SOUTH AFRICA
YEARBOOK
2024/25

Land and its people

The Land

Stretching latitudinally from 22°S to 35°S and longitudinally from 17°E to 33°E, South Africa's surface area covers 1 219 602 square kilometres (km2). Physical features range from bushveld, grasslands, forests, deserts and majestic mountain peaks, to wide unspoilt beaches and coastal wetlands. The country shares common boundaries with Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Eswatini, while the Mountain Kingdom of Lesotho is landlocked by South African territory in the south-east. The Prince Edward and Marion islands, annexed by South Africa in 1947, lie some 1 920 km south-east of Cape Town.

South Africa's long coastline stretches more than more than 3 000 kilometres (km), from the desert border with Namibia on the Atlantic coast southwards around the tip of Africa and then north to the border of subtropical Mozambique on the Indian Ocean.

The country has more than 290 conservation parks. It is home to almost 300 mammal species, about 860 bird species, and 8 000 plant species. The annual sardine run is the biggest migration on the planet. South Africa comprises nine world heritage sites and is divided into eight biomes.

The heritage sites are:

- Fossil Hominid Sites of South Africa (i.e. Cradle of Humankind, Taung Skull Fossil Site and Makapan Valley)
- Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape
- Richtersveld Cultural and Botanical Landscape
- Robben Island
- Cape Floral Region Protected Areas
- iSimangaliso Wetland Park
- Vredefort Dome
- uKhahlamba/Drakensberg Park
- ‡Khomani Cultural Landscape.

The biomes are:

- Grassland
- Savanna
- Succulent Karoo
- Nama-Karoo
- Forest
- Fynbos
- Desert
- Thicket
- Indian Ocean Coastal Belt.

The country is considered to be the Cradle of Humankind and boasts 40% of all hominid finds on Earth.

The oceans and coastline

The warm Mozambique-Agulhas current skirts the east and south coasts as far as Cape Agulhas, while the cold Benguela current flows northwards along the west coast as far as southern Angola.

The contrast in temperature between these two currents partly accounts for significant differences in climate and vegetation, as well as differences in marine life. Owing to the cold waters of the west coast being much richer in oxygen, nitrates, phosphates and plankton than those of the east coast, the South African fishing industry is centred on the west coast. Saldanha Bay is the only ideal natural harbour.

Rivers and lakes

None of the country's rivers are commercially navigable and most river mouths are unsuitable as harbours as large sandbanks block entry for most of the year. South Africa has no significant natural lakes. Artificial lakes are used mostly for crop irrigation. The Orange River is South Africa's largest river. Rising in the Drakensberg Mountains, it traverses through the Lesotho Highlands and joins the Caledon River between the Eastern Cape and the Free State before it empties into the Atlantic Ocean forming the border with Namibia. Other major rivers include the Vaal, Breede, Komati, Lepelle (previously Olifants), Tugela, Umzimvubu, Limpopo and Molopo.

Relief features

South Africa's surface area falls into two major physiographic categories: the interior plateau and the land between the plateau and the coast. Forming the boundary between these two areas is the Great Escarpment, the most prominent and continuous relief feature of the country. Its height above sea level varies from about 1 500 metres (m) in the dolerite-capped Roggeveld scarp in the south-west, to 3 482 m in the KwaZulu-Natal Drakensberg.

Inland from the escarpment lies the interior plateau, which is the southern continuation of the great African plateau stretching north to the Sahara Desert. The plateau is characterised by wide plains with an average height of 1 200 m above sea level. The dissected Lesotho plateau, which is more than 3 000 m above sea level, is the most prominent.

Between the Great Escarpment and the coast lies an area which varies in width from 80 km to 240 km in the east and south, and 60 km to 80 km in the west. At least three major subdivisions are recognised – the eastern plateau slopes, the Cape folded belt and adjacent regions, and the western plateau slopes.

Climate

A subtropical location, moderated by ocean on three sides of the country and the altitude of the interior plateau, account for the warm temperate conditions. South Africa is a relatively dry country, with an average annual rainfall of about 500 millimetres (mm). While the Western Cape gets most of its rainfall in winter, the rest of the country is generally a summer-rainfall region.

Temperatures in South Africa tend to be lower than in other countries at similar latitudes, owing mainly to greater elevation above sea level. On the interior plateau, the altitude – Johannesburg lies at 1 694 m – keeps the average summer temperatures below 30°C. In winter, for the same reason, night-time temperatures can drop to freezing point or lower in some places. South Africa's coastal regions are therefore relatively warm in winter.

