

Unemployment rate rises amid power crisis

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South Africa's unemployment rate rose in the first quarter after declining for four consecutive quarters last year, data showed on Tuesday, as the country reeled from record power cuts.



Social grant recipients stand in a queue outside a post office, as joblessness takes its toll in Meadowlands, a suburb of Soweto, South Africa, 24 February 2022. Reuters/Siphwe Sibeko

Unemployment rose to 32.9% in the first three months of 2023 from 32.7% in the final quarter of last year, Statistics South Africa said.

State power utility Eskom has implemented the worst power outages on record due to its inability to produce enough megawatts to meet demand, leaving South Africans without electricity for up to 10 hours a day.

However, Statistician General Risenga Maluleke said further analysis needed to be done on whether consistent power cuts were impacting employment.

"When you look at areas like mining and manufacturing, they have lost employment, but it needs a further analysis," he told a media briefing.

The power crisis is having a debilitating impact on households and businesses alike, and is expected to put pressure on the employment status of many as some firms struggle to remain in operation.



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Africa's most industrialised economy has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world.

The agency said the number of unemployed people totalled 7.933 million in the January-March period, from 7.753 million people in the last three months of 2022.

A major concern is the level of youth unemployment at 46.5%, as those in the 15-34 age range account for over half the country's employable population of 40.6 million aged between 15 and 64.

According to the expanded definition of unemployment which includes those discouraged from seeking work, 42.4% were without work compared to 42.6% in the fourth quarter of 2022.

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