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# Youth Unemployment Study in Nigeria

# Contents

<b>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY	7
1.2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH	7
1.3. KEY FINDINGS	7
1.4. STRATEGIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS	9
1.5. CONCLUSION	10
<b>2. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1. Background and Rationale	10
2.2. Literature Review	11
2.2.1. Evolution of Youth Employment as a Development Issue	11
2.2.2. Conceptual and Measurement Issues	12
2.2.3. Theoretical Perspectives	12
2.2.4. Drivers of Youth Labour Market Vulnerability	12
2.2.5. Consequences of Youth Employment Challenges	13
2.2.6. Policy Responses and Limitations	13
2.3. Youth Employment Challenges in Nigeria	13
2.3.1. Structural Labour Market Imbalance	13
2.3.2. Informality and Precarity	14
2.3.3. Education-Labour Market Disconnect	14
2.3.4. Policy Fragmentation and Implementation Gaps	14
2.3.5. Governance and Access Inequality	14
2.3.6. Digital Transformation and Emerging Inequality	14
2.4. Research Objectives	15
2.4.1. General Objective	15
2.4.2. Specific Objectives	15
2.5. Analytical Orientation	15
2.6. Scope of the Study	15
2.6.1. Thematic Scope	16
2.6.2. Population Scope	16
2.6.3. Analytical Scope	16

2.7.	Exclusions	16
2.8.	Delimitation Rationale	17
<b>3.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1.	Data Sources and Collection Methods	17
3.2.	Respondent Categories and Sampling	21
3.2.1.	Respondent Categories	21
3.2.2.	Sampling Approach	22
3.3.	Qualitative Data Management and Analysis Approach	22
3.3.1.	Phase 1: Data Management and Preparation	23
3.3.2.	Phase 2: Familiarisation	23
3.3.3.	Phase 3: Response Coding (Systematic Deconstruction)	23
3.3.4.	Phase 4: Theme Development and Refinement	23
3.3.5.	Phase 5: Cross-Data Triangulation	23
3.4.	Study Limitations	24
3.4.1.	Limited Statistical Generalisability	24
3.4.2.	Reliance on Self-Reported Narratives	24
3.4.3.	Geographic Scope	24
3.4.4.	Cross-Sectional Design	24
<b>4.</b>	<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1.	Nigeria's Youth Employment Landscape	24
1.1.1.	Labour Market Structure and Sectoral Dynamics	25
1.1.2.	Youth Aspirations and Employment Pathways	29
4.1.1.	Informality, Underemployment, and Job Quality	32
4.1.2.	Political Connection as Gatekeeper	35
4.1.3.	Gender Constraints and Normative Barriers	35
4.1.4.	Geographic Disadvantage and Infrastructure Gaps	36
4.1.5.	Intersecting Filters of Access	37
4.2.	Youth Employment Policy and Political Priorities	37
4.3.	Desk Review of Youth Employment Policies in Nigeria	38

4.3.1.	Policy-Implementation Gap	40
4.3.2.	Political Will, Budgeting, and National Priorities	42
4.3.3.	Policy Consistency and Continuity	44
1.1.3	Political Interference and Patronage	46
4.3.4.	Youth Voice in Policy Design	47
4.4.	Institutional Framework and Implementation Realities	49
4.4.1.	Institutional Mandates and Coordination	49
1.1.4	Implementation Capacity and Financing Gaps	51
1.1.5	Education-Labour Market Disconnect	52
4.4.2.	Digital Divide as Emerging Inequality	54
4.4.3.	Governance Challenges, Patronage, and Elite Capture	56
4.4.4.	Monitoring, Accountability, and Trust	57
4.5.	Lived Experiences of Youth Employment	58
4.5.1.	Dignity, Precarity, and Status Degradation	59
4.5.2.	Gendered and Vulnerability-Based Constraints	63
4.5.3.	Gendered Mobility and Occupational Constraints	63
4.5.4.	Socio-Economic Background and Network Inequality	64
4.5.5.	Capital Constraints and Professional Barriers	64
4.5.6.	Digital Exclusion as Emerging Vulnerability	65
4.5.7.	Psychological and Social Exclusion	65
4.5.8.	Youth Apathy, Trust Deficits, and Social Exclusion	66
4.6.	Private Sector, Informality, and Youth Agency	68
4.6.1.	Employer Perspectives and Labour Demand	68
4.6.2.	Regulatory Burdens and Hiring Disincentives	70
4.6.3.	Informality, Policy Evasion, and Gig Work	72
4.6.4.	Digital Pathways and Youth Innovation	74
4.7.	Political Economy Insights	75
4.7.1.	Rhetoric vs Reality in Youth Employment Policy	75
4.7.2.	Employment as a Political Transaction	77
4.7.3.	Normalisation of Precarity	79
4.7.4.	Youth Agency Beyond the State	81
4.8.	Summary of Findings	83
4.8.1.	Structural Imbalance as the Foundation	83
4.8.2.	Policy Abundance and Institutional Fragility	83

4.8.3.	Education, Digital Transformation, and Emerging Stratification	83
4.8.4.	Lived Experience: Fatigue, Adaptation, and Conditional Trust	83
4.8.5.	Private Sector Dynamics: Potential and Constraint	84
4.8.6.	Political Economy Insight	84
4.8.7.	Implication for Reform	84
<b>5.</b>	<b>POLICY OPTIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>84</b>
5.1.	Strengthening Policy Design and Coordination	84
5.1.1.	Institutionalising a Long-Term Youth Employment Strategy	85
5.1.2.	Establishing a Coordinated Youth Employment Council	87
5.1.3.	Aligning Education and Industry Through Structured Co-Design	89
5.2.	Improving Implementation and Accountability	90
5.2.1.	Insulating Recruitment and Programme Allocation from Political Interference	90
5.2.2.	Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Systems	93
5.2.3.	Stabilising Financing Mechanisms	94
5.3.	Demand-Side Job Creation and Private Sector Engagement	95
5.3.1.	Incentivising Youth Hiring	95
5.4.	Strategic Rationale	96
5.4.1.	Supporting High-Growth Sectors	96
1.1.6	Formalisation Pathways for Informal Enterprises	98
5.4.2.	Regulating and Protecting Gig Workers	99
5.4.3.	Proportional Regulatory Fee Scaling	100
1.1.7	Elimination of Duplicative Compliance Requirements	100
5.5.	Inclusion-Focused and Regionally Responsive Interventions	101
5.5.1.	Gender Responsive Programming	101
5.5.2.	Regionally Differentiated Approaches	102
5.5.3.	Targeted Support for Vulnerable Youth	104
<b>6.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Annex 1: Respondent Recommendation Matrix</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Annex 2: Briefs on Youth Employment Policies, Strategies, and Programme Documents in Nigeria</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>10.</b>	<b>Annex 3: Secondary Data Analysis Charts</b>	<b>127</b>

# List of Tables

Table 2.1: Respondent Categories and Coding Structure	21
Table 2.2: Key Informant Interviews Conducted	22
Table 2.3: Youth Focus Group Discussions	22
Table 4.1: Phase-Based Implementation Roadmap for National Youth Employment Strategy	85
Table 4.2: Composition of the National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC)	87
Table 4.3: Integrated Data Framework	88
Table 4.4: Key Risks and Mitigation Strategies	88
Table 4.5: Structured Education-Industry Alignment Framework	90
Table 4.6: Recruitment Integrity Reform Framework	92
Table 4.7: Risks and Mitigation in Recruitment Reform	92
Table 4.8: Output versus Outcome Monitoring Shift	94
Table 4.9: Youth Employment Results Chain	94
Table 4.10: Monitoring System Risks and Safeguards	94
Table 4.11: Implementation Framework	96
Table 4.12: High Growth Sector Support Strategy	97
Table 4.13: Formalisation Reform Framework	98
Table 4.14: Gig Worker Protection Framework	99
Table 4.15: Gender Inclusion Implementation Framework	102
Table 4.16: Comparative Regional Strategy Framework	103
Table 4.17: Vulnerable Youth Inclusion Framework	105
Table 4.18: Summary of Major Recommendations and Implementation Pathways	106
Table 4.19: Implementation Sequencing Overview	107



## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1.1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Nigeria is undergoing a significant demographic transition, with over 60% of its population under the age of 25. This presents both a profound opportunity for economic transformation and a critical policy challenge. While a large youth population has the potential to drive innovation, productivity, and growth, this dividend can only be realised if young people are meaningfully integrated into the labour market.

However, the evidence shows that Nigeria's labour market has not expanded at a pace sufficient to absorb this growing workforce. Youth unemployment, underemployment, and widespread informality persist, undermining economic inclusion, social stability, and long-term development prospects. Importantly, the challenge extends beyond unemployment alone. A large proportion of young Nigerians are employed in low-quality, insecure, and poorly remunerated work, reflecting a deeper structural imbalance within the economy.

Against this backdrop, this study was designed to move beyond descriptive labour statistics and examine the structural, institutional, and political economy drivers of youth employment outcomes in Nigeria. The study aims to provide evidence-based and system-level policy recommendations that align labour demand, institutional capacity, and inclusive access to opportunity.

### 1.2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study adopted a multi-method research design, combining three complementary approaches:

- A **desk review of national youth employment policies and programmes**,
- **Secondary quantitative analysis** of labour market data from the National Bureau of Statistics (2014–2023), and
- **Primary qualitative data collection** through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

While the study is national in analytical scope, it incorporates **subnational fieldwork in Abuja (FCT), Kaduna State, and Oyo State** as illustrative case contexts. These locations were purposively selected to reflect variation in economic structure, governance context, and labour market dynamics. In addition, interviews with federal-level policymakers ensured that national policy processes and implementation realities were adequately captured. This triangulated approach enabled the study to link policy intent, labour market outcomes, and lived experiences, providing both breadth and depth of analysis.

### 1.3. KEY FINDINGS

#### A. Structural Labour Market Imbalance

The study finds that Nigeria's youth employment challenge is fundamentally rooted in a structural imbalance between labour supply and labour demand. The rapid expansion of the youth population, combined with limited industrial growth and weak private sector absorption, has created a labour market characterised by intense competition for a narrow pool of formal opportunities.

This imbalance exerts downward pressure on wages, weakens bargaining power, and compels many young people to accept precarious or misaligned employment. The problem is not simply that young people lack skills; rather, the economy lacks sufficient labour-absorbing sectors capable of generating quality jobs at scale.

#### B. Dominance of Informality and Precarious Work

A defining feature of Nigeria's youth labour market is the overwhelming dominance of informal employment. Quantitative evidence shows that approximately 96% of employed youth are in informal work, with more than half



engaged in own-account activities.

While informality provides a buffer against open unemployment, it is associated with:

- Income instability,
- Limited access to credit and capital,
- Absence of social protection, and
- Restricted opportunities for upward mobility.

Qualitative findings reinforce this reality, with many young people describing employment as “survival-driven” rather than opportunity-driven. Even within formal employment, wage inadequacy and rising living costs undermine financial stability.

### **C. Education–Labour Market Disconnect**

The study identifies a persistent disconnect between education systems and labour market needs. While educational attainment has increased, employers report gaps in practical, digital, and soft skills. At the same time, structural constraints limit the availability of jobs aligned with qualifications.

This results in widespread occupational mismatch, with many graduates working outside their fields of study.

Importantly, the findings suggest that this disconnect is not solely a supply-side issue; it reflects both skills gaps and limited demand for high-skill labour.