The hottest place in South Africa is Letaba in Limpopo, with a mean annual temperature of 23.7°C and an average annual maximum temperature of 30.7°C. The coldest place

is Buffelsfontein near Molteno in the Eastern Cape, with a mean annual temperature of 11.5°C and an average annual minimum temperature of 2.9°C.

The wettest place is Matiwa in Limpopo with an average annual rainfall of 2004 mm (calculated over a 60-year period). The driest place in the country is Alexander Bay in the Northern Cape, with an average annual rainfall of only 46 mm and the windiest place is Cape Point in the Western Cape, which experiences only 2% of all hours in the year with calm conditions. The average wind speed is 6.9 m/s with 42.1% of the wind speeds higher than 8 m/s.

The people

According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), the 2024 mid-year population is estimated at 63, 02 million. The female population accounts for 51,0% (approximately 32,13 million) of the population. Life expectancy at birth for 2024 is estimated at 63,6 years for males and 69,2 years for females. The infant mortality rate for 2024 is estimated at 22,9 per 1 000 live births.

The estimated overall HIV prevalence rate is approximately 12,7% among the South African population. The total number of people living with HIV (PLWHIV) is estimated at approximately 8,0 million in 2024. For adults aged 15–49 years, an estimated 16,68% of the population is HIV positive. There is a reduction in international migration, which is indicative of the COVID-19 travel restrictions and subsequent impact on migratory patterns since March 2020.

Migration is an important demographic process, as it shapes the age structure and distribution of the provincial population (and so the country's population structure). For the period 2021–2026, Gauteng and Western Cape are estimated to experience the largest inflow of migrants of approximately, 1 381 024 and 492 427 respectively.

Gauteng still comprises the largest share of the South African population, with approximately 15,93 million people (25,3%) living in this province. KwaZulu-Natal is the province with the second largest population, with an estimated 12,31 million people (19,5%). With a population of approximately 1,37 million people (2,2%), Northern Cape remains the province with the smallest share of the South African population.

About 27,50% of the population is aged younger than 15 years (17,33 million) and approximately 9,7% (6,13 million) is 60 years or older. The provinces reflecting the highest percentage of children younger than 15 within its structure are Limpopo (33,09%) and Eastern Cape (31,70%). The proportion of elderly persons aged 60 years and older in South Africa is increasing over time and as such policies and programmes to care for the needs of this growing population should be prioritised.

Languages

Besides the official languages, scores of others – African, European, Asian and more – are spoken in South Africa, as the country lies at the crossroads of southern Africa. Other languages spoken in the country and mentioned in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 are the Khoi, Nama and San languages, South African Sign Language (SASL), Arabic, German, French, Greek, Gujarati, Hebrew, Hindi, Portuguese, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telegu and Urdu. There are also a few indigenous creoles and pidgins. English is generally understood across the country, being the language of business, politics, the media and the country's lingua franca.

South Africa is a multicultural society that is characterised by its rich linguistic diversity. Language is an indispensable tool that can be used to deepen democracy and also contribute to the social, cultural, intellectual, economic and political life of the South African society. The country is multilingual with 12 official languages (Afrikaans; English; Sepedi; Setswana; Sesotho; isiZulu; Siswati; isiNdebele; isiXhosa, Tshivenda, Xitsonga and SASL), each of which is guaranteed equal status. Most South Africans are multilingual and able to speak at least two or more of the official languages. In terms of the Use of Official Languages Act of 2012, and as part of promoting social cohesion and nation-building, every government department, public entity and enterprise is expected to establish a language unit and adopt a language policy.

Religion

South Africa is a secular democracy with freedom of religion. Many religions are represented in the ethnic and regional diversity of the population. They include Christianity; Islam; Traditional African religion; Hinduism; Buddhism; Bahaism; Judaism; Atheism, Agnosticism and Satanism.

The provinces

EASTERN CAPE

The Eastern Cape, at 168 966 km2, is South Africa's second-largest province after the Northern Cape, taking up 13.9% of the total land area. The province has a population of more than 6.6 million people, the majority of whom speak isiXhosa, followed by Afrikaans and English. It is a region of great natural beauty, particularly the rugged cliffs, rough seas and dense green bush of the Wild Coast.

