswana’s institute will bolster research capabilities through shared insights and joint innovation studies, while also focusing on targeted entrepreneurship initiatives to bridge research with practical application. Moreover, partnering with Ravensburg University offers a valuable exchange of best practices in aligning educational programmes with industry demands and elevating graduate employability through innovative research and cross-cultural learning.

Meanwhile, the SDF collaboration will emphasise ICT-driven solutions for skills development and examine the impact of technology on job creation and entrepreneurship. This integration of advanced technology into skills development strategies promises to drive significant advancements in the sector. However, one challenge identified concerning international partnerships has been delays in finalising some agreements. However, the SETA has made significant progress in ensuring effective engagements with potential partners as part of value chain analysis. The level of commitment within a partnership significantly contributes to the successes or failures of a project. To ensure higher commitment levels and active participation, the SETA continues to prioritise effective stakeholder engagement and sector partnership value chain analysis to identify key relevant stakeholders.

In addition to these, the SETA recognises the importance of cultivating new strategic partnerships that respond to emerging sectoral shifts. In this regard, the potential partnership with the Joburg Market presents a unique opportunity to integrate agro-processing and fresh produce trade into the Wholesale and Retail value chain. Areas of collaboration may include enterprise development, sector-specific training programmes, innovation in market access, and data-driven approaches to support informal and township-based traders. This will also strengthen the SETA's contribution to local economic development and inclusive participation across the food and retail system.

Furthermore, collaborations with higher education institutions through the Retail Leadership Chairs played a pivotal role in producing industry-aligned research and supporting postgraduate learners, while partnerships with industry stakeholders such as trade unions and Vodacom enabled workplace-based training and structured youth internship pathways. The Informal Traders Exchange Programme, delivered with Zetech University, further reflected the SETA's commitment to cross-border learning and informal sector empowerment. These partnerships were successful largely due to clear alignment with national development goals, responsiveness to sector needs, and shared implementation responsibilities. Importantly, the SETA maintained a strong transformation lens supporting HDI accredited providers, informal traders, and persons with disabilities which was embedded in most partnerships. Going forward, emerging opportunities such as agro-processing and urban market ecosystems, exemplified by the potential collaboration with Joburg Market, present promising avenues for expanding the sector's value chain impact and supporting township economies through targeted enterprise development and skills training.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the strategic partnerships outlined in this chapter reflect the Wholesale and Retail SETA's growing commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and future-oriented skills development. These collaborations are no longer peripheral initiatives, but they are central levers for deepening impact and driving systemic change across the sector. The NYDA partnership marks a major milestone in positioning youth as economic agents, unlocking access to funding and entrepreneurial support that aligns with national development priorities. Equally transformative is the CCIEEC international exchange initiative, which equips TVET students with globally competitive skills in e-commerce and online business, strengthening South Africa's participation in the digital economy. Importantly, the SETA is now poised to scale its research footprint through the planned expansion of Research Chair partnerships in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. This next-generation model aims to embed applied research within TVET and CET institutions, ensuring these colleges serve not only as delivery sites but as centres of knowledge creation and sector-relevant innovation. This approach strengthens the institutional role of public colleges, bridges the gap between training and sector needs, and grounds skills planning in local realities.

As the SETA looks ahead to formalising additional international partnerships with institutions such as Ravensburg University, the Botswana Institute for Technology and Research, and Rwanda's Skills Development Fund, there is a clear trajectory toward global collaboration, digitally enabled learning, and responsive research. While execution risks remain, particularly in maintaining momentum and alignment, the strategic direction is both ambitious and necessary.

5. CHAPTER FIVE: MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E)

5.1. Introduction

This chapter reflects the W&RSETA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data and performance on strategic priorities. It also outlines an action plan and mechanisms to address unachieved skills priorities. Regular impact and tracer studies on W&RSETA-funded projects are essential to enhance the effectiveness of sector skills development interventions. Annually, a performance evaluation of the W&RSETA is conducted to ensure that strategic priorities are met. Quarterly monitoring and reporting tools are employed to ensure that relevant mechanisms are implemented to achieve strategic objectives. The new decentralised operating model is expected to enhance monitoring and evaluation processes, as regional offices will have increased oversight over the implementation of the SETA's programmes through the provincial skills plan.

5.2. W&RSETA Approach to M&E

The current W&RSETA Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy, updated in May 2021, is based on three foundational policies: the Policy Framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES) (The Presidency, 2007), the Framework for Programme Performance Information (National Treasury, 2007), and the South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework (SASQAF) (Statistics South Africa, 2008). According to the National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NP-PSET), SETAs need to enhance their effectiveness and efficiency by focusing on supporting skills planning through industry engagement, ensuring that funding is allocated to meet demand, and strengthening workplace-based learning provision (W&RSETA, 2021). The M&E policy ensures that the SETA operates effectively and efficiently by documenting the approach, standards, and minimum requirements to be adopted and implemented. The SETA's aims and objectives must be implemented through plans that are monitored to measure progress toward achieving planned targets, with monitoring findings used to improve performance, future planning, and budgeting. Continuous monitoring involves collecting data on specified indicators, verifying, storing, analysing, and reporting findings. These findings inform management, oversight institutions, and the public about the progress of plan implementation (W&RSETA, 2021).

In September 2021, the W&RSETA released the 2020–2025 Theory of Change and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, underpinned by the Revised National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) (released in 2019). The NEPF aims to promote credible and quality evaluations that can be used for learning to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and impact of government interventions (W&RSETA, 2021). The NEPF commits all spheres of government to produce and use credible and objective evidence from evaluations to inform planning, budgeting, policy review, program management, and performance management. Within the PSET sector, evaluations assess whether PSET interventions improve access and quality of education, identifying cause-effect relationships within the PSET context. The framework addresses the requirements for a successful M&E approach and emphasises the 'why' and 'what' of M&E, along with its roles and responsibilities.