### **D. Barriers to Labour Market Entry**

Entry into the labour market remains highly constrained. A significant proportion of unemployed youth are first-time job seekers, particularly among younger cohorts and women. Prolonged job search periods often lead to discouragement, delayed career progression, and eventual entry into informal or low-productivity activities.

Access to employment is further shaped by social networks and political connections, with many respondents perceiving that merit alone is insufficient to secure desirable roles. This perception undermines trust in institutional fairness and reinforces inequality.

### **E. Governance, Policy Fragmentation, and Implementation Gaps**

Nigeria has implemented numerous youth employment programmes; however, their cumulative impact has been limited by:

- Fragmentation across ministries and agencies,
- Weak coordination mechanisms,
- Funding instability, and
- Inadequate monitoring systems.

A key finding is the persistent gap between policy design and implementation. Policies are often well-articulated at the national level but fail to translate into tangible outcomes at the community level. In many cases, programmes are perceived as short-term, politically driven initiatives rather than components of a coherent long-term strategy.

### **F. Digital Transformation: Opportunity and Inequality**

The expansion of digital technologies has created new employment pathways, including freelancing, remote work, and digital entrepreneurship. Many youths are actively leveraging these opportunities, particularly in urban areas. However, access to the digital economy is uneven. Constraints such as:

- Limited access to devices,
- Poor internet connectivity, and
- Unreliable electricity

Negatively affect large segments of the youth population. As a result, digital transformation risks creating new forms of inequality, even as it expands opportunity.

### **G. Regulatory and Private Sector Constraints**

Private sector employers highlight several constraints affecting job creation, including:

- High and disproportionate regulatory costs,



- Duplicative compliance requirements, and
- Infrastructure deficits.

These factors increase the cost of doing business and discourage workforce expansion. In some cases, firms prioritise regulatory compliance over hiring, directly limiting employment generation.

## H. Lived Experiences: Precarity, Adaptation, and Resilience

Youth narratives reveal that employment is experienced not merely as an economic condition, but as a social and psychological reality. Many young people navigate:

- Income volatility,
- Multiple job-holding,
- Delayed life transitions, and
- Emotional stress linked to job insecurity.

Despite these challenges, youth demonstrate significant agency and adaptability, engaging in entrepreneurship, digital work, and peer learning. However, this resilience often compensates for systemic gaps rather than replacing the need for structural reform.

### I. Political Economy Dynamics

The study highlights several cross-cutting political economy dynamics:

- **Rhetoric–reality gap:** Youth employment is prominent in political discourse but uneven in delivery.
- **Employment as a political resource:** Access to jobs is sometimes mediated through networks and influence.
- **Normalisation of precarity:** Instability is increasingly accepted as the default condition.
- **Youth agency beyond the state:** Young people are creating opportunities outside formal systems.

These dynamics underscore that youth employment is not only an economic issue but also a governance challenge shaped by institutional incentives and power relations.

## 1.4. STRATEGIC POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings point to the need for system-level reform, rather than incremental or fragmented interventions. Key strategic priorities include:

### A. Strengthening Labour Demand

- Promote industrialisation and sectoral diversification,
- Support high-growth sectors, including digital and creative industries,
- Improve infrastructure, particularly energy and connectivity.

### B. Enhancing Policy Coherence and Institutional Coordination

- Develop a long-term, legislated national youth employment strategy,
- Establish coordination mechanisms across ministries and agencies,
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems.

### C. Improving Job Quality and Worker Protection

- Expand social protection coverage,
- Introduce frameworks for gig and platform workers,
- Promote fair wages and decent working conditions.

### D. Reducing Regulatory Burdens on Businesses

- Introduce proportional fee structures linked to firm size and employment capacity,
- Eliminate duplicative compliance requirements,
- Digitise regulatory processes.



### **E. Aligning Education with Labour Market Needs**

- Strengthen Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET),
- Promote industry–education partnerships,
- Expand digital and soft skills training.

### **F. Addressing Inequality and Inclusion**

- Implement gender-responsive employment programmes,
- Expand access to finance for youth-led enterprises,
- Address regional disparities and digital exclusion.

## **1.5. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that Nigeria’s youth employment challenge is not driven by a lack of effort or aspiration among young people. Rather, it reflects a system in which labour supply outpaces demand, policy ambition outpaces implementation, and opportunity is unevenly distributed.

Addressing this challenge requires more than short-term programmes. It demands a coherent, long-term, and legislatively anchored youth employment strategy, supported by political will, fiscal commitment, institutional reform, and inclusive economic transformation.

Youth employment is ultimately a governance challenge embedded within economic development. With coordinated and sustained action, Nigeria can reposition youth employment from a persistent crisis to a foundation for inclusive growth and national stability.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Nigeria is undergoing a significant demographic transition characterised by a rapidly expanding youth population. With over 60% of its population under the age of 25, the country possesses substantial potential to harness a demographic dividend if young people are skilled and productively integrated into the economy (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021; World Bank, 2022). However, this demographic reality also presents structural risks. Persistent youth unemployment, underemployment, and widespread informality pose serious challenges to inclusive growth, social stability, and long-term economic transformation (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023).

While Nigeria has recorded periods of economic growth over the past two decades, growth has not consistently translated into sufficient labour-absorbing job creation. Structural transformation toward higher-productivity sectors, particularly manufacturing and modern services, has been limited, constraining the economy’s capacity to generate formal employment at scale (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2022; World Bank, 2022). As a result, many young Nigerians enter a labour market where competition is intense, and the few opportunities are unevenly distributed.

Youth unemployment rates remain significantly higher than national averages of the general unemployment level, and even among employed youth, a large proportion are engaged in informal, low-productivity activities characterised by income volatility and limited access to social protection (ILO, 2020; NBS, 2023). This has contributed to what development literature describes as “vulnerable employment,” where work does not guarantee income security or upward mobility (World Bank, 2022). The expansion of tertiary education has further intensified expectations for formal employment, yet formal sector absorption has not kept pace, leading to frustration among educated youths (AfDB, 2022).



In response to rising youth unemployment, successive governments have introduced numerous youth-focused initiatives, including skills acquisition programmes, entrepreneurship financing schemes, digital innovation platforms, and vocational training reforms. While these interventions signal political recognition of the problem, their cumulative impact has been constrained by fragmentation, weak coordination, funding volatility, and inconsistent implementation (World Bank, 2022). The proliferation of programmes has not always been matched by institutional alignment or long-term strategic coherence.

Beyond economic implications, youth employment is deeply intertwined with governance and social cohesion. Employment scarcity can heighten perceptions of inequality, erode institutional trust, and amplify political dissatisfaction (UNDP, 2021). Conversely, transparent and inclusive employment systems can strengthen legitimacy and reinforce social stability. Youth employment therefore represents not only a labour market issue but also a governance and development imperative.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies introduces both opportunity and complexity. Nigeria's growing digital ecosystem has created new pathways in fintech, remote services, creative industries, and platform-based work. However, unequal access to digital infrastructure and regulatory gaps risk generating new forms of inequality and precarious work (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2022). As digital transformation accelerates, policy adaptation becomes increasingly necessary.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to move beyond descriptive statistics and examine the structural and political economy dimensions shaping youth employment outcomes in Nigeria. By integrating institutional perspectives with youth lived experiences across diverse regional contexts, the research aims to provide grounded insights into how policy design, implementation dynamics, labour demand conditions, and inclusion mechanisms interact. The rationale for this study lies in the need for evidence-informed, system-level reform strategies capable of aligning demographic potential with sustainable economic opportunities.

## 2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate the empirical findings within existing academic and policy debates, a comprehensive review of the literature on youth employment in Nigeria was conducted. Below is a summary of the major findings.

### 2.2.1. Evolution of Youth Employment as a Development Issue

Youth employment in Nigeria has evolved from a relatively under-articulated concern into a central development, economic, and governance priority. Prior to the 1980s, Nigeria's largely agrarian economy absorbed most young people into agriculture, artisanal trades, and informal family enterprises. While open unemployment appeared low, this masked significant levels of underemployment and low-productivity work (Adebayo, 1999; Oladeji, 1994). During this period, employment challenges were framed primarily in terms of rural poverty and productivity deficits rather than joblessness as a distinct policy issue.

The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s marked a critical turning point. Public sector downsizing and reduced industrial activity led to a contraction in formal employment opportunities, particularly affecting educated youth entering the labour market (Fadayomi & Ogunrinola, 2003; Oladeji, 1994). The informal sector expanded as a coping mechanism, but without corresponding improvements in job quality. Retrospective analyses suggest that this period laid the structural foundations for persistent labour market vulnerabilities, as economic liberalisation outpaced job creation (World Bank, 2007).

By the early 2000s, youth unemployment had emerged as a major policy concern. Rapid population growth, increased educational attainment, and limited labour demand created a surge of job seekers without corresponding opportunities (Okafor, 2011). Empirical evidence revealed disproportionately high unemployment and underemployment rates among youth, alongside growing concerns about skills mismatch (Adelaja & George, 2015). International research further linked youth unemployment to risks of social instability and conflict, particularly in contexts characterised by large youth populations (Urdal, 2006; World Bank, 2007).



The 2010s witnessed both an intensification of youth unemployment and improvements in labour market data systems. National statistics indicated rising unemployment rates, peaking at over 30% in 2020 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020). At the same time, studies consistently highlighted the dominance of informal employment, with over 90% of jobs classified as informal (NBS, 2023). This shifted analytical focus from unemployment alone to broader concerns about job quality, underemployment, and labour vulnerability (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023a).

In the post-2020 period, the labour market landscape has become more complex. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated employment vulnerabilities, while recent revisions to labour force measurement methodologies resulted in much lower reported unemployment rates (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2023). A person is classified as employed if they work at least one hour in a week (7 days) for pay or profit. The new definition has resulted in a significantly lower unemployment rate, dropping it from 33.3% in 2020 (under the old methodology) to 5.3% in 2024. However, scholars caution that these figures reflect definitional changes rather than substantive improvements in labour market conditions. Consequently, contemporary literature increasingly emphasises the need to move beyond unemployment metrics toward broader concepts such as decent work, informality, and labour market inclusion (ILO, 2023a; World Bank, 2023).

### 2.2.2. Conceptual and Measurement Issues

A central issue in the literature concerns how youth employment is defined and measured. Traditional unemployment indicators, based on being without work, available for work, and actively seeking employment, are increasingly inadequate in contexts characterised by high informality (ILO, 2023a; World Bank, 2023).

Recent revisions by the National Bureau of Statistics have broadened the definition of employment to include minimal or irregular work, leading to a decline in reported unemployment rates (NBS, 2023). However, this has generated debate, as such classifications may obscure the extent of labour underutilisation and economic vulnerability (World Bank, 2023).

As a result, scholars increasingly advocate for a multidimensional approach incorporating:

- **Underemployment**, capturing insufficient or low-productivity work (NBS, 2023),
- **Informality**, reflecting insecure and unprotected employment (ILO, 2023a), and
- **NEET (Not in Employment, Education, or Training)**, indicating complete disengagement from productive systems (World Bank, 2023).

This broader perspective reflects a growing consensus that the primary challenge is not simply unemployment, but widespread labour market vulnerability, where many youths are employed yet economically insecure.

### 2.2.3. Theoretical Perspectives

The literature draws on multiple theoretical frameworks to explain youth employment outcomes. Human capital theory suggests that education enhances employability; however, Nigerian evidence challenges this assumption, as high levels of graduate unemployment persist despite increased educational attainment (Becker, 1964; Okafor, 2011).