The region has remarkable natural diversity, ranging from the dry, desolate Great Karoo to the lush forests of the Wild Coast and the Keiskamma Valley; the fertile Langkloof Valley, renowned for its rich apple harvests; and the mountainous southern Drakensberg region at Elliot. Various floral habitats meet in the province, ranging from tropical forests in the north to the more temperate woods of the south. The province is home to a number of higher education institutions including Rhodes University, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of Fort Hare and the Walter Sisulu University of Technology.

It has airports in Bhisho, East London, Mthatha and Gqeberha; with two major harbours in East London and Gqeberha respectively.

Agriculture, fisheries and forestry

The fertile Langkloof Valley in the south-west has enormous deciduous fruit orchards, while sheep farming predominates in the Karoo. The Alexandria-Makhanda area produces pineapples, chicory and dairy products, while coffee and tea are cultivated at Magwa.

An olive nursery developed in collaboration with the University of Fort Hare forms a nucleus of olive production in the Eastern Cape. The coastal areas receive good summer rainfall and have a moderate climate, becoming more subtropical to the north-west, which makes it particularly suitable for forestry. The basis of the province's fishing

industry is squid, some recreational and commercial fishing for line fish, the collection of marine resources, and access to line-catches of hake.

Industry

There are two industrial development zones: the West Bank in East London and Coega, near Gqeberha, which includes the deepwater Port of Ngqura. The metropolitan economies of Gqeberha and East London are based primarily on manufacturing, the most important being automotive manufacturing. The province is the hub of South Africa's motor industry.

With its ability to link throughout the economy, government has identified the automotive industry as a key growth sector. It already exhibited significant growth under the Motor Industry Development Programme. Other important sectors include renewables and green industries, forestry and timber processing, pharmaceuticals, plastics and chemicals, capital goods and tourism.

EASTERN CAPE

Capital: Bhisho
Principal languages:
IsiXhosa 81,8%
Afrikaans 9,6%
English 4,8%
Population: 7 176 230
Percentage share of the total population: 11.0%
Area: 168 966 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

FREE STATE

The main languages spoken in the Free State are Sesotho, Afrikaans and isiXhosa. The province has wide horizons and blue skies, farmland, mountains, goldfields and widely dispersed towns. It lies in the heart of South Africa, with Lesotho nestling in the hollow of its bean-like shape.

Between the Vaal River in the north and the Orange River in the south, this immense rolling prairie stretches as far as the eye can see. Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, comprising Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu, has an established institutional, educational and administrative infrastructure. With Bloemfontein being South Africa's judicial capital, the province houses the Supreme Court of Appeal. Important towns include:

Welkom, Sasolburg, Odendaalsrus, Kroonstad, Parys, Phuthaditjhaba, Bethlehem and the charming village of Clarens, situated in the rolling foothills of the Maluti Mountains. Some of South Africa's most valued San rock art can be found in the Free State.

Other tourist attractions include the Golden Gate National Park, the annual Air Show in Bethlehem, the Cherry Festival in Ficksburg and the Fauresmith International Endurance Ride equestrian event. The Vredefort Dome, 10 km in diameter, is South Africa's seventh World Heritage Site.

Agriculture

Agriculture dominates the Free State landscape, with cultivated land covering 32 000 km2 and natural veld and grazing 87 000 km2 of the province. Field crops yield almost two thirds of the gross agricultural income of the province. Animal products contribute a further 30%, with the balance generated by horticulture.

Mining

The National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 has intensified the mining potential that still exists in the goldfields region of Matjhabeng in the Lejweleputswa District as a job intervention zone. The De Bron-Merriespruit Gold Project and the Bloemhoek Gold Project are included as potential development projects in the scope of work of the Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission.

The province has 12 gold mines, producing 30% of South Africa's output and making it the fifth-largest producer of gold in the world. Gold mines in the Free State also supply a substantial portion of the total silver produced in the country. Uranium occurring in the goldbearing conglomerates of the goldfields is extracted as a by-product. The Free State's gold reef of more than 400 km stretches across the province from Gauteng.

South Africa's largest gold-mining complex is Free State Consolidated Goldfields, with an area of 330 km2. Bituminous coal is mined and converted to petrochemicals at Sasolburg. The province also produces high quality diamonds from its kimberlite pipes and fissures, and the country's largest deposit of bentonite is found in the Koppies District.

Manufacturing and industry

The Maluti-a-Phofung Special Economic Zone is the Free State's share of the logistics and industrial corridor. The Vehicle Distribution Centre was established in partnership with the German Bremen Logistics Group, which committed R60 million towards this project. The Harrismith Food Processing Park forms part of the broader development initiative.

