



INFORMATION BRIEF

April 2026

Youth Unemployment and Social Stability in Nigeria: Areas for Legislative Intervention

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Executive Summary

Youth unemployment remains one of the most critical socioeconomic challenges facing Nigeria today. With over 60% of Nigeria's population under the age of 25, the country has one of the youngest populations in the world (World Bank, 2024). While this demographic structure offers a potential demographic dividend, persistent unemployment and underemployment among young people threaten social stability, economic growth, and national security. Data from the National Bureau of Statistics indicates that Nigeria's youth unemployment rate was about 6.5% in Q2 2024. Although Nigeria rebased its labour statistics in 2023, unemployment among young people remains significantly higher than the national average (NBS, 2024). High youth unemployment has been linked to rising levels of poverty, crime, migration, and social unrest. Youth frustration has also manifested in political protests, most notably the 2020 #EndSARS protests, which highlighted widespread dissatisfaction with governance, economic opportunities, and police accountability.

Despite the Nigerian Government interventions in ensuring gainful employment for youths, like the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) for the period of 2021 to 2024, aimed to contribute to the achievement of decent, productive and freely chosen employment for young people by complementing and reinforcing existing policy commitments and national development priorities and related efforts. However, youth unemployment remain an issue that if not well tackled may cause social instability in the country.

Addressing youth unemployment is therefore essential not only for economic development but also for maintaining social stability and strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria. The National Assembly and the Federal Government may consider the following recommendations:

- Convene a multi-stakeholder oversight hearing by inviting the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Ministry of Youth Development, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, Ministry Education and organised private-sector stakeholders to review Government policies with aim to promote diversification into labour-intensive sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and digital services.
- Urge the Executive to prioritize technical education, vocational training, and digital skills development.
- Advise the Federal Government on the need to expand access to finance, business development services, and mentorship programs for young entrepreneurs
- Utilize oversight function to advise the Federal Government through the Ministry of Youth Development on the need to improve infrastructure, particularly electricity, transport, and digital connectivity, which are essential for job creation.
- Support and strengthen labour polices to support more job creation, improve labour market information systems, and encourage private sector employment.



1. Introduction

Employment plays a vital role in economic development, social inclusion, and political stability. For young people, access to decent work provides income, skills development, and opportunities for upward social mobility. Conversely, prolonged unemployment can lead to frustration, social exclusion, and vulnerability to criminal activities or violent extremism. Nigeria's labour market has struggled to absorb the rapidly growing youth population. According to the International Labour Organisation, 2023, each year, an estimated 3–4 million young Nigerians enter the labour market, but the economy creates far fewer formal jobs¹.

Several structural factors have been outlined to contribute to youth unemployment in Nigeria, including slow economic growth, weak industrial development, inadequate skills training, and limited access to finance for entrepreneurship². Given Nigeria's demographic trajectory, addressing youth unemployment is a strategic priority for ensuring long-term social and economic stability. Consequently, this brief examines the drivers of youth unemployment in Nigeria, its implications for social stability, and key policy priorities for addressing the challenge.

2. Content Analysis

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of over 223 million people in 2024, and youth constitute a large share of this population (United Nations, 2024)³. Nigeria's labour force is estimated at over 80 million people (NBS, 2024)⁴. Youth aged 15–35 account for more than 40% of the labour force. The informal sector employs over 80% of Nigeria's workforce, often in low-productivity jobs with limited income security (World Bank, 2024)⁵.

The challenge is further compounded by Nigeria's economic structure. Despite its large economy, the country remains heavily dependent on the oil sector, which generates significant revenue but creates relatively few jobs. In contrast, sectors capable of generating large-scale employment, such as manufacturing and agro-processing remain underdeveloped.

3. Key Issues and Evidence Based Analysis

- i. Rapid population growth and labour market pressure: Nigeria's population is projected to reach over 237 million by 2050, making it the third most populous country in the world (United Nations, 2024)⁶. This rapid population growth places enormous pressure on the labour market, as millions of young people enter the workforce each year without sufficient job opportunities. Without substantial job creation, the gap between labour supply and employment opportunities will continue to widen.
- ii. Skills mismatch and education system challenges: Many Nigerian graduates face difficulties finding employment because their skills do not match labour market demands⁷. Employers

¹ International Labour Organization. (2023). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2023. *ILO*. <https://www.ilo.org>

² Yakasai, S., A. (2025). Impact of youth unemployment on socioeconomic development: a study of kumbotso local government area, Kano State, Nigeria. *Benue Journal of Sociology (BJS)*. Volume 12, Issue 2. <https://bsum.edu.ng/journals/jsoc/vol12n2/download.php?id=160>