Labour market segmentation theory highlights structural barriers between formal and informal sectors, explaining why many youths remain trapped in low-quality employment with limited mobility (ILO, 2023a). Youth bulge theory further emphasises the demographic dimension, linking large youth populations to risks of social instability when economic opportunities are limited (Urdal, 2006).

More recent studies adopt a political economy perspective, focusing on how governance structures, institutional capacity, and policy incentives shape labour market outcomes (Omoju et al., 2023; World Bank, 2023). This perspective is particularly useful in explaining persistent gaps between policy design and implementation.

### 2.2.4. Drivers of Youth Labour Market Vulnerability

The literature identifies a complex interplay of structural, institutional, and demographic drivers. At the macroeconomic level, limited industrialisation and weak private sector growth constrain labour demand. Despite economic growth in certain sectors, job creation has not kept pace with the estimated 3–4 million youth entering the labour market annually (NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2023).



At the meso level, the education system contributes to a mismatch between skills supply and labour demand. Curricula are often criticised as overly theoretical, with insufficient emphasis on practical and technical skills (Makata, 2015; Omoju et al., 2023). The neglect of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) further limits pathways to employment.

Institutional factors also play a significant role. Governance challenges, including weak coordination, inadequate funding, and limited implementation capacity, undermine the effectiveness of employment programmes (Omoju et al., 2023; NILDS, 2019). Political influence and lack of transparency further distort access to opportunities. Demographic pressures and rural-urban migration intensify these challenges, increasing competition for limited jobs and reinforcing the expansion of informal employment (EA Journals, 2024). Importantly, these drivers are increasingly understood as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, rather than independent factors (World Bank, 2023).

### 2.2.5. Consequences of Youth Employment Challenges

The consequences of youth labour market vulnerability extend beyond economic outcomes. The literature links unemployment and underemployment to increased crime, social instability, and political unrest (Okafor, 2011; Omoju et al., 2023). Youth exclusion from economic opportunities contributes to frustration, marginalisation, and susceptibility to manipulation by political or extremist actors (IIARD Journals, 2021).

At the individual level, employment challenges lead to poverty, psychological stress, and reduced quality of life. At the national level, they result in underutilisation of human capital and reduced productivity (Wukari International Studies Journal, 2024). Brain drain further exacerbates these challenges, as skilled youth migrate in search of better opportunities (Journal of Business, n.d.).

### 2.2.6. Policy Responses and Limitations

Nigeria has implemented numerous youth employment programmes, often focusing on entrepreneurship and skills development. While these interventions have provided support to some beneficiaries, their aggregate impact remains limited (Omoju et al., 2023).

Key limitations identified in the literature include:

- Fragmentation and lack of coordination across programmes (NILDS, 2019),
- Weak monitoring and evaluation systems,
- Inadequate and inconsistent funding,
- Limited alignment with labour market demand, and
- Over-reliance on short-term, programme-based approaches.

A recurring critique is that many interventions are not embedded within broader macroeconomic strategies, limiting their ability to generate sustainable employment outcomes (Adapt.it, 2012).

The literature presents a consistent conclusion: youth employment challenges in Nigeria are structural, multidimensional, and deeply embedded in economic and institutional systems. Addressing them requires integrated approaches that align macroeconomic policy, education systems, and governance frameworks. Incremental or fragmented interventions are unlikely to produce significant change.

## 2.3. YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

Youth employment in Nigeria is shaped by a convergence of structural, institutional, and socio-economic constraints that extend beyond headline unemployment rates. While official labour statistics provide important indicators of labour market stress, they do not fully capture the complexity of youth employment experiences. The challenge is multidimensional, encompassing unemployment, underemployment, informality, skills mismatch, income insufficiency, regional disparity, and unequal access to opportunities (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2023; World Bank, 2022).

### 2.3.1. Structural Labour Market Imbalance

Nigeria's youth population continues to expand rapidly, placing sustained pressure on the labour market. The country's demographic structure, where 68% of the population is below 30 years old, creates both opportunity and risk. Job creation has not kept pace with labour force growth. Economic expansion has been uneven and



insufficiently labour-absorbing, particularly in high-productivity sectors such as manufacturing (World Bank, 2022). As a result, the labour market is characterised by excess supply relative to demand, intensifying competition for limited formal positions.

This imbalance contributes to wage suppression in entry-level roles and compels many young people to enter informal or self-employed activities out of necessity rather than preference (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2020).

### 2.3.2. Informality and Precarity

Informal employment accounts for a substantial share of youth labour market participation in Nigeria. While informality provides a buffer against open unemployment, it is typically associated with unstable earnings, low productivity, limited access to credit, and the absence of social protection (ILO, 2020). Underemployment remains a significant issue, with many youths engaged in work that does not fully utilise their skills or provide sufficient income. In urban areas, the rising cost of living further exacerbates income insufficiency, creating a gap between employment status and economic security. This condition reflects what scholars describe as the “working poor” phenomenon, where employment does not necessarily translate into financial stability or upward mobility (World Bank, 2022).

### 2.3.3. Education-Labour Market Disconnect

Nigeria has experienced considerable expansion in educational enrolment, particularly at the tertiary levels. However, the transition from school to work remains constrained by skills mismatch and limited industry alignment. Employers frequently report deficiencies in practical skills, digital competencies, and soft skills such as communication and teamwork (ILO, 2020).

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems remain under-resourced and inconsistently integrated with industry demand. As a result, graduates often struggle to secure employment aligned with their qualifications, contributing to graduate unemployment and underemployment (NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

### 2.3.4. Policy Fragmentation and Implementation Gaps

Nigeria has implemented numerous youth-focused employment programmes, including entrepreneurship financing schemes, skills acquisition initiatives, and digital training platforms. However, fragmentation across ministries and agencies has limited coherence and cumulative impact. Monitoring systems frequently prioritise enrolment numbers over sustained employment outcomes, and funding volatility disrupts programme continuity (World Bank, 2022). Implementation gaps are compounded by weak coordination mechanisms and limited labour market data integration, reducing the effectiveness of otherwise well-designed initiatives.

### 2.3.5. Governance and Access Inequality

Access to employment opportunities is often shaped by social networks, socio-economic background, and geographic location. Perceptions of patronage or unequal access to opportunities can undermine institutional trust and reduce confidence in merit-based recruitment systems (ILO, 2020). Gender disparities and regional inequalities further intensify these challenges. Young women frequently encounter mobility constraints and caregiving burdens, while rural youth face infrastructure deficits and reduced digital connectivity (World Bank, 2022).

### 2.3.6. Digital Transformation and Emerging Inequality

The digital economy presents new employment pathways, including freelancing, remote services, fintech innovation, and digital entrepreneurship. However, participation in digital labour markets depends heavily on access to reliable electricity, internet connectivity, and digital literacy. Unequal access to these resources, risks creating new forms of labour market stratification and inequity (World Bank, 2022).

At the same time, gig and platform work, while flexible, often lack formal labour protections and income stability. Without regulatory adaptation, digital transformation may replicate existing precarity patterns in new forms (ILO, 2020).

Nigeria’s youth employment challenge is not limited to unemployment. It reflects structural labour demand deficits, widespread informality, skills misalignment, policy implementation and coordination weaknesses, inadequate investments, governance constraints, and unequal access to opportunity. Addressing these interconnected



challenges requires systemic and politically informed reform strategies capable of aligning economic growth, institutional accountability, and inclusive opportunity expansion.

## 2.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to provide a structured and politically informed analysis of youth employment dynamics in Nigeria. While public discourse often frames youth unemployment primarily as a skills deficit or labour supply issue, this research approaches the problem as a multidimensional challenge shaped by structural economic conditions, institutional coordination, governance incentives, and access inequalities. The overarching objective is to examine how these factors interact to influence youth employment outcomes and to identify reform pathways capable of generating sustainable and inclusive labour market transformation.

### 2.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study is to analyse the structural, institutional, and political economy drivers of youth employment outcomes in Nigeria and to propose evidence-based, system-level policy reforms that strengthen labour demand, improve institutional coherence, and enhance inclusive access to opportunity.

### 2.4.2. Specific Objectives

To achieve this overarching aim, the study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- a) To assess the current youth employment landscape across selected states, including patterns of unemployment, underemployment, informality, job quality, sectoral dynamics, and regional variation.
- b) To examine youth aspirations, employment pathways, and lived experiences, with particular attention to income adequacy, dignity, mobility, digital access, and perceptions of fairness in opportunity allocation.
- c) To evaluate the design, coordination, and implementation of youth employment policies and programmes, identifying institutional strengths, fragmentation challenges, funding constraints, and monitoring gaps. (See annex 2 for youth policies and programs in Nigeria)
- d) To analyse the role of governance dynamics, including political interference, patronage perceptions, elite capture, and accountability mechanisms, in shaping employment access and institutional trust.
- e) To assess private sector labour demand constraints and employer perspectives, including hiring risk, regulatory burdens, sectoral growth potential, and digital transformation.
- f) To identify inclusion gaps, particularly relating to gender, geography, socio-economic background, disability status, and digital access.
- g) To develop actionable policy recommendations that align institutional reform, demand-side job creation, financing stability, and inclusion-focused strategies within a coherent national framework.

## 2.5. ANALYTICAL ORIENTATION

These objectives reflect the study's political economy orientation. Rather than isolating youth employment as a technical labour market issue, the research interrogates how power structures, fiscal priorities, institutional incentives, and structural economic conditions influence outcomes. The emphasis is on understanding not only what policies exist, but how they function within existing governance arrangements and economic realities.

By grounding these objectives in qualitative evidence from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, while situating findings within national structural trends, the study aims to contribute to a more coherent and reform-oriented youth employment discourse in Nigeria.

## 2.6. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study examines youth employment dynamics in Nigeria through a national analytical scope, using a combination of policy review, secondary data analysis, and primary qualitative inquiry.

At the National level, the study includes a comprehensive desk review of federal youth employment policies, strategies, and programmes, alongside an assessment of their implementation frameworks and institutional coordination mechanisms. In addition, interviews were conducted with national-level policymakers, development



actors, and institutional stakeholders to provide insight into policy design, prioritisation, and implementation realities. To complement this national perspective with grounded empirical evidence, the study incorporates subnational fieldwork in three selected locations: Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Kaduna State, and Oyo State. These locations were purposively selected not as the sole focus of the study, but as illustrative case contexts through which the on-the-ground realities of youth employment and policy implementation could be examined. They provide variation in economic structure, regional context, and labour market characteristics, enabling the study to capture how national policies translate into lived experiences across different settings.

Abuja, as the Federal Capital, offers insight into national policy processes, public sector employment dynamics, and emerging digital economy opportunities. Kaduna State reflects a northern context characterised by agro-industrial activity, SME participation, and mixed urban-peri-urban labour markets. Oyo State provides a southern perspective with strong representation of informal, artisan-based, and cluster-driven employment systems. Together, these case locations serve as analytical lenses rather than geographic limits, allowing the study to interrogate how national youth employment challenges and policy frameworks manifest across diverse socio-economic environments. The study ensures both breadth and depth, capturing overarching structural patterns while grounding findings in lived realities. The conclusions drawn are therefore reflective of national dynamics, while informed by context-specific insights from the selected states.