The green economic solar zone in the Xhariep district was expected to result in the establishment of the Xhariep Solar Park, harnessing the solar radiation in the southern part of the Free State. The Ingula Pumped Storage Scheme forms part of Eskom's Capital Expansion Programme. This energy infrastructure project is located on the border of the Phumelela and Maluti-a-Phofung Local Municipalities in the Free State; and eMnambithi Local Municipality and the uThukela District Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. Sasol South Africa, the largest producer of synthetic fuels on the sub-continent, remains a key role-player in the Free State economy.

Its investment in its Sasolburg operations is evident from the Wax Expansion Project, the Ethylene Purification Unit 5, the Gas Engine Power Plant and Clean Fuels 2. The Omnia Nitric Acid complex, located within the Sasol Industrial Complex, includes a nitric acid plant, an ammonium nitrate plant, a porous ammonium nitrate plant, a fleet of 145 specialised ammonia rail tankers and other ancillary facilities.

FREE STATE

Capital: Bloemfontein
Principal languages:
Sesotho 72,3%
Afrikaans 10,3%
IsiXhosa 5,5%
Population: 3 044 050
Percentage share of the total population: 4.8%
Area: 129 825 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

GAUTENG

StatsSA Census 2022 shows that Gauteng has the highest population, with approximately 15 099 422 million people. Financial and business services, logistics, manufacturing, property, telecommunications and trade are some of the province's most important economic sectors.

It is the business heart of South Africa, but it is also the shopping mecca of Africa, with tourists from the rest of the continent citing shopping as their reason for visiting the province. The population of more than 15 million people has the highest per-capita income level in the country. The province blends cultures, colours and first- and third-world traditions in a spirited mix, flavoured by a number of foreign influences. Most overseas visitors enter South Africa via OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. South of Johannesburg lies Soweto, the most populous urban residential area in the country, with a population of more than a million.

Some 50 km north of Johannesburg lies South Africa's administrative capital, Pretoria. The magnificent Union Buildings, which overlook the city from Meintjieskop, represent the official seat of the South African Government and house the offices of the country's President. The industrial area of Rosslyn and the townships of Soshanguve and Ga-Rankuwa are situated north of Pretoria. Cullinan, which is well known for its diamonds, and Mamelodi lie to the east.

To the west lies Atteridgeville. Other important Gauteng towns include Krugersdorp and Roodepoort on the West Rand; and Germiston, Springs, Boksburg, Benoni, Brakpan and Kempton Park on the East Rand. Vanderbijlpark and Vereeniging in the south of the province are major industrial centres, while Heidelberg, Nigel and Bronkhorstspruit, to the east, are of agricultural importance.

The University of Pretoria is the largest residential university in South Africa, while the University of South Africa is believed to be the largest long distance learning university in the world. Other universities include the University of the Witwatersrand and the University of Johannesburg.

The province also has several other tertiary education institutions such as universities of technology and further education and training colleges. Gauteng is also home to leading research institutions such as the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the Agricultural Research Council, the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute and the Human Sciences Research Council.

Mining and manufacturing

Manufacturing includes basic iron and steel, fabricated and metal products, food, machinery, electrical machinery, appliances and electrical supplies, vehicle parts and accessories, and chemical products. All major gold and diamond mining houses have their headquarters in Johannesburg, the biggest being Anglo American and De Beers.

Although gold-mining and ancillary industries provide thousands of jobs, the importance of mining is declining compared to the manufacturing and financial sectors. Gauteng dominates the South African economy in every major sector except agriculture, mining and quarrying. Mining produces only 6% of Gauteng's total income and 31% of export earnings.

Technology

More than 60% of South Africa's research and development takes place in Gauteng. The CSIR is one of South Africa's leading science and technology research, development and implementation centres. Located in Pretoria, the CSIR's research and development areas include Biosciences; The Built Environment; Information and Communication; Materials Science and Manufacturing; Natural Resources and the Environment; Mineral Resources; Space Technology; Nanotechnology and Synthetic Biology.

The Innovation Hub in Pretoria is Africa's first internationally accredited science park and a full member of the International Association of Science Parks. Its community has become a regional centre of innovation and knowledge creation, linked to the fast-moving world of global interconnectivity; and made up of small, medium and micro enterprises and multinational companies, employing over 1 000 people.

Industry and agriculture

The province is an integrated industrial complex with major areas of economic activity in three sub regional areas, namely the Vaal Triangle; East, West and Central Rand; and Pretoria. Johannesburg houses the Johannesburg Stock Exchange Limited, the largest securities exchange in Africa.

