

# Research association attacks NSA over unemployment data

■ Edgar Brandt

The Economic Policy Research Association (EPRA) has expressed dismay with the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) for the omission of domestic unemployment figures from the latest census results.

In a statement issued yesterday, the EPRA stated that since 2018, the NSA has failed to conduct a labour force survey, leaving a significant gap in the understanding of the nation's employment landscape.

The NSA released the 2023 Population and Housing Census Main Report in the capital last week.

A statement issued by Eben de Klerk on behalf of the EPRA management committee noted the association's "profound disgust" at the NSA's decision to withhold critical employment data from the 2023 census.

"This troubling action not only undermines transparency but also conceals the evidence that validates EPRA's longstanding warnings about the detrimental impact of government policies on economic growth and job-creation", he stated.

He added that EPRA has consistently raised alarm about various government policies that have led to skyrocketing unemployment.

These include 2016 consultations, where business experts warned that the introduction of the New Equitable Economic Empowerment Bill (NEEEB) would worsen economic hardship and unemployment; a 2021 report on NEEEB, where EPRA stated that the bill would decrease investment, exacerbating poverty, unemployment and inequality; and a 2022 Investment Promotion and Facilitation Bill, where the EPRA highlighted the potential for economic contraction and reduced investment stemming from this legislation.

EPRA added that recent data from an Afrobarometer survey shows that general unemployment in Namibia has reached a staggering 43%, with youth unemployment soaring to 58%.

"These figures confirm that Namibia now holds the highest unemployment rate in the world," De Klerk charged.

Afrobarometer's national partner in Namibia, Survey Warehouse, regularly collects unemployment statistics using nationally-representative, random, stratified probability samples of 1 200 adult citizens.

Survey Warehouse revealed that a sample of this size provides country-level results with a margin of error of approximately three percentage



**Jobless crisis...** The EPRA stated that it has consistently raised alarm about various government policies that have led to skyrocketing unemployment and destitution. Photo: Heather Erdmann

points at a 95% confidence level.

"It is particularly disturbing that the NSA, a government agency, would choose to suppress unemployment data, seemingly to shield the ruling party from accountability as elections approach. This tactic not only undermines public trust, but also denies citizens the critical information necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of government policies," De Klerk added.

EPRA asserted that the government has done nothing to amend harmful policies, all while making empty promises of job-creation.

"Real jobs cannot be produced in a toxic policy environment that disincentivises private sector growth and complicates business operations in Namibia. EPRA stands firm in its commitment to advocate for policies that promote sustainable economic development

and job creation, and we call on the government to prioritise transparency and accountability," the statement reads

The NSA has also faced a backlash from a local economist, Roland Brown, who on social media called for the dismissal of the NSA board and executives for excluding the labour force survey.

"The 2023 Census was released. However, the normal section on employment/unemployment was removed (see 2011 report example vs. 2023). After not producing socioeconomic data for six years, the NSA now hides vital information before elections. The board and executive should be held to account and dismissed".

Moreover, Independent Patriots for Change spokesperson Immanuel Nashinge accused minister of economic planning Obeth Kandjoze, statistician general Alex Shimuafeni and the NSA board of

political manipulation.

However, at the release of the latest census figures, Shimuafeni said the Labour Force Thematic Report has not yet been published, saying its figures would only be available when it is released impartially as required by law.

The latest census figures reveal that domestic distribution of households by main source of livelihood statistics indicate that 46.6% of Namibians are dependent on salaries for survival or income, while 10.6% derive their income from commercial and subsistence farming.

Another 9% get their income from non-farming business activities.

This translates into over 66.2% of Namibians who have a stable and consistent income from those three streams.

Shimuafeni stated that when those income statistics are intricately analysed, the country's unemployment rate will still not be over 35%.

"Just look at those figures. You can all do your maths, but statistics are powerful, and never lie. When you take the 46.6% of people getting their income from wages, the 10.6% getting their income from farming activities, and then the 9% from other businesses, that is telling us all that 66.2% of Namibian people have an income, and are somehow employed.

"Those figures are then also telling us that the country's unemployment rate can be estimated to be at around 35%. Not the other ridiculous numbers you are hearing," said the NSA's Statistician General.

-ebrandt@nepc.com.na