### 2.6.1. Thematic Scope

The study focuses on five interrelated thematic domains:

- a) **Labour Market Structure and Youth Employment Patterns:**  
Including unemployment, underemployment, informality, sectoral distribution, job quality, and income adequacy.
- b) **Youth Aspirations and Lived Experiences**  
Examining school-to-work transitions, mobility constraints, perceptions of fairness, dignity in work, and digital participation.
- c) **Policy Design, Institutional Coordination, and Implementation Dynamics**  
Assessing the coherence, continuity, financing, and monitoring of youth employment interventions.
- d) **Governance and Political Economy Factors**  
Exploring patronage dynamics, recruitment transparency, elite capture, accountability systems, and institutional trust.
- e) **Private Sector Demand and Sectoral Growth Opportunities**  
Analysing employer perspectives, regulatory burdens, high-growth sectors, digital transformation, and formalisation pathways.

The study also explicitly addresses cross-cutting inclusion issues, including gender disparities, regional inequality, digital divide, vulnerability status, and access to capital.

### 2.6.2. Population Scope

The primary population of interest comprises Nigerian youth broadly defined as individuals age 18-35 years. However, the study also incorporates perspectives from policymakers, public sector administrators, private sector employers, training providers, civil society organisations, development partners, and youth-led organisations. This multi-actor approach allows for institutional and experiential triangulation.

### 2.6.3. Analytical Scope

The study does not attempt to produce nationally representative statistical estimates. Instead, it provides analytical generalisation grounded in qualitative evidence and triangulated with secondary data. It seeks to identify systemic patterns and institutional dynamics that may be applicable beyond the selected states, while acknowledging contextual variation.

## 2.7. EXCLUSIONS

The study does not conduct econometric modelling or quantitative impact evaluation of specific programmes. It



does not provide a comprehensive fiscal cost analysis of all recommended reforms. Additionally, while it recognises macroeconomic factors such as inflation and exchange rate volatility, these are addressed only insofar as they influence youth employment conditions.

## 2.8. DELIMITATION RATIONALE

By focusing on selected states and combining institutional interviews with youth focus groups, the study prioritises depth over breadth. The scope is intentionally structured to examine not only employment outcomes but also the governance systems and structural incentives that shape them. This bounded, yet multidimensional scope enables the development of context-sensitive and politically informed policy recommendations.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a multi-method research design to generate a comprehensive and politically informed analysis of youth employment in Nigeria. Recognising the complexity of youth employment as both an economic and governance challenge, the methodology combined three complementary approaches: (i) a desk-based review of youth employment policies, (ii) analysis of secondary quantitative data, and (iii) primary data collection through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Primary data collection was preceded by desk review and secondary quantitative data analysis.

The integration of these methods enabled the study to examine youth employment from multiple analytical angles, linking policy intent, labour market outcomes, and lived experiences. While the desk review provided insight into the structure and evolution of policy frameworks, the quantitative analysis generated evidence on employment trends and labour market conditions. The qualitative component, in turn, captured institutional dynamics, implementation realities, and the everyday experiences of young people navigating the labour market.

This triangulated approach strengthened analytical depth and ensured that findings were grounded in both empirical data and contextual realities, consistent with the study's political economy framework.

### 3.1. DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION METHODS

#### A. Desk Review of Youth Employment Policies

The desk-based review of youth employment policies in Nigeria highlights a persistent paradox: despite an extensive array of policies and programmes spanning over a decade, youth unemployment and underemployment remain deeply entrenched structural challenges. The report situates this issue within a broader socio-economic and political context, emphasising that youth employment is not merely a labour market problem, but a complex development challenge shaped by institutional dynamics, economic structures, and governance realities.

A central argument of the review is that conventional narratives focusing solely on unemployment rates obscure the true nature of the problem. Nigeria's youth labour market is characterised not only by open unemployment but also by widespread underemployment, informality, and low-productivity work. A significant proportion of young people are engaged in precarious livelihoods that offer limited income security, minimal skills development, and few opportunities for upward mobility. This structural reality has critical implications for policy effectiveness, as many interventions are designed around a narrow assumption that unemployment is primarily driven by skills deficits. While skills gaps are indeed relevant, the report underscores that demand-side constraints, such as weak industrial growth, limited job creation in high-productivity sectors, and an unfavourable business environment, are equally, if not more, significant.

The review traces the evolution of youth employment policies in Nigeria from 2011 to 2024, identifying three dominant intervention pathways: skills development, entrepreneurship promotion, and temporary employment schemes. Early initiatives, such as YouWin!, focused on entrepreneurship through grant-based support, aiming to



stimulate job creation via youth-led enterprises. This was followed by the expansion of public employment and social protection programmes like YESSO and N-Power, designed to provide immediate income support and work experience. More recently, policy attention has shifted toward human capital development and digital skills, reflected in programmes such as SKYE, the Three Million Technical Talent (3MTT) initiative, and the National Youth Skills Programme (NYSP).

Despite this apparent evolution, the report finds a high degree of continuity and repetition in policy design. Many programmes replicate similar approaches without adequately addressing the structural constraints of the labour market. Skills development initiatives often lack strong linkages to employers, resulting in training that does not translate into actual job opportunities. Entrepreneurship programmes assume that access to finance and training is sufficient for business success, yet overlook systemic barriers such as poor infrastructure, limited market access, and macroeconomic instability. Temporary employment schemes, while effective in providing short-term relief, rarely lead to sustainable employment outcomes. As a result, successive policy cycles tend to reproduce similar limitations rather than generate transformative change.

Institutional fragmentation emerges as a major constraint across the policy landscape. Multiple ministries, departments, and agencies implement overlapping programmes with limited coordination, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficient resource use. Although frameworks such as the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) aim to provide strategic coherence, their effectiveness is constrained by weak enforcement mechanisms and limited institutional capacity. Broad policy frameworks, such as the National Youth Policy and the National Employment Policy, provide important strategic direction but lack the operational specificity required for effective implementation. This disconnect between policy formulation and execution is a recurring theme throughout the review.

The report also provides a critical analysis of inclusion within youth employment policies, revealing significant gaps in how different groups of young people are targeted and supported. While many programmes are nominally inclusive, they often adopt a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to account for structural inequalities. Women, for example, continue to face barriers related to education, cultural norms, and care responsibilities, which limit their participation in training and employment opportunities. Rural youth are disadvantaged by limited access to infrastructure, markets, and information, while persons with disabilities remain largely excluded due to inadequate accessibility provisions. Moreover, policies rarely adopt an intersectional lens, meaning that individuals experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage, such as rural, low-educated young women, are often overlooked. This lack of targeted and context-sensitive design reduces the overall effectiveness and equity of interventions.

A key contribution of the review is its application of a Political Economy Analysis (PEA) lens to explain why many youth employment policies underperform. The analysis highlights how institutional incentives, power dynamics, and governance structures shape policy outcomes. Government agencies are often incentivised to prioritise programmes that are highly visible and politically salient, favouring large-scale initiatives with immediate outputs over those focused on long-term outcomes. This helps explain the prominence of programmes like N-Power, which demonstrate broad outreach but limited sustainability. Political cycles further influence policy continuity, with changes in administration often leading to programme restructuring or discontinuation, thereby undermining institutional learning and long-term impact.

The role of development partners is also significant, particularly in programmes such as YESSO and SKYE, which benefit from donor funding and technical expertise. While such partnerships can enhance programme design and introduce global best practices, they also raise concerns about sustainability and domestic ownership, especially when funding is not fully integrated into national budgets. At the same time, private sector engagement remains limited, despite its central role in job creation. Structural constraints within the business environment—such as infrastructure deficits, regulatory burdens, and macroeconomic instability—reduce incentives for private sector participation in youth employment initiatives.

Financing and sustainability represent another critical dimension of policy effectiveness. The review finds that many



programmes rely heavily on government funding or donor support, making them vulnerable to fiscal constraints and shifts in political priorities. Grant-based initiatives like YouWin! face challenges of scalability and sustainability due to their high cost, while loan-based programmes encounter issues of repayment and access. Donor-funded programmes often perform better in terms of design and monitoring but face uncertainties once external funding ends. Overall, the financing landscape is characterised by fragmentation, limited transparency, and insufficient alignment with long-term sustainability objectives.

In terms of outcomes, the report concludes that the overall impact of youth employment policies on reducing unemployment has been modest. While individual programmes have generated benefits for participants, their aggregate effect on national employment indicators remains limited. This reflects issues of scale, as many programmes reach only a small proportion of the youth population, as well as challenges related to sustainability, inclusivity, and labour market alignment. The persistence of high youth unemployment and underemployment rates underscores the need for a more systemic and coordinated approach.

The review identifies several structural and implementation challenges that continue to undermine policy effectiveness. These include the education-employment mismatch, where graduates lack relevant skills; weak institutional capacity for programme delivery and monitoring; inadequate and inconsistent funding; and governance issues, including corruption and lack of accountability. Macroeconomic instability and a difficult business environment further constrain job creation, limiting the ability of policies to achieve meaningful impact. In response to these challenges, the report proposes a set of strategic recommendations aimed at transforming the youth employment policy landscape. Central to these is the need for comprehensive education reform, with a stronger emphasis on practical skills, digital competencies, and alignment with industry needs. Strengthening private sector engagement is also critical, through incentives, partnerships, and improved business conditions. The report calls for enhanced policy coordination, including the establishment of a central coordinating mechanism to reduce fragmentation and improve resource allocation. It also emphasises the importance of inclusivity, advocating for targeted interventions that address the specific barriers faced by marginalised groups.

Furthermore, the review highlights the need for robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure accountability and enable evidence-based policy adjustments. Improving the broader macroeconomic environment through investments in infrastructure, regulatory reforms, and institutional strengthening is identified as a foundational requirement for sustainable job creation. Finally, the report underscores the importance of recognising and supporting the informal sector, where the majority of youth are employed, by improving working conditions, productivity, and pathways to formalisation.

In conclusion, the desk review presents a compelling case that Nigeria's youth employment challenge is deeply structural and cannot be addressed through isolated or short-term interventions. While the country has demonstrated sustained commitment through numerous policies and programmes, its impact has been constrained by fragmentation, weak implementation, and misalignment with labour market realities. A more integrated, inclusive, and system-wide approach grounded in both supply- and demand-side considerations and informed by political economy realities is essential to unlock the potential of Nigeria's youth and achieve sustainable employment outcomes.

## **B. Secondary Quantitative Data Analysis**

To complement the policy review and qualitative data, the study analysed secondary quantitative data on youth employment in Nigeria. This component aimed to generate empirical evidence on labour market dynamics and strengthen the evidentiary basis for policy analysis.

The analysis drew on nationally representative datasets from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), specifically the Nigeria Labour Force Survey (NLFS) covering the period 2014 to 2023. The overarching goal was to generate actionable insights that could inform policies promoting dignified and sustainable youth employment.

The specific objectives of the quantitative analysis were to:

- Assess labour market conditions and employment structure,
- Monitor trends in youth employment, unemployment, and underemployment,



- Identify key correlates of employment outcomes,
- Quantify the extent of vulnerable and informal employment,
- Provide evidence to inform country-specific policy recommendations.

By situating qualitative findings within broader statistical trends, the quantitative analysis enabled cross-validation of narratives, particularly in areas such as underemployment, informality, and income instability. It also provided a macro-level perspective on the scale and persistence of youth employment challenges in Nigeria.