GAUTENG

Capital: Johannesburg
Principal languages:
IsiZulu 23,1%
Sesotho 13,1%
Sepedi 12,6%
Setswana 10,4%
Afrikaans 7,7%
English 9,2%
Population: 15 931 824
Percentage share of the total population: 26.6%
Area: 18 178 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

KWAZULU-NATAL

KwaZulu-Natal is one of the country's most popular holiday destinations. It includes South Africa's lush subtropical east coast, stretching from Port Edward in the south to Mozambique in the north. The Drakensberg mountain range stretches the entire length of KwaZulu-Natal's western boundary, and forms the boundary between South Africa and the mountain kingdom of Lesotho.

It provided the backdrop for the films Zulu (1964) and Yesterday (2004), and the setting for Alan Paton's novel Cry, the Beloved Country. KwaZulu-Natal is the inspiration behind a million picture postcards. Within the area is a vast 243 000-hectare sweep of basalt summits and buttresses; this section was formally granted World Heritage status in November 2000, and was renamed uKhahlamba-Drakensberg Park.

The summer-rainfall coastal regions are hot and humid, with a subtropical climate. The Midlands area is drier, with extremely cold conditions in winter and snow on the high-lying ground. In the north, the subtropical strip extends around Eswatini to the edge of the escarpment.

Visitors can enter the province through the King Shaka International Airport at La Mercy, north of Durban or use the extensive national road network. There are also two major harbours – the port of Durban, which is one the busiest in Africa, and Richards Bay, which is an important coal-export harbour. There are several nature reserves including the Royal Natal National Park, Giant's Castle and the Kamberg Nature Reserve.

Tertiary institutions of learning in the province include the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Durban Institute of Technology. KwaZulu-Natal is the only province with a monarchy specifically provided for in the Constitution.

Industry and agriculture

KwaZulu-Natal has a diverse industrial sector, with major industries having developed around the port of Durban. Major industries in the province are agriculture, forestry, aluminium, petro-chemicals, automotive manufacturing, steel production, plastics and packaging, paper and board manufacturing, and a range of industries associated with imports and exports though the major ports of Durban and Richards Bay.

The coastal belt is also a large producer of subtropical fruit and sugar, while the farmers in the hinterland concentrate on vegetables, dairy and stock farming. Another major source of income is forestry in the areas around Vryheid, Eshowe, Richmond, Harding and Ngome, which is also known for its tea plantations.

KWAZULU-NATAL

Capital: Pietermaritzburg
Principal languages:
IsiZulu 80,0%
English 14,4%
IsiXhosa 3,1%
Afrikaans 1.0%
Population: 12 312 712
Percentage share of the total population: 19.0%
Area: 94 361 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

LIMPOPO

South Africa's northernmost province shares borders with Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana, making it the ideal gateway to Africa. Named after the Limpopo River that flows along its northern border, the province is rich in wildlife, natural beauty and historical and cultural treasures.

The province is linked to the Maputo Development Corridor through the Phalaborwa Spatial Development Initiative, which is a network of rail and road corridors connected to the major seaports, opening up Limpopo for trade and investment. This is complemented by the presence of smaller airports in centres such as Phalaborwa and Musina, as well as the Gateway International Airport in Polokwane, the capital city, which lies strategically in the centre of the province.

The Great North Road, running through the centre of the province, strings together a series of towns such as Bela-Bela, with its popular mineral spa; Modimolle, with its beautiful Waterberg mountain range; Mokopane; Polokwane; Makhado, at the foot of the Soutpansberg mountain range; and Musina, which is well-known for its majestic baobab trees. The crossing into Zimbabwe is at Beit Bridge.

Phalaborwa and Thabazimbi are Limpopo's major mining centres, while the town of Tzaneen in the picturesque Magoebaskloof is known for its tea plantations, forestry products and tropical fruit. The province is in the Savanna Biome, an area of mixed grassland and trees, generally known as bushveld. Natural resources include more than 50 provincial nature reserves and several private game reserves. The largest section of the Kruger National Park is along Limpopo's eastern boundary, which borders on Mozambique.

Several museums and national monuments bear testimony to the ancient people and fearless pioneers who braved the unknown. Living museums include the Bakone Malapa Museum near Polokwane and the Tsonga Open-Air Museum near Tzaneen. Mapungubwe (Place of the Jackal) Hill, some 75 km from Musina, is a World Heritage site. It served as a natural fortress for its inhabitants from about 950 AD to 1200 AD.

