

# Press Release

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SOUTH AFRICAN  
INSTITUTE OF  
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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## **One in four of the unemployed without work for more than five years**

A quarter of unemployed people have been looking for work for more than five years, and a further 40% have been out of work for at least a year according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg last week.

According to data from Statistics South Africa, there are a total of 4.5 million people classified as officially unemployed, because they are available and would like to work and have been actively looking for a job. The International Labour Organisation defines the long-term unemployed as those who have been looking for work for more than a year. In South Africa, there are 3 million such people (or 68% of the unemployed). However, the Institute has calculated that nearly half of these people have been unemployed for more than five years, equating to 26% of all unemployed people.

Lucy Holborn, research manager at the Institute, said, 'We have very high long-term unemployment levels according to the international definition – the average among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries is 32% of total unemployment compared to 68% in South Africa. On top of this, very long-term unemployment of over five years accounts for a significant number of our unemployed. The chances of finding work after being out of the workplace for more than five years (or perhaps having never worked) are likely to be slim in a labour market saturated with low- and un-skilled workers but in need of experienced and skilled labour.'

In addition, these figures do not take into account those who would like to work but have given up actively looking for work, perhaps because they have given up hope of finding a job. There are an additional 3.2 million people who are unemployed according to the expanded definition, which includes people not actively looking for work. 'Many such people are likely to add to the number of long-term unemployed, as they are more likely to have lost hope of finding a job after having been unemployed for a long period of time,' said Holborn.

'All of this suggests that there may be large numbers of people who are simply unemployable. Therefore, any solution to our unemployment problem will need to address educational and skills inadequacies to provide a better match between what the labour market requires and the pool of people supplying it. In the meantime, relaxing labour regulation in order to reduce the cost and risk of hiring people could help to dent levels of unemployment that have been persistently high for over ten years.'

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