The Theory of Change (ToC) outlines a process of planned change, detailing the assumptions that guide its design, the planned outputs, and outcomes, and the long-term impacts it seeks to achieve. The W&RSETA revised the Theory of Change and Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to understand the following:

- Monitoring and reporting of progress towards predetermined targets, outputs, and related outcomes
- Understanding the Sector 'universe' - How large is the need in the Sector (what is the baseline)

- of beneficiaries) and where is the largest need?
- To what extent are skills programmes demand-led, and aligned to sector needs?
- What are the constraints and enablers for the implementation of programmes established to equip the W&R workforce with relevant skills?
- To what extent is the funding model used for learnership/artisan/skills programmes suitable for these programmes?
- To what extent have the programmes structured in response to national priorities created sustainable structures which are responsive to the needs of the communities in which they were implemented?
- To what extent have transformational programmes contributed towards addressing historical inequalities in employment?

Alignment to the decentralised model that has been implemented:

- The SETA introduced Provincial Skills Plans in 2021, which assist in the preparation of plans that are flexible enough to account for provincial variations in skills needs. These have not yet been implemented at the level of the APP; however, work is underway to do so.

5.2.1. Functions of M&E Unit

The W&RSETA’s Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) function is responsible for conducting various monitoring and reporting activities throughout the year, as well as evaluations over different planning cycles. This function is divided into two primary areas: monitoring (including reporting) and evaluation. Before monitoring can commence, W&RSETA programme managers develop detailed monitoring plans for their specific areas of work. These plans outline the objective, focus area, responsibilities, schedule, methods, costs, data handling processes, and indicators for monitoring.

The table below outlines the various M&E activities/functions, including in-year monitoring and reporting, year-end assessments, and mid-term and end-of-term evaluations. Reporting may also involve evaluating programme outcomes, as is the case with Tracer Studies.

Table 29: Monitoring & Reporting Functions of M&E

M&E Reporting	Function	Output
In-year Monitoring & Reporting	1. Reporting on artisan targets	Monthly artisan report
	2. Report on the annual operational plan	Monthly progress report
	3. Reporting on an annual performance plan	Quarterly performance reports (QPR)
	4. Reporting on skills education and training	Quarterly report for SETMIS
	5. Reporting on placement absorption/placement	WBL tracer reports
Year-end Monitoring & Reporting	6. Reporting on financial information and predetermined objectives	Annual Report (AR)
	7. Reporting on progress in the attainment of Outcomes and Impact	Annual Strategy Implementation Assessment Report
Mid-term and End-of-Term Assessment & Report	8. Reporting on strategic plans	Institutional midterm assessment report (MTAR)
		Institutional end-term assessment report (ETAR) ((Q4 of year 5 of the planning cycle)

In addition to monitoring and reporting, the M&E function also evaluates the SETA’s programmes to assess their achievements and produce recommendations for improvements. The findings of evaluations are then used to inform decision-making and future planning.

5.3. Use of M&E Data

Information forms the basis of our plans as we use performance reports as well as evaluation findings to inform all plans. Strategic Changes e.g., changes to the SETA's plans, delivery models as well as interventions are motivated by performance information as well as findings from evaluation and tracer studies. The W&RSETA will also be conducting Workplace Based Learning (WBL) tracer studies, focusing on SETA-funded bursaries, internships and learnerships. This is part of evaluation, assessing the return on investment and improving on future implementation of similar programmes.

The following reflect the use of M&E data as part of improving W&RSETA performance and programme implementation:

- To assess the effectiveness, relevance, value for money, impact, and sustainability of W&RSETA interventions in responding to transformational imperatives.
- To objectively analyse W&RSETA programmes' performance, as evidenced by improved operational efficiency.
- To evaluate the implementation of learning programmes targeted at the sector occupational shortages list.
- To analyse why intended results were not achieved; thus, gather lessons learnt; leading to recommendations for improvement.
- To monitor the decentralised model and promote improved accountability, transparency, and oversight at national and regional levels.
- To provide data for policy development and qualification development.
- To provide data for planning and implementation of future projects.
- To provide reports used to assess the outcomes and impact of NSDP and W&RSETA strategic objectives.
- To guard against unintended consequences – well-resourced institutions participating in the programmes thus achieving results and making an impact; however, creating further disparities.
- There are plans to develop a data management governance framework.

5.4. SSP Strategic Priorities captured in the Strategic Plan and Annual Performance Plan from the previous financial year

Furthermore, the below were documented in the Seta's aforementioned documents;

- **Priority 1:** Advance the implementation of the Priority Skills Plan (PSP) through structured stakeholder engagement
- **Priority 2:** Strengthen SMME, Cooperatives & Informal Traders Development for Inclusive Sector Growth
- **Priority 3:** Address Youth Unemployment through Targeted Skills Development and Transition Pathways

- **Priority 4:** Enhance Responsiveness to Skills Demand and Supply
- **Priority 5:** Drive the integration of Circular Economy principles (Green) to promote sustainable resource utilization
- **Priority 6:** Advance Sector Transformation, including the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)
- **Priority 7:** Align skills development with the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)

It is important to note that these aforementioned priorities were conceptualised to align with the key national priorities such as NSDP and ERRP. The SETA’s implementation is to ensure that it responds to the outcomes or key principles of these national plans, ultimately the National Development Plan.