Agriculture

Limpopo produces a wide range of agricultural products. The area is a potato belt and known for its superior quality potatoes for high-end markets. It also produces 75% of the country's mangoes; 65% of its papayas; 36% of its tea; 25% of its citrus, bananas and litchis; 60% of its avocados and two thirds of its tomatoes. Other products include coffee, nuts, guavas, sisal, cotton, tobacco, sunflower, maize, wheat and grapes. In addition, more than 170 plantations produce timber. Most of the higher-lying areas are devoted to cattle and game ranching, earning a reputation for quality biltong (salted, dried meat) – a popular South African delicacy.

Industry and mining

Limpopo also has abundant mineral resources, making mining the critical sector of the province's economy by contributing 22% of the gross geographic product. Metals include platinum, chromium, nickel, cobalt, vanadium, tin, limestone and uranium clay.

Other reserves include antimony, phosphates, fluorspar, gold, diamonds, copper, emeralds, scheelites, magnetite, vermiculite, silicon, mica, black granite, corundum, feldspar and salt. The Medupi Power Station, a dry-cooled, coal-fired power station, is under construction near Lephalale. Medupi is a Sepedi word, which means "gentle rain". The station is expected to create around 40 000 job opportunities.

LIMPOPO

Capital: Polokwane
Principal languages:
Sepedi 55,5%
Tshivenda 17,4%
Xitsonga 17,3%
Afrikaans 2,3%
Population: 6 402 594
Percentage share of the total population: 9.8%
Area: 125 754 km2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

MPUMALANGA

Spectacular scenic beauty and an abundance of wildlife make the province one of South Africa's major tourist destinations. Mpumalanga, which means "Land of the rising sun", is home to more than four million people. The principle languages are Siswati and isiZulu. With a surface area of only 76 495 km2, it is the second-smallest province after Gauteng, yet has the fourth-largest economy in South Africa.

Bordered by Mozambique and Eswatini in the east, and Gauteng in the west, the province is situated mainly on the high plateau grasslands of the Middleveld. In the north-east, it rises towards mountain peaks terminating in an immense escarpment. In some places, this escarpment plunges hundreds of metres down to the low-lying area known as the Lowveld.

The province has a network of excellent roads and railway connections, making it highly accessible. Owing to its popularity as a tourist destination, Mpumalanga is also served by a number of small airports, including the Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport. Mbombela is the capital of the province and the administrative and business centre of the Lowveld.

Other important towns are eMalahleni, Standerton, Piet Retief, Malalane, Ermelo, Barberton and Sabie, which lies in the centre of one of the largest man-made forests in the world. Mpumalanga lies mainly within the Grassland Biome. The escarpment and the Lowveld form a transitional zone between this grassland area and the Savanna Biome. The Maputo Corridor, which links the province with Gauteng, and Maputo in Mozambique, facilitates economic development and growth for the region.

Agriculture and forestry

Mpumalanga is a summer-rainfall area divided by the escarpment into the Highveld region with cold frosty winters and the Lowveld region with mild winters and a subtropical climate. The escarpment area sometimes experiences snow on the high ground. Thick mist is common during the hot, humid summers. Agriculture, as the backbone of the province's economy, employs 8.1% of its total workforce. An abundance of citrus fruit and many other subtropical fruit – mangoes, avocados, litchis, bananas, papayas, granadillas, guavas – as well as nuts and a variety of vegetables are produced in the province.

Mbombela is the second-largest citrus-producing area in South Africa and is responsible for one third of the country's orange exports. The Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Crops is situated in the city. Groblersdal is an important irrigation area, which yields a wide variety of products such as citrus, cotton, tobacco, wheat and vegetables. Carolina-Bethal-Ermelo is mainly a sheep-farming area; however, potatoes, sunflowers, maize and peanuts are also grown there.

Industry and manufacturing

Most of the manufacturing production in Mpumalanga occurs in the southern Highveld region; especially in Highveld Ridge, where large petrochemical plants such as Sasol 2 and Sasol 3 are located. Largescale manufacturing occurs especially in the northern Highveld area, particularly chrome-alloy and steel manufacturing. In the Lowveld sub region, industries concentrate on manufacturing products from agricultural and raw forestry material.