### **C. Qualitative Data Collection: KIIs and FGDs**

Qualitative data were collected primarily through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These methods were deliberately selected to capture both institutional and experiential dimensions of youth employment in Nigeria. While KIIs provided insight into policy design, implementation challenges, governance dynamics, and labour market demand, the FGDs offered a deeper understanding of youth lived experiences, including aspirations, employment pathways, income instability, precarity, and perceptions of fairness and opportunity access. Three locations were selected in Nigeria to give the study national coverage as much as possible. They are the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja – the seat of government and home to policy formulation, Kaduna State – historically the capital of the country’s northern region, a metropolitan state with diverse ethnic groups from various states of the federation, and Oyo State in the south-western part of the country, close to Lagos, which exhibits similar metropolitan characteristics to Kaduna, with the addition of a prominent gig economy. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with a diverse range of stakeholders, including public sector officials at federal and state levels, private sector employers, civil society organisations, academic and research institutions, youth training providers, development partners, and youth-led organisations. This diversity ensured that the analysis incorporated perspectives from policy formulators, implementers, employers, and intermediary institutions involved in youth employment ecosystems. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing respondents to elaborate on institutional realities while ensuring alignment with the study’s core research questions.

Focus Group Discussions were conducted with youth participants across the selected study locations. The FGDs were designed to facilitate interactive dialogue and collective reflection on employment challenges and opportunities. This format enabled participants to build on one another’s experiences, surface shared concerns, and articulate collective perceptions regarding job access, income adequacy, digital opportunity, and institutional trust. The group setting was particularly valuable for exploring social and emotional dimensions of employment that may not emerge in one-on-one interviews.

All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded to ensure accuracy. Recordings were transcribed verbatim in accordance with the study’s qualitative data analysis framework. Verbatim transcription preserved not only the substantive content of responses but also pauses, emphasis, tone, and key expressions, enhancing interpretive reliability and analytical depth.

Together, the combination of qualitative interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data review provided a multidimensional understanding of youth employment dynamics, grounded in both lived experience and structural analysis.

### **D. Research Ethics Approvals and Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for social research involving human participants. Ethics approval was obtained from the following bodies:

- The Kaduna State Ministry of Health, Ref no: MOH/ADM/744/VOL.1/1110064
- Institute for Advanced Medical Research and Training (PIMRAT)  
College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ref no: UI/EC/25/01198
- The Economic Planning, Revenue Generation and Public Private Partnership Secretariat, Ref no: FCTA/EPRGPPPS/R&S/117/1/001



Beyond formal approvals, the study was guided by a set of core ethical principles that informed all stages of primary data collection. Participation in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was strictly voluntary. All participants were provided with clear information on the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and how the data would be used. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, with respondents given the option to decline answering specific questions or to withdraw from the discussion at any point without consequence.

Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously maintained throughout the research process. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts, and respondents were assigned structured codes (e.g., NG\_KII\_PUS\_01, NG\_FGD\_YOU\_03) to ensure that individual identities could not be traced in the analysis or reporting. Special care was taken when handling sensitive topics—such as experiences of unemployment, workplace exploitation, or perceptions of governance—to minimise potential discomfort or risk to participants.

Data security protocols were also implemented to protect the integrity and confidentiality of collected information. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored, with access restricted to authorised members of the research team. Data were used solely for this study and managed in accordance with applicable data protection standards. Given the inclusion of youth participants, particular attention was paid to ensuring respectful engagement, non-coercive facilitation, and the creation of safe discussion environments during FGDs. Moderators were trained to manage group dynamics, avoid leading questions, and ensure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute without intimidation or undue influence.

The study's ethical approach reflects a commitment to respect, integrity, and responsibility.

## 3.2. RESPONDENT CATEGORIES AND SAMPLING

Respondents were purposively selected to ensure broad representation across institutional, sectoral, and youth constituencies relevant to youth employment policy and labour market dynamics. The study sought to capture perspectives from policy designers, programme implementers, employers, training providers, intermediary organisations, and youth themselves. This diversity was essential to understanding both the structural and experiential dimensions of youth employment.

All transcripts were anonymised using structured coding formats (e.g., NG\_KII\_XX\_01; NG\_FGD\_XX\_03) to protect respondent identity while preserving analytical traceability. The coding system enabled systematic comparison across respondent types and locations without compromising confidentiality.

### 3.2.1. Respondent Categories

In line with the study's qualitative analysis framework, respondents were classified into the categories presented in **Table 2.1**.

*Table 2.1: Respondent Categories and Coding Structure*

Code	Respondent Category	Description
PUS	Public Sector Officials	National and subnational government officials involved in policy design, implementation, or oversight
PRS	Private Sector and Employers	Business owners, firm managers, and industry representatives
CS	Civil Society Organisations	Non-governmental organisations and advocacy groups
YGO	Youth-Led Organisations	Organisations led by or representing youth constituencies
DP	Development Partners	Multilateral and bilateral development agencies
AR	Academia and Research Institutions	Scholars, researchers, and policy analysts



TRA	Training Institutions	Vocational centres, technical institutes, and skill development providers
YOU	Youth Participants	Young individuals participating in FGDs or individual interviews
GE	Youth Participants	Youths engaged in the digital workspace

To ensure diverse and representative perspectives, the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were designed to capture multiple clusters of youth nationally, including unemployed graduates, underemployed youth, informal sector workers, entrepreneurs, and digitally engaged youth. A total of 5 FGDs were conducted. Gender balance was prioritised by ensuring equal male and female participation in all the group discussions, enabling participants to freely discuss gender-specific constraints. Each FGD typically comprised 6–8 youth participants, and sessions were facilitated using participatory techniques like moderated turn-taking and probing to ensure inclusive engagement and prevent dominance by more vocal individuals. Multiple FGDs were conducted to reflect both gender and contextual variation, ensuring that the qualitative data captured a broad spectrum of lived experiences among youth. Data from youth was complemented by Key Informant Interviews across stakeholder categories.

*Table 2.2: Key Informant Interviews Conducted*

Federal Level		Abuja		Kaduna State		Oyo State	
Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
4	2	15	13	15	21	17	14

*Table 2.3: Youth Focus Group Discussions*

Abuja		Kaduna		Oyo (3 FGDs)	
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
4	7	3	5	9	9

### 3.2.2. Sampling Approach

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants possessed relevant expertise, institutional insight, or lived experience related to youth employment, labour demand, enterprise development, or training systems. The objective was not statistical representativeness, but analytical depth and diversity.

The sampling design ensured:

- Inclusion of Federal and State level policymakers and implementers,
- Geographic representation from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states,
- Inclusion of both urban and peri-urban participants,
- Gender diversity across respondent groups,
- Representation from both formal and informal labour market actors,
- Inclusion of digital economy participants and gig workers where relevant.

This approach enabled the study to capture variation in institutional mandates, sectoral exposure, economic structure, and regional labour market conditions. By intentionally incorporating multiple perspectives across governance levels and economic sectors, the sampling strategy strengthened the study’s capacity to conduct comparative and political economy analysis.

## 3.3. QUALITATIVE DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS APPROACH

Qualitative data analysis followed a structured five-phase analytical process. This approach ensured systematic handling of transcripts, transparent coding procedures, and rigorous thematic interpretation grounded in the research objectives.



### 3.3.1. Phase 1: Data Management and Preparation

All recorded interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic nuance, tone, and emphasis. To ensure accuracy, a data integrity check was conducted by reviewing a subset of transcripts against the original audio recordings. Identifying information was systematically anonymised to protect respondent confidentiality while maintaining analytic traceability through structured coding identifiers. Cleaned and anonymised transcripts were then organised and prepared for systematic coding within a structured analytical workflow.

### 3.3.2. Phase 2: Familiarisation

The research team engaged in repeated, close readings of all transcripts to develop immersion in the dataset. During this phase, reflective memos were prepared to document initial impressions, emotional tone, and emerging patterns. Particular attention was given to recurring expressions of aspiration, precarity, institutional trust or distrust, perceptions of policy effectiveness, and political economy dynamics. Contextual materials, including desk review findings, policy documents, and labour market statistics, were reviewed alongside transcripts to situate narratives within broader structural and institutional contexts.

### 3.3.3. Phase 3: Response Coding (Systematic Deconstruction)

A structured coding process was then applied to deconstruct the dataset into analytically meaningful units. The process began with open coding, involving line-by-line identification of concepts and issues such as employment aspirations, policy implementation gaps, regulatory burdens, elite capture, dignity erosion, and digital opportunity constraints.

Codes were then compared across interviews and focus groups to identify convergence and divergence among respondent categories and geographic locations. Through focused coding, related concepts were consolidated into coherent thematic clusters. A formal codebook was developed to define each code, establish inclusion and exclusion criteria, and ensure consistency across analysts. This iterative coding process enhanced reliability and facilitated structured comparison across respondent types.

### 3.3.4. Phase 4: Theme Development and Refinement

Following coding, themes were developed through aggregation and abstraction. Codes were grouped into higher-order themes reflecting structural, institutional, and political economy dimensions of youth employment. Thematic mapping was conducted across three analytical levels:

Structural Codes, capturing foundational issues such as labour market conditions, policy design, implementation fidelity, political will, coordination mechanisms, youth voice, and gender inclusion,

Emergent Themes, reflecting recurring patterns such as policy inertia, aspiration–opportunity gaps, patronage dynamics, digital divides, and the normalisation of precarious work,

Interpretive Patterns, synthesising findings into broader political economy insights, including rhetoric–reality gaps, employment as a political transaction, systemic precarity, and youth agency beyond the state.

Themes were continuously refined to ensure coherence, internal consistency, and direct relevance to the study's research questions. Only themes supported by sufficient textual evidence across multiple transcripts were retained.

### 3.3.5. Phase 5: Cross-Data Triangulation

To enhance analytical robustness, qualitative findings were triangulated with secondary data sources, including national labour statistics and sectoral employment data. For example, qualitative narratives of underemployment and income insufficiency were examined alongside official employment indicators. Reports of widespread informality were contextualised within sectoral employment distribution data. This triangulation strengthened the validity of interpretive conclusions by aligning experiential accounts with structural evidence.



The five-phase analytical process ensured methodological rigour, transparency, and depth. By combining systematic coding, layered thematic development, and cross-data triangulation, the study generated a comprehensive and politically informed analysis of youth employment dynamics in Nigeria.

### 3.4. STUDY LIMITATIONS

While this study was designed and implemented using a rigorous qualitative framework, certain limitations should be acknowledged in interpreting the findings. These limitations relate to methodological scope, geographic coverage, data type, and temporal design. Recognising these constraints enhances transparency and strengthens the integrity of the research.

#### 3.4.1. Limited Statistical Generalisability

As a qualitative study, the research prioritises depth of insight over statistical representativeness. Respondents were purposively selected to capture diverse institutional and youth perspectives; however, the findings cannot be interpreted as nationally representative. The study provides analytical generalisation, identifying patterns and dynamics, rather than quantitative extrapolation to the entire youth population.

#### 3.4.2. Reliance on Self-Reported Narratives

The study draws extensively on self-reported experiences and perceptions. While these narratives are central to understanding lived realities and institutional dynamics, they may be influenced by recall bias, perception bias, or subjective interpretation. This is particularly relevant for sensitive topics such as patronage, elite capture, and political interference, where respondents may frame experiences through personal or contextual lenses.