5.5. Status of Implementation of National Plans

W&R SETA Outcomes	NSDP 2030 Priorities	ERRP	Measures to improve implementation
<p>Outcome 4: A sector-responsive Research Agenda that supports and informs the establishment of impact-geared W&R skills development programmes</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 1.4: Identification of interventions required to improve enrolment and completion of priority occupations</p>	<p>Intervention one: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes</p>	<p>The W&RSETA continues to ensure that labour market information on the demand and supply of skills is thoroughly triangulated to enhance the trustworthiness of data used for skills planning purposes. In its ongoing commitment to evidence-based planning, the SETA has produced 13 research reports, 7 research studies, and 6 evaluation studies that collectively inform sector skills development. Through strong partnerships with research chairs, the SETA manages and disseminates research outcomes focused on occupations in high demand, supporting the incremental development of career guidance in collaboration with industry and various learning institutions. These research outputs play a pivotal role in shaping responsive and targeted skills interventions aligned with national priorities.</p> <p>Looking ahead, the SETA plans to establish new research chairs in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape through its specialised research chair model to further strengthen regional skills intelligence and innovation capacity. An expression of interest has already been issued to identify suitable academic partners for these initiatives, underscoring the SETA’s commitment to expanding its research footprint and enhancing the sector’s responsiveness to evolving labour market demands across key provinces.</p>

W&R SETA Outcomes	NSDP 2030 Priorities	ERRP	Measures to improve implementation
<p>Outcome 2: An integrated career guidance strategy</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 1.4: Identification of interventions required to improve enrolment and completion of priority occupations</p>	<p>Intervention one: Embedding skills planning into sectoral processes</p>	<p>The W&RSETA’s strategy, developed and approved in the 2020/21 financial year, is currently being actively implemented. As part of this strategic framework, the career toolkit has been successfully launched and is now fully operational. The SETA is collaborating with its strategic partner, Nzalo Careers, to market the toolkit nationwide. This partnership is driving comprehensive promotional activities to ensure widespread awareness and utilisation of the career toolkit across South Africa. The ongoing marketing efforts aim to maximise the toolkit’s reach and impact, supporting learners and job seekers in making informed career decisions aligned with sector demands and skills priorities.</p>
<p>*Outcome 3: Growth-focused programmes for the development and support of Training Providers and the Higher Education, TVET and CET sectors to enable their responsiveness to changing occupations and technological advances.</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 2.1: Workplace-based learning opportunities increased</p>	<p>Intervention four: Access to targeted skills programmes</p> <p>Intervention ten: Strengthening the post-school education and training system</p>	<p>During the W&RSETA’s recent award ceremony in Kempton Park, 41 Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI) Skills Development Providers (SDPs) were formally accredited, marking a significant milestone in the sector’s transformation and skills development agenda. The SETA has invested R10 million over three years to support these accredited providers, reinforcing its commitment to fostering equal opportunities and sustainable livelihoods within the retail training landscape. This investment aimed to empower Black-owned training providers to deliver quality, sector-relevant skills development, thereby contributing to the broader goals of economic transformation and youth empowerment in the wholesale and retail sector.</p>
<p>Outcome 5: Increased access to wholesale and retail occupationally directed programmes</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 3.1: To increase workers participating in various learning programmes to a minimum of 80% by 2030, to address, critical skills required by various sectors of the economy, to transform workplaces, improve productivity and to improve economic growth prospects in various sectors of the economy</p>	<p>Intervention three: Increased access to programmes resulting in qualifications in priority sectors.</p> <p>Intervention four: Access to targeted skills programmes</p>	<p>The five-year target has been achieved, with 39971 (4,2% of person with disability, 29,7% persons from rural areas) having benefitted through W&R occupationally directed programmes</p>
<p>Outcome 6: *Growth-focused skills development and entrepreneurship development support for</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 4.2: Increase access for Intermediate and high-level skills</p>	<p>Intervention 1: Expand the provisioning of short skills programmes</p>	<p>11 286 informal businesses have participated in W&RSETA skills development initiatives</p>

W&R SETA Outcomes	NSDP 2030 Priorities	ERRP	Measures to improve implementation
emerging entrepreneurs, cooperative sector, and small, medium, and informal business enterprises to enhance their participation in the mainstream economy.	Sub-Outcome 5.2: Support the CET colleges	Intervention ten: Strengthening the post-school education and training system	
Outcome 7: Capacitated Trade Unions within the W&R sector	Outcome 7: Encourage and support worker-initiated training	Intervention 2: Enable the provision of targeted skills programmes	The SETA had a 5 year target of 15 intervention around this outcome, it has overachieved +25, meaning 40 interventions around this indicated were implemented capacitating beneficiaries of Trade Unions.
*Outcome 8: An appropriately skilled, agile, and responsive workforce and skills pool able to meet the W&R sector current and emerging skills needs.	Outcome 8: Support career development services	Intervention 8: Embed skills planning in economic planning processes and vice versa	37 235 workers registered in programmes addressing Hard to Fill Vacancies as identified in the SSP. This is an over achievement of the planned 5 year target of 10 000.
Outcome 3: Growth-focused programmes for the development and support of Training Providers and the Higher Education, TVET and CET sectors to enable their responsiveness to changing occupations and technological advances.	Sub-Outcome 5.1: Support the TVET Colleges	Intervention ten: Strengthening the post-school education and training system	31 partnerships formed with Training Providers and Further and Higher Education and Training Institutions. 59 education and training institutions and training providers offering W&R occupationally directed programmes. 41 Historically Disadvantaged Individuals (HDI) Skills Development Providers (SDPs) were formally accredited, marking a significant milestone in the sector's transformation and skills development agenda.

5.6. The extent of implementation of the previous Strategic Priorities

The above section discussed the status of implementation by the SETA to implement on national priorities. The table below highlights the status of implementation of the SETA strategic priority areas:

	To Be Achieved
	Achieved
	Not To Be Achieved

Table 30: The extent of implementation of the previous Strategic Priorities

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	Five Year Target	Progress / Achieved to Date
Outcome 1: An efficient and effective organisation with good corporate governance	Audit opinion by 2024/25	Unqualified	Unqualified audit opinion	Unqualified Audit Opinion Awaiting audit outcome – 1 Aug 2025
	% Reduction of manual processes as a result of seamless and optimised business processes	70% manual processes	90% reduction of manual processes	56 manual processes were automated, resulting is 119% and below is the breakdown per financial year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2020/21 – 10 processes were automated – 21% In 2021/22 – 46 manual processes were automated – 98%
Outcome 2: An integrated career guidance programme	A comprehensive career guidance and career development strategy developed	A new target	A career guidance and career development strategy which is developed and implemented to guide the W&RSETA career guidance interventions over the period 2020/21 – 2024/25.	Career Guidance Strategy developed and approved in 2020/21 period. The Strategy is currently being implemented In 2021/22: 307 career guidance interventions were implemented In 2022/23, the following activities were implemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total of 226 career guidance events held in urban and rural areas. 16 life orientation educators capacitated in use of the career guide. 25 people were trained on career guidance information officer qualification during the year under review. Two Career Development Practitioner Capacitation programmes were held in Western Cape and Eastern Cape with 49 people trained on Career Development Practitioner capacitation. Videography of the W&R sector. 254 career events were implemented, which includes capacitation of 20 Life Orientation educators during 2023/2024 financial year period During the year under review (2024/2025) 252 career events were implemented, which includes capacitation of 26 Life Orientation educators
Outcome 3: Growth focused programmes for the development and support of training providers and the	Percentage increase in the number of HET, TVET and CET partnerships aimed at enabling their growth	A new target	10% increase in the number of partnerships with Training Providers and Further and Higher	The target of percentage increase in partnerships with HET, TVETs and CETs was exceeded with 90,9% increase over the 5 year period

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	Five Year Target	Progress / Achieved to Date
higher education, TVET and CET sectors to enable their responsiveness to changing occupations and technological advances			Education and Training Institutions	
	Number of education and training institutions and training providers offering W&R occupationally directed programmes	A new target	20 HET, TVETs, CET sites/campuses 40 Training Providers (of which 100% are HDI Providers)	A total of 81 education and training institutions and training providers offering W&R occupationally directed programmes. A total of 41 HDI Skills Development Providers (SDP) were trained and graduated.
Outcome 4: A sector responsive research agenda that supports and informs the establishment of impact geared W&R skills development programmes.	Number of research studies conducted in response to the sector needs	4 research reports	20 research reports completed	23 research studies conducted
	Number of impact assessment reports published	4	5	15 impact tracer studies have been conducted and reports published.
Outcome 5: Increased access to wholesale and retail occupationally directed programmes.	Number of learners participating in occupationally directed programmes	6 536	7 000 (4% person with disability 12.5% persons from rural areas)	By 2024/2025 total was 53 669 (5.5% persons with disability and 31% from rural areas)
Outcome 6: Growth-focused skills development and entrepreneurship development support for emerging entrepreneurs, cooperative sector and small, medium and informal business enterprises to enhance their participation in the mainstream economy.	Number of informal businesses that have participated in W&RSETA skills development initiatives registered with relevant business or enterprise registration bodies	New Target	1 000 Informal Businesses registered with relevant registration bodies	No informal businesses have been registered with the relevant bodies. It should however be noted that 14 378 informal businesses have participated in the W&RSETA skills.
	Number of Cooperatives participating in skills development initiatives	New Target	100	111 Cooperatives have participated in skills development initiatives It should be noted that the SETA further enabled 314 community based entities to participate in skills development initiatives.

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	Five Year Target	Progress / Achieved to Date
	Number of transformation projects implemented in collaboration with industry partners	New Target	3	Eight transformation projects were implemented in collaboration with industry partners.
Outcome 7: Capacitated trade unions within the W&R sector	Number of interventions conducted to capacitate Trade Union members	N/A	15 interventions	49 Trade Union Interventions conducted to capacitate Trade Union members.
	Percentage Increase in trade union member participation in Trade Union Capacitation Programmes	800	20%	22% increase in trade union member participation in Trade Union Capacitation programmes. It should be noted that 6910 trade union members have participated over the 5 year period from the baseline of 800.
Outcome 8: An appropriately skilled, agile and responsive workforce and skills pool able to meet the W&R sector current and emerging skills needs.	Number of workers registered in programmes addressing Hard to Fill Vacancies as identified in the SSP	New Target	10 000	Target is overachieved with 47 869 workers registered in programmes addressing HTFVs as identified in the SSP.
	A comprehensive impact evaluation of W&RSETA strategic programmes towards addressing imbalance between skills supply and demand	New Target	1	1 impact evaluation of W&RSETA strategic programmes towards addressing imbalance between skills supply and demand
	Number of employed and unemployed persons obtain qualifications in programmes that address W&R sector current and emerging skills needs for increased sector responsiveness to 4IR and related technological advances.	New Target	2000	188 learners have obtained qualifications in programmes that address W&R sector current and emerging skills needs for increased sector responsiveness to 4IR and related technological advances.
	Number of young people supported with ICT skills to access digitisation job and entrepreneurship opportunities in the sector	874	1500	3 745 young people supported with ICT skills to access digitisation job and entrepreneurship opportunities in the sector.
	Number of learners exiting W&RSETA programmes	21 252	39 470	42 658 have completed W&RSETA programmes.

Outcome	Outcome Indicator	Baseline	Five Year Target	Progress / Achieved to Date
	Number of previously unemployed persons who have completed W&RSETA programmes are employed or start their own businesses	9 064	12 000	1 470 previously unemployed persons who have completed W&RSETA programmes who are now employed or have started their own businesses.

5.7. Measures to improve planning/ Plan of Action

To strengthen planning within its mandate of facilitating occupationally directed learning and sectoral skills development, the SETA will adopt a more integrated, outcomes-driven approach. While many targets have been achieved or exceeded, the SETA will ensure that future planning establishes stronger alignment between outputs and measurable outcomes such as learner certification, skills acquisition, progression into learning pathways, and improved provider capacity. Moreover, priority will be to set realistic, evidence-based targets informed by historical trends and sector intelligence, ensuring full alignment with the NSDP and SSP. To enhance the effectiveness of its interventions, the SETA will improve tracking of learner achievements, strengthen reporting on provider performance, and ensure that programmes are responsive to hard-to-fill vacancies and emerging occupational needs. The SETA will also prioritize the integration of transformation indicators such as rural reach, support to historically disadvantaged institutions, and inclusivity of persons with disabilities into its planning processes. By embedding periodic impact assessments and linking performance indicators to sectoral skills priorities, the SETA will continue to fulfil its mandate of building a skilled, adaptable, and inclusive workforce for the wholesale and retail sector.