³ United Nations. (2024). Nigeria demographic profile. <https://www.un.org>

⁴ National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). Nigeria Labour Force Statistics. <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>

⁵ World Bank. (2024). Youth Employment in Nigeria. <https://www.worldbank.org>

⁶ Adewole, S. (2024). Nigeria's population to cross 237 million by 2025 – Report. *The Guardian NG*. <https://guardian.ng/news/nigerias-population-to-cross-237-million-by-2025-report/>

⁷ Ekugo, N. (2025). 65% of Nigerian employers cite skills gap as a barrier to organisational transformation. *BusinessDay NG*. <https://businessday.ng/news/article/65-of-nigerian-employers-cite-skills-gap-as-a-barrier-to-organisational-transformation/>



frequently report shortages of workers with technical and digital skills, while universities continue to produce graduates primarily in theoretical disciplines. According to the World Bank (2023), Nigeria's education system does not adequately prepare young people for the modern labour market, particularly in areas such as: digital technology⁸; engineering and manufacturing; and entrepreneurship and innovation. This mismatch contributes significantly to graduate unemployment.

- iii. Weak industrial and manufacturing base: Industrialization has historically played a crucial role in job creation in emerging economies. However, Nigeria's manufacturing sector contributes only about 8–9% of GDP, limiting its ability to absorb labour (World Bank, 2025)⁹. Challenges facing the manufacturing sector include: high energy costs; inadequate infrastructure; limited access to credit; and policy uncertainty. These constraints discourage private investment and reduce employment opportunities for young people.
- iv. Youth unemployment and social instability: High levels of youth unemployment have significant implications for social stability. Studies show that unemployed youth are more likely to engage in criminal activities, political violence, or irregular migration. Nigeria has witnessed several instances where economic frustrations among youth have contributed to social unrest. The #EndSARS protests in October 2020¹⁰, for example, reflected broader frustrations with unemployment, governance challenges, and economic hardship among young Nigerians. Similarly, youth unemployment has been linked to the recruitment of young people by armed groups and criminal networks in various parts of the country.

4. Socioeconomic Implications

Youth unemployment has both socioeconomic and political implications. Some of the impacts include the following:

- i. Youth unemployment reduces economic productivity and limits Nigeria's ability to harness its demographic dividend. When a large portion of the population remains unemployed, national income and consumer spending decline, slowing economic growth.
- ii. Persistent unemployment increases the risk of insecurity, including armed banditry, insurgency, cybercrime, and urban and rural violence. Young people without economic opportunities may become vulnerable to recruitment by criminal or extremist groups.
- iii. High unemployment encourages migration among educated youth seeking opportunities abroad. Nigeria has experienced increasing migration of skilled professionals, particularly in healthcare, technology, and engineering sectors.
- iv. Youth dissatisfaction with economic conditions can weaken public trust in government institutions and contribute to political instability.

⁸ World Bank. (2025). Digital skills in Nigeria. *World Bank Group*. <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/a607bb6e3b76d2be0f3db8db34dcf73e-0140022025/original/1Nigeria-TF0C2441-Digital-Skills-Report-final.pdf>

⁹ World Bank. (2025). Nigeria Development Update: Jobs and Economic Transformation. *World Bank Group*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099020012132216124/pdf/P1761970c336260ce0bd0e0ebd98a53275d.pdf>

¹⁰ Armrest International. (2023). Nigeria: Three years after #EndSARS at least 15 protesters languish in Lagos jail. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/10/nigeria-three-years-after-endsars-at-least-15-protesters-languish-in-lagos-jail/>



5. Key Areas for Legislative and Executive Intervention

Addressing youth unemployment is therefore essential not only for economic development but also for maintaining social stability and strengthening democratic governance in Nigeria. The National Assembly may consider the following recommendations:

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- ii. Urge the Executive to prioritize technical education, vocational training, and digital skills development.
- iii. Advise the Federal Government on the need to expand access to finance, business development services, and mentorship programs for young entrepreneurs
- iv. Utilize oversight function to advise the Federal Government through the Ministry of Youth Development on the need to improve infrastructure, particularly electricity, transport, and digital connectivity, which are essential for job creation.
- v. Support and strengthen labour polices to support more job creation, improve labour market information systems, and encourage private sector employment.

6. Conclusion

Youth unemployment represents one of the most significant threats to Nigeria's social stability and long-term economic development. With millions of young people entering the labour market each year, the country faces a critical challenge in creating sufficient employment opportunities. If effectively managed, Nigeria's youthful population could become a powerful engine for economic growth and innovation. However, failure to address unemployment risks undermining social stability, economic progress, and democratic governance. Comprehensive reforms in education, industrial policy, entrepreneurship support, and economic diversification are essential for transforming Nigeria's demographic potential into sustainable development.

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