#### 3.4.3. Geographic Scope

Data collection was conducted in Abuja (central Nigeria), Kaduna (north), and Oyo State (south). These locations were selected to reflect varied geographical locations, economic realities and labour market conditions, they capture the full diversity of Nigeria's subnational contexts. Apart from central Nigeria, FCT interviews captured views of federal level stakeholders. However, youth employment dynamics some specific geopolitical zones—particularly conflict-affected regions—may differ in important ways.

#### 3.4.4. Cross-Sectional Design

The study is based on cross-sectional data collected at a single point in time. As such, it cannot track longitudinal changes in employment trajectories, income mobility, or policy implementation outcomes. Long-term impact assessment would require panel data or repeated follow-up studies.

Despite these limitations, the systematic application of a structured qualitative analysis framework, careful respondent selection, rigorous coding procedures, and cross-data triangulation enhances the credibility and analytical robustness of the findings. The study provides a deeply contextualised and politically informed understanding of youth employment dynamics, offering valuable insights for policy design and reform.

## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. NIGERIA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE

Understanding youth employment in Nigeria requires moving beyond headline unemployment statistics to examine the structure, dynamics, and lived realities of the labour market itself. The findings from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states reveal that youth employment outcomes are not merely the result of individual skill gaps or isolated policy shortcomings. Rather, they are embedded within a broader political and economic context defined by demographic pressure, limited industrial expansion, institutional fragmentation, and uneven access to opportunity.

Across all three locations, young people are entering a labour market that is simultaneously expanding in number and contracting in quality. While the youth population continues to grow, the creation of secure, dignified and



fulfilling employment opportunities has not kept pace. The result is an increasingly competitive environment in which young people must navigate constrained formal sector openings, saturated informal markets, and emerging digital opportunities that remain unevenly accessible.

The evidence further suggests that youth employment in Nigeria is characterised by structural segmentation. The public sector remains symbolically attractive but practically limited; the private formal sector demands skills and experience that many young people struggle to access; and the informal economy functions as the primary absorber of excess labour. In this context, employment is often secured through adaptation rather than alignment; young people adjust their aspirations to available opportunities rather than progressing along predictable career pathways. Importantly, the youth employment landscape also reflects deep inequalities. Gender norms, geographic location, socio-economic background, digital access, and political connection all shape entry into, and movement within, the labour market. These structural filters mean that opportunity is unevenly distributed long before questions of merit or effort arise.

The following sections examine this landscape in greater detail. Section 3.1.1 explores the structural imbalance between labour supply and demand and the dominance of informality. Section 3.1.2 examines youth aspirations and employment pathways in the face of constrained opportunity. Section 3.1.3 analyses underemployment and job quality, while Section 3.1.4 highlights the role of gender, geography, and access in shaping outcomes. Together, these sub-sections provide a grounded understanding of how Nigeria's youth labour market functions in practice, as experienced by young people and interpreted by institutional stakeholders.

This landscape analysis provides the foundation for the subsequent examination of policy design, institutional capacity, and political economy dynamics in later sections of the chapter.

### 1.1.1 Labour Market Structure and Sectoral Dynamics

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, the structure of youth employment is defined by a persistent and widening imbalance between labour supply and labour demand. In all three locations, respondents consistently described a labour market in which the number of young people seeking work far exceeds the number of quality jobs available. This imbalance is not episodic or cyclical; rather, it reflects a structural condition shaped by demographic pressures, limited industrial expansion, weak private sector absorption, and constrained public sector recruitment. An academic respondent in Abuja captured this dynamic succinctly:

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*“There are more people than jobs, so employers now dictate wages... people are willing to accept anything because there are no alternatives. The employers of labour seem to believe that, when the supply is high, the prices will reduce, okay? So, when there's an increased supply of labour, the tendency is for the cost and the pricing for labour, to reduce” NG\_KII\_AR\_30 (Abuja)*

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This statement underscores two interrelated dynamics: first, the oversupply of labour; and second, the downward pressure this exerts on wages and working conditions. When employment opportunities are scarce, bargaining power shifts decisively toward employers. Youth, faced with limited alternatives, accept low pay, insecure contracts, and poor working environments. The labour market thus becomes not merely competitive, but coercively competitive, structured by scarcity rather than productivity.

A respondent reinforces the structural imbalance between the number of graduates entering the labour market and the limited capacity of the formal economy to absorb them. The civil society respondent emphasises how prolonged unemployment after graduation pushes young people into uncertain career trajectories. He explains:



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*“When you go to the University, you learn a course and graduate. Then you try to get employment for yourself. Sometimes you stay for 7, 8 years. Before you know it, you are out of the entry-level range. Nobody wants to hire someone who is 30 years old for an entry-level position or graduate trainee role. And from there, if one is not careful, the journey of life starts not aligning again.” NG\_KII\_CS\_45 (Oyo)*

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A similar observation emerged in Kaduna, where the demographic dimension of the imbalance was emphasised:

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*“The population of the youth now grows faster than the generation of jobs, that’s why we will tell them, don’t wait for jobs, create your own. We are trying to give them that mindset to be self-employed.” NG\_KII\_AR\_09 (Kaduna)*

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Here, the issue is framed not only as insufficient job creation but as a systemic failure to align economic growth with demographic expansion.

The temporal instability in youth employment outcomes described in the qualitative findings is clearly reflected in national trend data. Between 2016 and 2018, the proportion of youths classified as NEET increased sharply from approximately 16% to over 40%, indicating a significant deterioration in labour market engagement (See Annex 3, Figures 1, 2, and 3). This period coincides with broader economic challenges and was frequently referenced in qualitative interviews as a time when jobs became even harder to find. Although some recovery is observed in later years, unemployment levels in 2023 remain comparable to earlier periods, suggesting that job creation has not kept pace with the growth of the youth labour force.

These fluctuations highlight the vulnerability of young people to macroeconomic shocks and structural constraints. The persistence of high NEET levels, despite periods of increased employment, reinforces qualitative concerns about discouraged workers and labour market disengagement. Respondents often described cycles of job search, temporary work, and withdrawal from the labour market, which are quantitatively captured in the volatility of employment and NEET trends. Together, these findings underscore the need for sustained and resilient job creation strategies that can absorb the growing youth population and reduce long-term disengagement.

A respondent from the Academia in Oyo reinforces this structural framing by directly challenging the dominant “unemployable graduate” narrative:

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*“The truth of the matter is that I find it funny when so many people actually talk about Nigerian graduates being unemployable, but honestly, it’s not a matter of being employable; it’s the question of how many opportunities are available.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This respondent sees the problem not as a function of graduates’ unpreparedness for the labour market, not merely an educational failure, but as a structural absorption constraint. The respondent went further to contextualise the regional dynamics of this constraint:

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*“If you come down South, you discover that the number of educated people is actually more than the available resources. What happens when they*



*finish school? They usually do not have the environment to explore or put into practice what they have learnt in school.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This reinforces the findings from other States that unemployment is a structural condition exacerbated by demographic pressures, limited industrial expansion and so on.

Meanwhile, not all respondents believed that the learning system provides all that youths need to successfully navigate the job market. In Oyo State, an employer provided a candid assessment of hiring challenges:

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*“The major problem that most Nigerian businesses face is human resources: it’s the people in the business. Many people are better employees during the interview process than in the actual job process. So, you find yourself teaching professionals what they should already know, what they are certified to do already. So, the biggest challenge we have is employing the right persons to take up the right roles without investing even more in them to be able to do what they claim to know how to do.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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From this vantage point, the issue is not simply the absence of jobs, but a perceived gap between certification and applied competence. Employers report expending additional resources retraining staff for tasks they should ostensibly already qualified to perform. This introduces a second dimension to the youth employment challenge: while macro-level opportunity scarcity constrains absorption, micro-level productivity and professional readiness concerns influence hiring confidence and retention decisions.

Taken together, these perspectives reveal a layered supply-demand mismatch. At the structural level, job creation lags behind the volume of educated youth. At the firm level, employers express uncertainty about applied skills, work discipline, and professional maturity. The employment crisis, therefore, operates simultaneously as an economic capacity issue and as a productivity alignment issue, requiring reforms that address both demand expansion and quality enhancement within the labour supply.

Kaduna respondents pointed to the decline of local industries in the past three decades, limited diversification, and shrinking formal employment pathways. Youth enter the labour market in increasing numbers each year, yet the absorptive capacity of both public and private sectors remains constrained. The result is intensified competition for a narrow band of opportunities.

In Oyo State, the structural imbalance is most visibly expressed through saturation in the informal artisan economy. Focus group participants repeatedly described streets lined with similar micro-enterprises competing for the same limited customer base. One participant explained:

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*“For example, there may be three or four tailors on the same street, some even facing each other, and some people have sewing machines at home with which they make their own clothes. So, it’s usually very difficult to get enough customers to make enough money to take care of one’s needs.”  
NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03, R5 (Oyo)*

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This observation reflects a critical structural phenomenon: when formal sector pathways are limited, youth redirect into accessible informal activities, such as tailoring, hairdressing, barbering, carpentry, petty trading, and POS operations. However, because entry barriers into these sectors are relatively low, they quickly become oversaturated. What begins as a coping strategy becomes a congested survival market, where income margins



shrink, and competition intensifies.

Importantly, this pattern was not confined to Oyo. In Kaduna, artisan and subsistence activities, farming, teaching in low-fee private schools, and small trading function as default employment options. In Abuja, informality takes a different form: freelance digital work, short-term NGO contracts, gig-based services, and micro-entrepreneurial ventures. Although the sectoral expression differs, the structural logic remains the same: youth gravitate toward whatever short term, gig-based segment of the economy remains accessible.

The public sector, traditionally perceived as a stabilising employer, no longer provides sufficient absorption. Civil service recruitment is limited, politically mediated, and fiscally constrained. Even where recruitment processes exist, wage adequacy is contested, and positions are far fewer than applicants. Meanwhile, high-skill private sector segments, such as fintech and data-driven enterprises, report gaps in digital and soft skills among applicants, further narrowing entry pathways.

Respondents describe a labour market in which educational attainment does not guarantee occupational alignment. In Kaduna, a private sector employer in the salon industry explained how structural job scarcity drives youth into misaligned work.

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*“Most graduates are actually working where their degrees don’t match the jobs they have. It’s not their discipline. So, they just go about looking for jobs to make ends meet. So, most of them don’t have the passion for what they are doing, but they have to do it because they want to survive.” NG\_KII\_PS\_32*

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This narrative reframes perceived “lack of passion” as a function of economic survival pressures rather than attitudinal deficiency.

A respondent from Kaduna State linked structural constraints directly to infrastructure deficits.

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*“Electricity remains a major factor. A stable power supply is essential for economic growth. Without electricity, many young people cannot engage in entrepreneurial activities or small businesses.” NG\_KII\_AR\_31*

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Thus, labour market dysfunction is not merely a supply-side problem; it is embedded within macroeconomic and infrastructural decay that restrict enterprise growth and job creation.

Thus, across all three states, the labour market exhibits a dual structural condition:

- Excess labour supply, driven by youth population growth and expanded educational access,
- Constrained demand, shaped by low infrastructure, weak industrialisation, limited diversification, and fiscal pressures.

In such a context, informality becomes the default absorber of excess labour—not because it offers stability, protection, or upward mobility, but because it is immediately available. Informal work requires minimal gatekeeping, limited credential verification, and lower capital thresholds relative to formal employment. Yet its accessibility comes at the cost of income instability, weak labour protections, and vulnerability to market fluctuations.