In line with the revised Framework for Strategic Planning and Annual Performance Plans (DPME and National Treasury, 2019), the SETA will further adopt the Outcomes Approach and Theory of Change to move beyond a focus on activities and towards outcomes and impact. This will ensure that planning and implementation directly contribute to national priorities as reflected through aggregated targets in the APP and SLA. Additionally, it will promote full alignment between the Annual Operational Plan (AOP) (activities), the APP (outputs), and the Strategic Plan (outcomes and impact), creating a coherent and results-focused planning ecosystem.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Plan within the SETA provides the framework through which performance against set objectives is measured. It outlines expected inputs, activities, and outputs, and defines how data will be collected, verified, and analysed to assess performance against targets. The plan further ensures the following:

- Clear alignment between planned outputs and strategic outcomes
- Timely and accurate performance reporting,
- Identification of implementation risks and corrective actions,
- Evidence-informed decision-making to improve future planning and resource allocation.

5.7.1. Strengthening M&E Function

To strengthen the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) function across the SETA, significant strides have been made to improve institutional capacity and capability. Recognising that a well-functioning M&E system is foundational to evidence-based planning and performance accountability, the SETA has rolled out targeted capacity-building interventions in all provincial offices. These efforts have focused on enhancing both human and systems capabilities to ensure the integrity, accuracy, and strategic use of performance data. The M&E unit has implemented a range of support initiatives, including:

- **Provincial capacity-building workshops** on the development and implementation of M&E plans, tailored to ensure alignment with organisational objectives and performance frameworks.
- **Specification of IT-based M&E system requirements**, aimed at enabling seamless data integration, tracking, and reporting.
- **Institutionalisation of internal data controls** to safeguard the reliability and validity of data throughout the performance chain.
- **Routine quality assurance assessments** of M&E activities and outputs from various units to ensure consistency, accuracy, and learning.
- **Establishment of formal performance feedback mechanisms** to facilitate continuous improvement and accountability and
- **Improved coordination of performance information management** for strategic documents such as the Strategic Plan (SP), Annual Performance Plan (APP), and Quarterly Reports.

These developments reflect a strategic shift towards embedding M&E as a core management function across the organisation, enabling data-driven decision-making, early identification of implementation bottlenecks, and timely corrective action in line with the SETA's strategic priorities.

5.7.2. Interventions Implemented in Support of ERRP Skills Strategy

The South African Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan presents interventions that are geared towards ensuring that the country's economy returns to pre-COVID-19 levels and adds more GDP growth and jobs, in pursuit of the National Development Plan goals for reducing unemployment, poverty, and inequality (South African Government, 2020). The plan, which was presented to the Joint Hybrid Sitting of Parliament by President Cyril Ramaphosa in October 2020, highlights several priority interventions including Aggressive infrastructure investment; Employment orientated strategic localisation, reindustrialisation and export promotion; Energy security; Support for tourism recovery and growth; Gender equality and economic inclusion of women and youth; Green economy interventions; Mass public employment interventions; Strengthening food security; and

Macroeconomic interventions.

The SETA identified 32 ERRP-aligned occupations that are in short supply for reasons such as a lack of required technical skills through the SETA Survey Tool. These are aligned to the following ERRP priorities: innovation, industrialisation through localisation, communication and the digital economy, presidential youth employment initiative, agriculture and food security, energy security, and infrastructure investment and delivery. The occupations include quality manager, software developer, and purchasing officer, among others. The most appropriate interventions identified included increasing access to programmes (i.e., increasing enrolments), updating or amending qualifications, and reskilling to preserve jobs, amongst others. To develop the skills associated with identified occupations, the SETA suggested inter-SETA partnerships and collaboration; SETA-Employer-TVET Partnerships; development of new occupations in demand; post-graduate funding, and accelerated artisan and or apprenticeship programmes. Six occupations (aligned to the communications and the digital economy ERRP priority) were identified for addition to the list of occupations that are in shortage, namely: marketing specialist, e-commerce manager, e-commerce planner, ICT specialist, system analyst, and e-learning designer. These have been previously identified as emerging occupations as per previous SSPs.

Overall, the SETA identified 6 key ERRP Skills Strategy Interventions that respond to other related skills-related needs over and above occupations in shortage. These are: expanding the provisioning of short skills programmes (both accredited and non-accredited) to respond to skills gaps identified in the ERRP skills strategy; strengthening entrepreneurship development programmes; expanding the provisioning of workplace-based learning (WBL); increasing enrolments in qualification-based programmes that respond to occupational shortages identified in the strategy; strengthening the post-school education and training system; and embedding skills planning into economic planning processes and vice versa.

5.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, the SETA has demonstrated measurable progress in advancing an inclusive and responsive skills development agenda. Over the past five years, the institution exceeded key targets in occupationally directed learning, the capacitation of trade unions, and strategic partnerships achievements which underscore its operational effectiveness and relevance in the sector. Notable strides include the overachievement in worker registrations for Hard-to-Fill Vacancies, the proactive scaling of research outputs, and the strengthening of career guidance interventions, all of which reflect the SETA's commitment to sectoral intelligence and demand-driven delivery. Moreover, this period also marked meaningful engagement with historically disadvantaged institutions, informal enterprises, and rural communities, aligning the SETA's outputs with national goals of transformation and inclusion. While successes are evident, the review also revealed areas requiring greater focus, particularly in scaling 4IR-related qualifications and the formalisation of informal businesses. These gaps offer critical learning for enhancing future interventions and deepening impact.

Going forward, the adoption of the Theory of Change and outcomes-based planning will serve to sharpen the link between interventions and measurable sectoral change. By embedding continuous learning, stakeholder collaboration, and labour market insights into its strategic framework, the SETA is poised to refine its planning and delivery models. This will ensure not only improved programme responsiveness and sustainability, but also sustained contributions to South Africa's developmental priorities, especially in advancing youth employment, enterprise development, and inclusive economic growth.