The growth in demand for goods and services for export via Maputo is expected to stimulate manufacturing in the province. Mpumalanga is rich in coal reserves with eMalahleni being the biggest coal producer in Africa. South Africa's major power stations are situated in this province. Kendal Power Station's cooling towers are the largest structures of their type in the world. The Kusile Power Station near Delmas is the country's biggest, contributing a massive 4 800 megawatts of electricity to the national grid.

One of the country's largest paper mills is situated at Ngodwana, close to its timber source. Middelburg, which produces steel and vanadium, is home to Columbus Stainless, South Africa's only producer of stainless-steel flat products.

MPUMALANGA

Capital: Nelspruit
Principal languages:
SiSwati 30,5%
IsiZulu 27,8%
IsiNdebele 9,9%
Afrikaans 3,2%
Population: 5 057 662
Percentage share of the total population: 7.8%
Area: 76 495 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

NORTHERN CAPE

The Northern Cape is South Africa's largest province, taking up almost a third of the country's total land area. However, the province is sparsely populated with only about 1.2 million people on 372 889 km2 of land. About 68% of the people speak Afrikaans while Setswana, isiXhosa and English are also widely spoken.

The last remaining true San people live in the Kalahari area, mainly along the Orange and Vaal rivers. Many fossils and San rock engravings have been found here, some of which are displayed at the McGregor Museum in Kimberley. The province lies to the south of its most important asset, the mighty Orange River, which provides the basis for a healthy agricultural industry.

The Northern Cape borders the Atlantic Ocean in the west with Namibia and Botswana to the north and north-west, respectively. It is fringed by the Swartberg mountain range on its southern border. With two major airports at Kimberley and Upington, and an excellent road network, the province's interior is easily accessible from South Africa's major cities, harbours and airports.

Sutherland hosts the southern hemisphere's largest astronomical observatory, the multinational-sponsored Southern African Large Telescope. The Northern Cape is one of two sites to host the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) radio-telescope. Developed by scientists from 17 countries, the SKA will be the largest and most advanced radio telescope in the world.

Among many other benefits, the province's tourism and hospitality industry is profiting from the project, as scientists and other interested parties are flooding into the town of Carnarvon. The province has several national parks and conservation areas, including the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Ai-Ais/ Richtersveld Transfrontier Conservation Park and Augrabies Falls National Park.

The largest part of the province lies in the dry Nama-Karoo Biome, which contains a number of fascinating plants, including the elephant's trunk ("halfmens" or half-man) tree, aloe ("kokerboom" or quiver tree) and a variety of succulents. The area is well known for its spectacular annual spring flowers, which attract thousands of tourists.

Agriculture and industry

The economy of the province's Karoo region depends on sheep farming, while the karakul-pelt industry is one of the most important in the Gordonia district. The province has fertile agricultural land, especially in the Orange River Valley. A variety of fruit is cultivated at Upington, Kakamas and Keimoes. The Vaalharts Irrigation Scheme near Warrenton facilitates the production of wheat, fruit, peanuts, maize and cotton.

Wine is also produced in the Northern Cape's Orange River wine region, which accounts for 25.6% of South Africa's Colombard vines and 10% of its Chenin Blanc. The Niewoudtville Rooibos Tea processing initiative centres on the development and economic empowerment of smallholder farmers. It is aimed at unlocking economic potential, creating sustainable jobs and increasing the skills base. The installation of pasteurisation equipment has been completed and tea has been exported to countries such as Germany, Spain and Japan.

Mining

Mining contributes 27.6% to the gross regional domestic product. Iron-ore mining in the north-eastern corner of the province has been expanding despite the global recession, driven largely by China's demand for steel. Sishen is the biggest iron-ore mine in the country and its owner, Kumba Iron Ore, is engaging in a new project at Kolomela. New manganese projects are also underway.

Diamond mining, in contrast, has seen declining volumes and job losses. Diamond mining is increasingly moving away from the older mines to alluvial mining along the Orange River and its tributaries and in the Atlantic Ocean. The province also has copper, asbestos, fluorspar, semi-precious stones and marble.

NORTHERN CAPE

Capital: Kimberley
Principal languages:
Afrikaans 54,6%
Setswana 35.7%
IsiXhosa 4.5%
Population: 1 372 943
Percentage share of the total population: 2.2%
Area: 372 889 km^2

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

NORTH WEST

North West is bordered by Botswana in the north and fringed by the Kalahari Desert in the west, Gauteng to the east, and the Free State to the south. It is known as the "Platinum Province", owing to its wealth of this precious metal. The province has a population of more than four million people who mainly speak Setswana. Mahikeng is the capital city and well known for the Mafikeng Siege, which took place in October 1899 during the Anglo-Boer/South African War.