The combined evidence from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo points to a structurally segmented labour market in which:

- The formal sector is narrow and competitive,
- The public sector is constrained and politically mediated,
- The private high-skill sector demands competencies that many youth lack,



- The informal sector with low and unstable returns is overcrowded but accessible.

Informality functions as a pressure valve for demographic and economic imbalance rather than as a pathway to sustained productivity or dignified and fulfilling work. Without structural expansion of labour demand through industrial growth, coordinated skills alignment, and improved investment climates, the supply-demand imbalance will continue to channel youth into precarious and congested informal markets.

### 1.1.2 Youth Aspirations and Employment Pathways

The findings reveal a striking pattern: Nigerian youth do not suffer from a deficit of ambition. On the contrary, young people articulate clear professional aspirations, personal goals, and a desire for meaningful, stable, and dignified work. However, these aspirations are repeatedly recalibrated, often downward, by systemic constraints embedded within the labour market structure. The issue, therefore, is not the absence of drive, but the fragility of pathways that connect aspiration to opportunity.

Across all the states where the study was carried out, youth employment pathways are increasingly characterised by adaptation rather than linear transition from education to stable wage employment. While many young people still aspire for structured, formal roles, constrained labour demand and institutional instability are redirecting aspirations toward digital entrepreneurship, hybrid work arrangements, and independent monetisation models.

A youth entrepreneur describes how gig platforms allow individuals to bypass traditional gatekeepers:

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*“With my little knowledge, I think many of these platforms are easy to access online now. For example, for e-commerce, there are many platforms... the most accessible is Fiverr. Most of the gig work is online, and in fact, you don’t need connections or big groups... if you can do it, you get paid.” NG\_KII\_YOU\_47 (Oyo)*

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He adds that the flexibility of digital work is a key attraction:

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*“I would say it’s the flexibility because even if you want to get a desk job, you can still get it, but nothing will be as flexible as digital work. You can take two hours off or two days off... and you can even add a side hustle with it.” NG\_KII\_YOU\_47 (Oyo)*

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In Oyo State, a private sector employer in the fitness and wellness industry described how digital transformation within even a traditionally physical service sector has begun generating new forms of employment beyond the gym floor:

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*“The company recently invested more than Ten Million Naira in the first phase of app development for the company, which is just the first phase. Now, people don’t have to be fitness enthusiasts to do that job and youths who work on that project will be no less than a team of twenty or more, and these people are most likely working remotely. So, the industry is a fitness and wellness industry, but it has been able to bring out employment opportunities for people who are in tech, and the number of those keeps growing.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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This account illustrates how sectoral boundaries are blurring. A fitness enterprise is simultaneously becoming a technology employer, creating remote opportunities for software developers, data managers, and digital product designers. Digital transformation, therefore, expands labour demand in indirect but significant ways. Beyond firm-level expansion, the respondent also identified a deeper structural shift in how professionals are conceptualising their careers:

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*“Professionals are converting their years of experience into a digital product in the form of an app where they don’t have to interface with clients, see them or talk to them, but the clients are using their systems to better their lives. If they look at how much is brought in from their apps, on a monthly basis, they really may not see the need to come into a gym, answer to a staff, answer to a management, clock in and out and earn a salary at the end of the month.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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This reflects a reconfiguration of aspiration itself. Rather than viewing employment as entry into hierarchical organisational structures, some youth now see digital platforms as vehicles for autonomy, scalability, and potentially higher earnings. The appeal lies not only in income potential but also in independence from managerial oversight and rigid schedules.

These findings mirror patterns observed in Abuja’s freelance ecosystem and Kaduna’s digital skill initiatives: youth agency is increasingly expressed through platform participation, remote service provision, and hybrid entrepreneurial models. However, this shift is not purely aspirational. For some, digital pathways represent opportunity expansion; for others, they are adaptive responses to limited formal openings.

A gig worker described how constrained opportunity structures redirect aspirations:

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*“So, most times, due to the lack of opportunities, most people develop extra skills that are different from what they studied in school. Most of the time, it is digital skills that they can sell to people, both within and outside the country. And most of the time, people use different platforms to sell their skills. Some use platforms like Upwork and Fiverr. Others use social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, now known as X, and Facebook where they can meet people who need their services. They build their profiles there and try as much as possible to position themselves to attract people who will need their skills.” NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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On the issue of preference for gig work over the formal, conventional labour market, the respondent further clarified that motivations are mixed but heavily shaped by scarcity:

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*“I think it’s a mixture of all the factors you mentioned. For some, it’s the flexibility. Some don’t want to be tied down to a typical 9-5 schedule. And some don’t want to report to a boss. Some don’t like a structured environment. Working in the digital economy allows them the flexibility of time and the flexibility to choose who they want to work with. It also allows them to make as much money as possible, provided they can get a willing buyer for their products and services. While for some, it’s a lack of opportunities. Some would prefer a structured work environment or employment and the benefits that come with it. But because of the limited opportunities we have in the country presently, they have no other choice*



*but to get digital skills that they can sell on various platforms.” NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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Digital participation often emerges as a compensatory adaptation within a constrained formal labour market. In Abuja, where proximity to federal institutions and international organisations might be expected to expand horizons, the dominant narrative is not one of progression but of exit through emigration. An academic respondent observed a profound shift in youth orientation:

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*“Young people are no longer asking what to study; they are asking how to leave the country.” NG\_KII\_AR\_30 (Abuja).*

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This statement reflects more than frustration; it signals a transformation in how opportunity is imagined. Rather than seeking alignment between education and domestic employment prospects, many young people are increasingly strategizing around international migration. The “japa” phenomenon emerges not merely as personal mobility but as a rational response to perceived systemic stagnation. In this context, aspiration becomes geographically displaced, redirected outward rather than invested locally.

In Kaduna, youth narratives reveal a different but equally telling pattern: aspirations are not abandoned outright but are rerouted into available alternatives when structural shifts close preferred pathways. A focus group participant described how industrial decline reshaped his career trajectory:

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*“I wanted to work in manufacturing, but the factories have shut down. I found myself in teaching.” FGD Participant (Kaduna)*

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This account illustrates how macroeconomic transformations like infrastructure decay leading to industrial contraction and factory closures, have direct implications for individual life courses. What begins as a sector-specific aspiration can quickly become untenable when the enabling ecosystem disappears. In such cases, youth do not necessarily abandon work; they adapt to what remains available. However, adaptation often involves accepting roles outside their original training or passion, resulting in a form of involuntary career drift.

The sectoral concentration of youth employment observed in the qualitative findings is strongly validated by national labour statistics. The data show that agriculture accounts for 29.1% of youth employment, followed by market services (27.0%) and non-market services (25.0%), while manufacturing represents only 15.3% and construction a marginal 3.6% (See Annex 3, Table 2). This distribution reflects a labour market dominated by low- and medium-productivity sectors, consistent with respondents’ descriptions of agriculture, petty trading, and informal services as the primary livelihood options available to young people.

These patterns also reinforce qualitative concerns regarding limited industrialisation and weak private sector absorption capacity. Across KIIs, stakeholders frequently highlighted the absence of large-scale industries capable of generating stable employment. The relatively low share of employment in manufacturing and construction confirms this structural gap, suggesting that the Nigerian economy has not undergone sufficient transformation to create high-productivity jobs for its growing youth population. Consequently, young people remain concentrated in sectors with low earnings potential and limited upward mobility, reinforcing cycles of underemployment and economic vulnerability.

In Oyo State, the constraint takes a different but equally consequential form: capital barriers. Many young people described completing formal education with professional ambitions—whether in engineering, business, or service



provision, only to confront the prohibitive costs of establishing practice. As one participant explained:

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*“When they can’t get access to that kind of money, their dreams are killed, and they resort to craftwork.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03, R1 (Oyo)*

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Here, the pathway between qualification and enterprise is severed not by lack of skill or interest, but by lack of startup capital and financing mechanisms. Professional aspirations are truncated by financial exclusion. Craftwork and artisan trades become fallback options, not necessarily because they are preferred, but because they are accessible within existing resource constraints.

Across all three states, a common structural dynamic emerges: aspirations are shaped by education and exposure, but outcomes are shaped by constraints. These constraints include:

- Limited formal sector absorption capacity,
- Industrial contraction and weak sectoral diversification,
- Inadequate access to startup capital and credit,
- Political filtering of opportunity,
- Infrastructure gaps (especially digital and energy),
- Weak institutional continuity.

The redirection of aspirations is therefore not simply psychological; it is structural. Youth recalibrate ambitions to align with what is realistically attainable within the system they inhabit. In Abuja, this recalibration often takes the form of international migration planning. In Kaduna, it involves sectoral shifts into teaching or informal trade. In Oyo, it manifests as a move into saturated artisan markets.

Yet it is critical to underscore that aspiration itself remains robust. Youth repeatedly express interest in stable employment, professional growth, creative and dignified work, and economic independence. Even those who have redirected into craftwork or informal enterprise articulate a desire for expansion, improved tools, or transition into more secure roles. The presence of ambition alongside constrained pathways produces a tension that defines much of the youth employment landscape.

Youths do not lack ambition. They lack enabling capital, institutional stability, and opportunity fairness. Their employment trajectories are shaped less by preference than by constraint, and their career pathways are negotiated within a system that often narrows rather than expands possibilities. Understanding this tension between aspiration and constraint is essential for designing policies that move beyond skills rhetoric toward structural reform.

#### **4.1.1. Informality, Underemployment, and Job Quality**

While unemployment remains a central concern in public discourse, the findings from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states suggest that the more pervasive challenge facing Nigerian youth is not simply joblessness, but the quality, adequacy, and sustainability of the jobs that do exist. Across all three states, youth employment is consistently marked by precarious income, sectoral oversaturation, weak protections, and an emerging pattern of emotional detachment from work.

The informal economy plays a dominant role in absorbing youth labour, yet it rarely guarantees a stable or sufficient income. Many young people are technically employed but remain economically insecure. An Abuja FGD participant captured this imbalance between effort and reward:

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*“The energy you put in is not equal to the income you get at the end of the day.” FGD Abuja, Participant 8*

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The qualitative findings highlighting the predominance of informal, low-quality employment across the three study locations are strongly reinforced by national labour force evidence. Analysis of the 2022 Nigeria Labour Force Survey shows that approximately 96% of employed youths are engaged in informal work, with only about 3.9% in formal employment (See Annex 3, Table 2). This overwhelming dominance of informality aligns with interview narratives describing youth engagement in petty trade, small-scale agriculture, and casual service activities as the most accessible livelihood options. Respondents consistently emphasised that most jobs available to young people are not structured or secure, a pattern quantitatively validated by the extremely low share of formal employment captured in the survey.

Further disaggregation of employment status reveals that over 50% of youths are own-account workers, while an additional 19.9% contribute to family enterprises, compared to just 13.9% in wage employment (See Annex 3, Table 2). This structure mirrors qualitative accounts of self-employment being less a choice and more a necessity driven by limited formal job opportunities. Across KIs and FGDs, participants repeatedly framed entrepreneurship as survivalist rather than opportunity-driven, which is consistent with the quantitative dominance of informal self-employment. Together, these findings confirm that Nigeria's youth labour market remains heavily characterised by informality, precarious work arrangements, and limited access to stable wage employment.

Analysis of the secondary quantitative data reveals that only 6.8% of workers have permanent contracts, while the vast majority operate without clearly defined contractual arrangements. In addition, just 1.6% of youths report access to social security, indicating extremely limited coverage of employment-related protection (See Annex 3, Table 2). These findings directly mirror respondents' accounts of working without formal agreements, job security, or benefits, with many describing their employment as "temporary, uncertain, or based on daily earnings.

