

Synopsis of the Status of Key Development Statistics in Africa

Unemployment Statistics

Motivation and Objectives

Africa's comparatively low unemployment rate, about 6.3 percent in 2025 coexists with widespread labour-market distress: working poverty stood at 35.6 percent, while nearly four in five workers were informally employed in 2024, often with low earnings, limited social protection and poor working conditions. This apparent contradiction raises questions about whether unemployment alone adequately reflects labour-market conditions, mainly where survival-oriented work is widespread and differences in definitions, surveys and estimation methods can produce competing statistical narratives.

The brief on unemployment statistics is guided by four main objectives: (i) to assess the comparability of unemployment statistics from national and international sources; (ii) to identify gaps and fragmentation in data coverage, reporting frequency, survey sources and methodological approaches; (iii) to determine whether unemployment statistics adequately reflect labour-market conditions by examining their relationship with working poverty, underemployment, vulnerable employment and other measures of labour welfare; and (iv) to advance a relational statistical framework that combines unemployment with complementary indicators to support coherent labour-market diagnosis and evidence-based policymaking.

Highlights of the Status of Statistics

1. The production of unemployment statistics across African countries varies significantly. The first estimates span 1970-2019, while the latest range from 1983-2025, and Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, and South Sudan have only one estimate for national unemployment statistics.
2. Differences between ILO's modelled unemployment estimate and official statistics reported by National Statistical Offices are stark, with Senegal (18.6%) and Angola (14.2%), recording the largest variations.
3. Working-poverty rate in Africa is more than four times the average of other regions.
4. With the significantly high prevalence of the informal sector, the limited availability of underemployment statistics across African countries is concerning: in 11 countries, including Namibia (2004) and Burundi (2014), the latest available estimates predate 2020.
5. The source of data for the latest available unemployment statistics varies across African countries. Evidence from 52 African countries shows the following:
 - 31 countries rely on Labour Force Surveys;
 - 13 countries use Household Income/Expenditure Surveys;
 - 6 countries depend on General Household Surveys; and
 - 2 (Equatorial Guinea and South Sudan) rely on Population Census sources.