Most of the province's economic activity is concentrated between Potchefstroom and Klerksdorp, as well as in Rustenburg and the eastern region, where more than 83.3% of the province's economic activity takes place. The province has various tourist attractions, including Sun City, the Pilanesberg National Park, Madikwe Game Reserve, and the De Wildt Cheetah and Wildlife Trust. A portion of

one of South Africa's World Heritage Sites also falls within the borders of North West namely the Taung Hominid Fossil site, which has been incorporated into South Africa's Cradle of Humankind.

Mining and manufacturing

The Rustenburg and Brits districts produce 94% of the country's platinum, which is more than any other single area in the world. In addition to granite, marble, fluorspar and diamonds, the province also produces a quarter of South Africa's gold. Employment along the Platinum Corridor, from Pretoria to eastern Botswana, accounts for over a third of the province's total employment.

North West's manufacturing sector centres on the municipalities of Brits, Rustenburg, Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp and Mahikeng, which together account for more than 50% of the province's total manufacturing production. The industries in Brits concentrate on manufacturing and construction, while those in Klerksdorp are geared towards the mining industry. In the manufacturing arena, automotive parts, machinery, electronic, audio, and medical equipment are manufactured using local materials and resources.

Agriculture

Some of the largest cattle herds in the world are found at Stellaland near Vryburg, which explains why this area is often referred to as the Texas of South Africa. Marico is also cattle country. North West is South Africa's major producer of white maize. The areas around Rustenburg are fertile, mixed-crop farming land, with maize and sunflowers being the most important crops.

NORTH WEST

Capital: Mahikeng
Principal languages:
Setswana 72,8%
Afrikaans 5,2%
IsiXhosa 4,8%
Population: 4 155 303
Percentage share of the total population: 6.9%
Area: 140 882 km²

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*

WESTERN CAPE

Situated on the south-western tip of the African continent, the Western Cape with its wide beaches and breathtaking scenery, complemented by a rich variety of cultures, historical landmarks, world-class restaurants and entertainment, is a world-famous tourist destination. Cape Town, often referred to as the "Mother City", is South Africa's legislative capital and houses Parliament. The province has a strong network of higher education institutions, including the universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and the Western Cape, and has the highest adult education level in the country.

Visitors to the province can disembark at one of the province's two main airports, Cape Town International or George Airport or at the seaports of Cape Town, Mossel Bay and Saldanha. Table Mountain, the Cape winelands, Robben Island and the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens are among the province's most popular tourist attractions. The Western Cape is also known for its floral diversity. The Cape Floristic Region World Heritage Site, comprising eight separate protected areas, covers an area of more than 553 000 ha stretching from the Cape Peninsula to the Eastern Cape.

The Knysna-Tsitsikamma region has the country's biggest indigenous forests. The cold Atlantic Ocean along the West Coast is a rich fishing area, while the warmer Indian Ocean skirts the province's southern beaches.

Agriculture and fisheries

The Western Cape's sheltered valleys between mountains are ideal for the cultivation of export-grade fruit such as apples, table grapes, olives, peaches and oranges. A variety of vegetables is cultivated in the eastern part of the Western Cape, while the Swartland and Overberg districts are well-known as the country's prime wheat-growing areas. The agricultural sector is critical to the Western Cape economy, accounting for 60% of regional exports.

The Western Cape is also well known for its wine production. Some 75% of all South African fishing takes place along the Western Cape coastline. The rich fishing grounds on the west coast are protected from exploitation by a 200 km commercial fishing zone and a strict quota system.

Snoek, Cape lobster, abalone, calamari, octopus, oysters and mussels are among the delicacies found in these waters. Other exports are fruit, wine, wool and ostrich. The high quality of exports, combined with the relative weakness of the local currency, makes the products some of the most affordable high-quality exports in the world.

Industry

The Saldanha Bay Industrial Development Zone is drawing strong international interest. Saldanha Bay is strategically located to serve as a service, maintenance, fabrication and supply hub for the booming African oil and gas sector, due to the increasing number of oil rigs requiring maintenance, and their traffic flow passing from the west to the east coast of Africa.

WESTERN CAPE

Capital: Cape Town
Principal languages:
Afrikaans 41,2%
IsiXhosa 31,4%
English 22,0%
Population: 7 562 588
Percentage share of the total population: 11.8%
Area: 129 462 km²

Source: Stats SA's *Mid-year population estimates of 2024.*