6. CHAPTER SIX: SETA STRATEGIC SKILLS PRIORITY ACTIONS

This chapter consolidates the findings of previous chapters and reflects on priority actions for the sector. The previous chapters provided the information and analysis and thus enabled a response in the form of recommended actions that are realistic, consistent, and achievable. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a set of priority actions and not a detailed strategic or operational plan.

6.1. Key Findings from Previous Chapters

This section draws insights from previous chapters on skills priorities.

Findings from Chapter 1

Based on Chapter 1's findings, the analysis of the economic and labour market context underscores a sector grappling with entrenched structural inefficiencies. While retail trade has shown resilience through modest growth, the wholesale sub-sector and manufacturing-linked trade continue to contract. These declines are magnified by persistent supply chain disruptions, exacerbated by South Africa's deepening logistics crisis currently estimated to inflict R1 billion in daily trade losses. This has significantly increased the cost of doing business, stifled productivity, and eroded the sector's agility.

Labour market instability, highlighted by job losses in early 2025 and rising discouragement among work-seekers, points to a fragile employment ecosystem. Although youth employment remains relatively strong, the data reveals concerning geographic and demographic disparities including gender and racial imbalances in occupational roles suggesting that transformation is both necessary and uneven. These dynamics reveal a need for a sharper focus on equity-centred workforce planning, leadership development for underrepresented groups, and targeted support for marginalised populations.

Findings from Chapter 2

Based on the findings in Chapter 2 several key skills implications emerge for the Wholesale and Retail sector. Disruptive technologies and evolving consumer behaviours are rapidly redefining the wholesale and retail value chain. Traditional roles are no longer sufficient to sustain sectoral growth. Instead, there is rising demand for competencies in digital fluency, customer experience design, e-commerce management, data analytics, inventory optimisation, and agile supply chain coordination.

Yet, existing training systems have struggled to keep pace. Stakeholders repeatedly raised concerns about the limited responsiveness of curricula, the misalignment between qualifications and employer needs, and the scarcity of structured workplace learning. The SETA's pivot toward modular, stackable, and flexible learning pathways is a positive and necessary evolution. Furthermore, the piloting of district-level skills planning represents an innovative shift enabling more granular, region-sensitive planning that takes into account local economic contexts and training infrastructure disparities.

Findings from Chapter 3

Chapter 3 revealed a pressing imperative for the sector to strike a dual focus, stabilising foundational occupations while simultaneously building future-focused capabilities. Foundational roles such as Sales Assistants, Shelf Fillers, and Retail Supervisors remain vital to the daily operations and customer facing functions of the sector. Yet, these roles are increasingly marked by high turnover rates, low levels of professionalisation, and minimal prospects for upward mobility. Persistent recruitment and retention challenges in these categories are not merely revealing of tight labour markets, but rather indicative of systemic issues in job design, poor career attractiveness, and inadequate articulation of

progression pathways.

At the same time, the rise of digitally enabled, compliance-intensive, and cross-functional roles including Cybersecurity Specialists, E-commerce Project Managers, and SHEQ (Safety, Health, Environment, and Quality) Practitioners signals a dramatic shift in the sector's skill demands. These roles demand not only advanced technical capabilities, but also critical thinking, adaptability, and collaborative working, reflecting broader trends toward automation, datafication, and sustainability. Yet, the current talent pipeline is not producing sufficient volumes of candidates with the requisite digital fluency and transversal skills, pointing to a growing risk of skills mismatch and sectoral stagnation if this gap is not addressed with urgency.

Furthermore, complicating this landscape are significant provincial disparities in vacancy rates and employer capacity. Economic hubs such as Gauteng and the Western Cape face intensifying competition for digitally savvy professionals, driving up wage costs and exacerbating skills shortages. In contrast, rural and peri-urban provinces struggle with limited institutional infrastructure, fragmented post-school education offerings, and high rates of youth outmigration, which erode the local talent base. These geographical inequities not only undermine the SETA's objective of national inclusivity but also limit the sector's potential to serve as a driver of local economic development.

Addressing these multifaceted challenges calls for regionally differentiated and demand-led planning approaches. The SETA must intensify its efforts in district-level skills planning, which provides a more granular understanding of local economic structures, employer needs, and learner constraints. Equally important is the strengthening of career guidance systems across schools, TVET colleges, and community education centres, to expose learners to emerging career paths and equip them with the information needed to make informed occupational choices. This includes demystifying both entry-level roles and new economy occupations, while making clear the qualifications and experiential pathways required for advancement. Moreover, the chapter underscores the critical importance of dynamic and sustained engagement between the SETA, employers, post-school institutions, and civil society. Such collaboration is necessary to co-develop curricula, expand workplace-based learning, and ensure feedback loops that enhance programme responsiveness. Only through these partnerships can the sector begin to shift from reactive, fragmented interventions toward coordinated and future-proof workforce strategies that nurture both operational continuity and long-term adaptability.

Findings from Chapter 4

Chapter 4 highlights the increasing centrality of strategic partnerships to the SETA's transformation agenda. Initiatives such as the NYDA collaboration and the China-South Africa CCIEEC e-commerce exchange programme reflect a deliberate pivot toward integrated, future-focused development. These partnerships are not merely operational, they are redefining the sector's developmental mandate by unlocking youth potential, building globally competitive skills, and aligning with international digital commerce trends.

Most notably, the SETA is now expanding its research footprint through the development of specialised Research Chairs in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. This model, anchored in collaboration with TVET and CET colleges, aims to decentralise research capacity and embed applied sectoral knowledge within public education institutions. In doing so, it strengthens the institutional role of colleges as not only training centres but also as knowledge producers and innovation hubs. This approach is critical to ensuring that skills planning reflects both national priorities and localised labour market realities.

The planned formalisation of further international partnerships with institutions such as Ravensburg University (Germany), the Botswana Institute for Technology and Research, and Rwanda’s Skills Development Fund signals a clear trajectory towards global collaboration, digitally enabled learning, and responsive research. While execution risks remain, particularly in maintaining focus and stakeholder alignment, these developments position the SETA at the frontier of transformative, border-crossing skills development.

