

**Title:**

**“The times they are a changing”: The changing nature of day labouring in  
South Africa’s informal economy<sup>1</sup>**

Derick Blaauw<sup>2</sup>, Anmar Pretorius <sup>3</sup>& Rinie Schenck<sup>4</sup>

**May 2015**

**Corresponding author:**

**Derick Blaauw**

**School of Economics**

**North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus**

**Tel +27 18 285 2488**

**[Derick.blaauw@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Derick.blaauw@nwu.ac.za)**

---

<sup>1</sup> Abstract of paper submitted for presentation at the Biennial Conference of the Economic Society of South Africa, Cape Town, 2 – 4 September 2015. Full paper will be uploaded as soon as possible.

<sup>2</sup> Professor, School of Economics, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, School of Economics, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa

<sup>4</sup> Professor, Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

**Abstract:**

Day labour markets in South Africa function in essence as a 'catchment area' for workers who have lost their formal employment, or who have never had the opportunity to hold a steady job (Theodore et al., 2015). The prospects of entry or re-entry into the formal sector are limited. Previous research described the socio-economic dynamics within this informal activity with surprising findings in terms of the role of migrant day labourers (Blaauw et al., 2013). The constant changes in this segment of the informal economy necessitate the repeat of this country wide research project. The first phase in this process revealed wholesale changes in the dynamics of the day labour market in South Africa.

This paper draws on a mixed method research approach. It incorporates elements of an ethnographic study of 'day labourers' (both South African and foreign) in Pretoria in 2014 as well as the first results of the latest round of survey research in 2014 / 2015 in Pretoria and Potchefstroom. The characteristics and ratio of foreign to local day born day labourers have changed significantly from the previous research done in this part of the informal economy. The ratio of foreign born day labourers to that of South Africans has more than doubled in the space of seven years. The paper investigates casual employment and the relations between South Africans and foreign nationals in the day labour market against the backdrop of the current wave of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

**Key words:** informal economy, day labourers, mixed method research