Findings from Chapter 5

Chapter 5 presents clear evidence of the SETA’s operational growth and strategic maturity. Over the past five years, the institution has exceeded key targets in occupationally directed learning, union capacitation, and strategic partnership development. High performance in addressing hard-to-fill vacancies and scaling research outputs reflects a maturing intelligence function and a shift towards demand-driven delivery. Moreover, meaningful engagement with historically marginalised institutions, rural communities, and informal enterprises demonstrates growing alignment with national goals of inclusion and transformation. The adoption of the Theory of Change and outcomes-based planning further signals a commitment to sharpen the link between interventions and measurable impact. However, areas of underperformance such as limited progress in scaling 4IR qualifications and slow formalisation of informal businesses highlight persistent systemic challenges. These gaps offer important learning opportunities for refining delivery models, strengthening implementation capacity, and embedding continuous improvement.

6.2. Planned Strategic Priority Actions

There are a multitude of recommended actions needed in the sector. In this section, the SETA has identified seven key skills priorities that should be considered. These priorities have remained largely consistent over the past years, with slight amendments or additions to align with changing national priorities such as the introduction of the NSDP and ERRP.

Table 31: Planned Strategic Priority Actions

Planned Strategic Priority Actions	NDP Chapter	MTDP Strategic Priority	NSDP 2030 Priorities	ERRP Focus	Change Drivers	SETA Focus Area
Advance the implementation of the Priority Skills Plan (PSP) through structured stakeholder engagement	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 1.4: Identification of interventions required to improve enrolment and completion	Intervention ten: Strengthening the post-school education and training system	Technological Advancements & AI: The SETA’s strategic focus on stakeholder partnerships and curriculum alignment responds directly to technological advancements and AI, which are reshaping occupations in wholesale and retail. By collaborating with institutions, the SETA ensures that	The SETA will develop and sustain robust partnerships with Higher Education Institutions, TVET and CET colleges, focusing on curricula co-development aligned to emerging sector technologies and occupations. It will drive capacity building for educators and institutional governance to improve training quality. By integrating workplace-based learning and industry exposure, the SETA ensures learners gain

			of priority occupations; Sub-Outcome 5.2: Support the CET colleges		curricula remain current and responsive to digital innovation, automation, and e-commerce trends. The emphasis on inclusive access also addresses demographic shifts, particularly the growing Gen Z population entering the workforce with distinct learning and employment preferences.	relevant, practical skills. Special emphasis will be placed on broadening access and equity, particularly for youth, women, and people with disabilities, addressing critical skills gaps highlighted in recent sector research.
	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 4.2: Increase access for intermediate and high-level skills	Intervention seven: Retraining/upskilling of employees to preserve jobs		
Strengthen SMME, Cooperatives & Informal Traders Development for Inclusive Sector Growth	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 2.1: Workplace-based learning opportunities increased; Sub-Outcome 3.1: Increase workers participating in learning programmes to 80% by 2030	Intervention six: Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation	Consumer Behaviour Changes: This priority responds to the changing consumer behaviours driven by localisation, digital platforms, and the rising demand for informal trade. The focus on micro-enterprises and cooperatives positions the SETA to support economic resilience amidst economic trends such as inflation and unemployment. Furthermore, youth and township-based enterprise support directly reflects demographic shifts, empowering new entrants into the economy through skills and mentorship.	The SETA will design and implement tailored skills development and entrepreneurship support programmes for small, micro, and informal businesses. This includes facilitation of workplace-based learning, mentorship, and business development services that directly address sector-specific challenges faced by emerging entrepreneurs and informal traders. By collaborating with industry and training providers, the SETA will enhance the formalisation pathways and competitiveness of these enterprises, thereby supporting inclusive economic growth and job creation.
Enhance Responsiveness to Skills Demand and Supply	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 2.1: Workplace-based learning opportunities increased	Intervention six: Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation	Technological Advancements & AI: The SETA's efforts to address critical and emerging skills shortages directly reflect technological change and AI integration, which are disrupting traditional retail roles and requiring rapid workforce adaptation. By continuously updating occupational forecasts and aligning programmes, the SETA ensures agility in responding to	The SETA will implement targeted skills development programmes addressing critical and emerging skills shortages in the sector. It will leverage research data to continuously update occupational demand forecasts and align training interventions accordingly. Efforts include upskilling existing workers through accredited programmes and retraining to support workforce adaptability in the face of digital disruption and changing market demands. Trade unions and

					labour market shifts and job role transformation.	employers are key partners in delivering these programmes to preserve jobs and strengthen sector resilience.
Advance Sector Transformation, including the Training and Employment of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 5.1: Support the TVET Colleges; Sub-Outcome 5.2: Support the CET colleges	Intervention four: Access to targeted skills programmes	<p>Labour Market & Demographic Shifts</p> <p>Data Privacy & Protection (POPIA):</p> <p>This priority responds to labour market and demographic shifts by focusing on inclusion, equity, and access for marginalised groups, including persons with disabilities. The SETA recognises the need for diversified talent pipelines in response to a changing workforce and promotes institutional readiness to support underrepresented groups.</p>	The SETA will promote inclusive sector transformation by prioritising training and employment of people with disabilities, in line with national equity objectives. It will ensure CET colleges are capacitated to deliver relevant retail and related programmes that cater to diverse learners. The SETA will also monitor transformation targets across skills development initiatives, ensuring equitable access and participation from historically marginalised groups, thus fostering a diversified and representative workforce.
Address Youth Unemployment through Targeted Skills Development and Transition Pathways	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 1.2: Targets for priority occupations	Intervention four: Access to targeted skills programmes Intervention six: Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation	<p>Labour Market & Demographic Shifts:</p> <p>Technological Advancements & AI:</p> <p>With youth being disproportionately affected by unemployment, this priority speaks directly to labour market shifts and the urgent need to prepare young people for evolving occupational demands. The SETA's approach through structured learning pathways and experiential learning ensures that youth are equipped to enter the workplace or entrepreneurial space.</p>	Focus will be on closing the youth employment gap by implementing skills development initiatives that bridge education and employment. These initiatives include targeted bursaries, internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning opportunities designed to prepare youth for priority occupations in wholesale and retail. The SETA will actively work to reduce barriers to entry and ensure youth participation in learning programmes is significantly increased, leveraging industry partnerships and continuous labour market insights.
Drive the integration of Circular Economy principles (Green) to promote sustainable	Ch3. Economy and employment	Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation	Sub-Outcome 8: Green skills and sustainable livelihoods	Intervention six: Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation	<p>Economic Trends</p> <p>This strategic area addresses growing pressure for environmental sustainability, aligning with economic trends such as resource scarcity and the demand for green recovery. By embedding green skills into training programmes, the SETA supports the</p>	Key will be to explore opportunities to integrate green skills into sector training programmes, aligning with national commitments to the circular economy and sustainable practices. This includes developing curricula that embed environmental awareness, resource efficiency, and sustainable retail practices, supporting the sector's transition to greener

<p>resource utilization.</p>					<p>transition to circular economy models in retail. These interventions also respond to consumer behaviour changes, where eco-conscious choices are reshaping purchasing trends, and encourage innovation aligned to technological evolution in sustainable retail practices.</p>	<p>business models as outlined in the ERRP. Collaboration with industry partners and training providers will be critical to mainstream these green skills.</p>
<p>Align skills development with the Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan (ERRP)</p>	<p>Ch3. Economy and employment</p>	<p>Strategic Priority 1: Inclusive growth and job creation</p>	<p>Sub-Outcome 4.2: Increase access for Intermediate and high-level skills</p> <p>Sub-Outcome 2.1: Workplace-based learning opportunities increased;</p> <p>Sub-Outcome 3.1: Increase workers participating in learning programmes to 80% by 2030</p>	<p>Intervention six: Supporting entrepreneurship and innovation</p> <p>Intervention seven: Retraining/upskilling of employees to preserve jobs</p> <p>Intervention ten: Strengthening the post-school education and training system</p>	<p>Economic Trends:</p> <p>The SETA's alignment with the ERRP addresses the broader economic shifts facing South Africa, including the freight crisis, rising inflation, and the post-pandemic recovery. By focusing on retraining and institutional support, the SETA contributes to job preservation and skills resilience. These initiatives also anticipate technological change, as they aim to future-proof the workforce through digital and adaptive skills, while responding to ongoing labour market volatility.</p>	<p>The SETA will actively contribute to the implementation of the ERRP by aligning skills development programmes with ERRP priorities. This includes strengthening post-school education, supporting entrepreneurship and innovation, retraining workers, and enabling workforce adaptability to economic shifts. The SETA's programmes will support recovery through targeted skills interventions that enhance sector competitiveness and sustainable employment growth.</p>

6.3. Reflection on SETA's Strategic Priorities over the years

Over the years, the SETA has maintained a consistent focus on critical strategic priorities such as addressing skills gaps, supporting SMMEs, cooperatives, and informal traders, and implementing the Priority Skills Plan (PSP). Notably, while earlier frameworks explicitly highlighted Hard-To-Fill Vacancies (HTFVs) and sector transformation as separate focal points, the most recent priorities demonstrate a more integrated and streamlined approach. Although Hard-To-Fill Vacancies are no longer separately emphasized, their essence persists within the broader priority of enhancing responsiveness to skills demand and supply. Importantly, sector transformation remains a key strategic pillar, now more explicitly aligned with advancing the training and employment of persons with disabilities, signalling a refined and targeted commitment to inclusivity. Furthermore, youth unemployment continues to be prominently addressed through focused skills development and transition pathways, reflecting sustained urgency in this area. Overall, the evolution of these priorities illustrates the SETA's adaptive strategy to embed foundational goals within a more cohesive framework, ensuring responsiveness to emerging sectoral challenges while maintaining a steadfast commitment to transformation and inclusive growth.

6.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the wholesale and retail sector is at a critical inflexion point, one that demands decisive, future-oriented action. Across all chapters, the findings consistently point to deep structural inefficiencies, emerging technological disruptions, uneven transformation, and widening geographic and institutional disparities. These challenges if unaddressed, will further entrench inequality and constrain sectoral competitiveness. In response, the SETA is strengthening its posture as a transformative force within the skills development ecosystem. Priority actions emerging from this analysis focus on stabilising core occupational pipelines, closing the gap between skills demand and supply, and fostering inclusive access to economic opportunities. This means ensuring that traditional roles such as sales assistants and retail supervisors are not only preserved but enhanced through career progression pathways, while simultaneously building capacity in future-facing roles such as e-commerce specialists, data analysts, and supply chain innovators.

A central feature of the SETA's approach will be regional differentiation, moving beyond national averages to drive district-level skills planning that responds to the specific needs of both urban economic hubs and underserved rural provinces. This approach will be supported by expanded collaboration with TVET and CET colleges, especially in provinces facing youth outmigration and infrastructure constraints. The growing research presence through Research Chairs will serve as a foundation for decentralised intelligence and improved local responsiveness. Moreover, in tackling youth unemployment, the SETA will scale structured workplace-based learning, strengthen career guidance systems, and co-create learning pathways with employers that lead to sustainable employment. For informal traders and SMMEs, the SETA will provide support to more enabling developmental programmes that integrate digital skills, entrepreneurship, and access to markets.

Critically, the SETA's transformation agenda will be actioned through high-impact partnerships nationally and internationally. Likewise, programmes with NYDA, e-commerce exchange initiatives, and forthcoming collaborations with regional and global institutions are not peripheral activities; they form the framework of a new strategic orientation that places innovation, digital capability, and youth inclusion at the centre of the sector's renewal. In addition, the SETA recognises that strategic planning alone is insufficient without execution capability. The adoption of outcomes-based planning, a Theory of Change, and the use of labour market intelligence to inform delivery marks a shift from input-driven compliance to intentional, measurable impact.

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