The lack of formalisation extends beyond contracts to the broader structure of employment relationships. A significant proportion of respondents in the survey reported unknown or undefined contract types, reinforcing qualitative insights that employer–employee relationships are often informal and unregulated. This aligns with narratives from both youth and key informants who emphasised that "even when you are working, there is no guarantee of continuity or protection." The convergence of qualitative and quantitative evidence highlights a systemic deficit in decent work conditions, suggesting that employment generation alone is insufficient without parallel improvements in job quality and labour protections.

A gig worker in Oyo State described income volatility as inherent to the model of digital and informal pathways that create income opportunities:

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*"..it's not really stable because it's gig work. You can get a gig that can last for months, and you can get one that will span just a few days. So, if you can't get as much as possible to keep earning consistently, you will experience a fluctuation in earnings. So, it's not really stable in terms of the frequency of the work and the earnings you get from such." NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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These statements highlight a fundamental productivity–income disconnect. Youth frequently work long hours, often juggling multiple roles, yet earnings remain insufficient to meet living costs. The problem, therefore, is not inactivity but inadequate return on labour.

Beyond income volatility, protection deficits are stark, and precarity is normalised within emerging digital pathways. This is attested to by this statement from a respondent:

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*"For conventional employment, you'll have access to health insurance and some allowances. But for a gig worker, you don't have public holidays to*



*observe, and you don't have insurance. If you fall sick, you are paying out of pocket. You don't have any other form of benefit except the pay you are receiving for your services." NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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In Kaduna, a similar frustration was expressed more directly:

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*"The job and the pay do not correspond." FGD Kaduna Participant*

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Here, the issue is framed as a structural mismatch between labour value and compensation. Youth perceive a disconnect between their qualifications, effort, and remuneration. Underemployment—where individuals work below their skill level or in unstable arrangements—emerges as a defining feature of the youth labour market. In Oyo State, this pattern was confirmed emphatically. When participants were asked whether their jobs provided enough income to meet obligations, the response was unanimous

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*"No!" (NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 Oyo)*

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This collective response underscores the pervasiveness of income inadequacy. Even within artisan trades, where some participants described their work as "dignifying", earnings are constrained by oversaturation and rising cost of living. Competition among similar micro-enterprises erodes margins, while inflation further diminishes purchasing power.

Importantly, wage insufficiency is not limited to the informal sector. Public sector employees in Oyo State also acknowledged the erosion of income adequacy:

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*"If you remove 500,000 Naira rent, how much will be left?" NG\_KII\_PUS\_31 (Oyo)*

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This observation is significant because it challenges the assumption that formal or public employment guarantees stability. Even where jobs are secure, wages no longer align with housing costs, transport, food prices, and family responsibilities. Thus, the quality crisis spans both informal and formal sectors.

Simultaneously, dignity in work is framed multidimensionally. The Oyo employer defines dignified work not solely by pay, but by relational and developmental conditions:

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*"Am I happy with the job? Does the company consider my interests? Am I given time to refill? Is my mental health put into consideration? Are there opportunities for me to train and be better in the space? Does the pay fit the current realities of our economy? Does the company treat its staff not just like tools to get the job done but like humans who also break down and need to recharge?" NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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Beyond income insufficiency, the findings reveal a psychological dimension to precarious work. In Abuja and Kaduna FGDs, youth described working primarily for survival rather than fulfilment, often detaching emotionally from roles that provide little security or growth. Employment becomes transactional, performed to meet immediate needs rather than pursued as a long-term career pathway.

Oversaturation further compounds the problem. In Oyo and Kaduna, artisan sectors such as tailoring, hairdressing,



and petty trading are crowded, leading to intense local competition. Entry barriers are low, but sustainability is fragile. This congestion creates a labour market in which many are employed, yet few thrive.

Additionally, gig and freelance work, more visible in Abuja and emerging in Oyo, introduces flexibility but lacks regulatory protection. While some youth report earning competitively in digital or remote roles, there are no social protections, no wage floors, and no enforcement mechanisms to guard against exploitation or sudden income loss. The growth of this segment represents opportunity, but also new forms of vulnerability.

The evidence across the three states points to a broader structural condition. Employment in Nigeria's youth labour market is often insecure, insufficient, and disconnected from long-term mobility. Underemployment is widespread, informal work is saturated, and even formal roles struggle to keep pace with inflation and living costs. The issue facing Nigerian youth is not unemployment alone; it is income insufficiency and dignity erosion. Many young people are working, but their work does not guarantee stability, progression, or an adequate living standard. Addressing youth employment, therefore, requires moving beyond job counts toward a deeper focus on job quality, wage adequacy, productivity alignment, and social protection.

#### 4.1.2. Political Connection as Gatekeeper

Across all three states, respondents repeatedly identified social and political connections as a decisive factor in accessing desirable employment. In Oyo State, youth participants expressed this perception unambiguously:

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*“You must be connected to people in top positions before you can get prestigious, high-paying jobs or before you can get jobs that match your qualifications.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03, R6 (Oyo)*

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This statement reflects a widely held belief that merit alone is insufficient. Employment—particularly in government or high-paying formal roles—is seen as mediated through networks of influence. Such perceptions shape behaviour: youth invest time not only in skill acquisition, but also in cultivating social capital, where possible.

An academic respondent in Abuja reinforced this concern, pointing to more explicit forms of elite filtering:

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*“Another thing that I’ve also observed where I am is the selling of jobs, even in the federal government jobs. Many people now have to pay to get employed.” NG\_KII\_AR\_30 (Abuja)*

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Here, the issue moves beyond informal networking into allegations of transactional access. Whether literal or perceived, the idea that opportunities in the civil service can be “sold” or reserved for insiders undermines confidence in institutional fairness. It also deepens distrust in public recruitment processes and weakens the legitimacy of labour market governance structures.

In Kaduna, civil society actors similarly described the importance of background and support systems:

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*“If you don’t come from a privileged family or have a supportive network, life is hard.” NG\_KII\_CS\_02 (Kaduna)*

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This observation broadens the lens from political patronage to socio-economic advantage. Youth from wealthier or more connected families are better positioned to access internships, finance startup ventures, relocate for



opportunities, or navigate bureaucratic systems. Those without such support structures face compounded disadvantage. Thus, labour market inequality is reproduced not only through institutional design, but also through inherited social capital.

### 4.1.3. Gender Constraints and Normative Barriers

Gender further structures access to employment across the three states. While both young men and women face economic constraints, the evidence suggests that women encounter additional normative and mobility-based barriers.

In Oyo State, a participant explained:

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*“It’s more difficult for women, men can travel to far places to farm, but it is difficult for women.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03, R1 (Oyo)*

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This statement illustrates how gender norms intersect with geography and occupational structure. In rural and peri-urban contexts, certain livelihood strategies, such as farming, transport services, or long-distance trade, are socially coded as male. Women’s participation is constrained by expectations regarding mobility, domestic responsibilities, and safety concerns. As a result, their employment options are narrower, even within the same local economy. In both Abuja and Kaduna, women in male-dominated sectors (such as technology or industrial trades) reported subtle forms of exclusion or under-recognition. Although not always formalised as discrimination, these patterns influence hiring, promotion, and remuneration.

The qualitative evidence on gendered constraints in employment is further reinforced by patterns observed in Figures 4–6 (See Annex 3). Across the datasets, women who are more likely to be represented among certain marital categories and lower education levels consistently exhibit weaker labour market outcomes and higher vulnerability. For instance, Figure 4 (employment by marital status) shows that individuals in categories more associated with constrained mobility and caregiving roles, particularly among single and previously married groups, experience relatively higher shares of unemployment and NEET in earlier years (notably 2014–2018), before improvements in later periods. This aligns with qualitative accounts that social expectations around domestic roles and safety limit women’s participation in geographically mobile or physically demanding occupations such as agriculture, transport, and trade.

Similarly, Figure 5 (employment by education) highlights that while employment outcomes improve with higher levels of education, significant proportions of youth, especially those with secondary or lower education, remain either unemployed or NEET. Given that women are disproportionately represented in lower-income and lower-education cohorts due to structural barriers in access to education, this further constrains their labour market entry and progression. Even among those with higher education, the persistence of unemployment and underemployment reflects qualitative findings that women face additional barriers beyond skills, including hiring biases and occupational segregation.

Figure 6 (employment by rural–urban residence) provides additional insight into the geographic dimension of these gendered constraints. While rural areas often show higher employment rates overall, largely due to engagement in agriculture and informal activities, these opportunities are not equally accessible to women. Qualitative findings indicate that mobility restrictions and safety concerns limit women’s participation in these rural livelihood strategies, effectively excluding them from sectors that absorb a large share of the labour force. In urban areas such as Abuja, where opportunities in services and digital sectors are expanding, women still reported subtle exclusion in male-dominated fields like technology and industrial trades.

Taken together, the quantitative trends and qualitative narratives point to a consistent conclusion: gender norms interact with geography, education, and sectoral structures to produce layered constraints on women’s employment.



Even where aggregate employment indicators improve over time, these underlying inequalities persist, shaping not only access to jobs but also the quality and sustainability of employment outcomes for young women.

#### 4.1.4. Geographic Disadvantage and Infrastructure Gaps

Digital opportunity is unevenly distributed. The Oyo gig respondent described structural barriers this way:

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*“As a result of the widespread poverty level in Nigeria, being able to afford a basic personal computer is one of the huge barriers that a lot of youth face in being able to access the digital economy. Irrespective of the skills you are offering, to be able to offer that effectively, you need a personal computer. And also, access to good Internet is a huge barrier to entry. Depending on your location, it can be very frustrating, slow and very poor. That can affect the quality of your work as well. Also, another challenge is power [ electricity].” NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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Similarly, the Kaduna academic reinforced this structural filter:

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*“Digital access plays a major role. Limited access to the internet and unreliable electricity significantly affect how young people learn new skills and access job opportunities.” NG\_KII\_AR\_31*

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Digital transformation, while promising, risks deepening stratification between connected and disconnected youth. Geography also shapes opportunity access. Youth in urban centres such as Abuja may benefit from proximity to federal institutions and international organisations, yet they also face intense competition. In contrast, youth in more rural or peri-urban settings in Kaduna and Oyo encounter infrastructural barriers, unreliable electricity, limited internet connectivity, and poor transport networks that restrict access to emerging digital opportunities.

These infrastructural gaps become particularly significant as the labour market evolves toward digital and remote work. Without reliable electricity and internet connectivity, youth are excluded from online training platforms, gig opportunities, and application portals for grants or government programs. Thus, geography operates as a structural filter that compounds socio-economic disadvantage.

#### 4.1.5. Intersecting Filters of Access

Taken together, the evidence suggests that access to employment in Nigeria is mediated by three interlocking filters:

- a) **Networks and Political Connection** determine entry into high-value formal opportunities.
- b) **Gender Norms and Mobility Constraints** shape occupational pathways and geographic reach.
- c) **Socio-economic Background and Geography** influence exposure, financing capacity, and digital access.

These filters interact rather than operate independently. A young woman from a low-income rural household without political connections faces layered constraints that extend far beyond skill acquisition.

The employment landscape in Nigeria is not neutral terrain. It is mediated by networks, gender norms, and socio-economic background. Merit and effort matter, but they operate within a system where access itself is unevenly distributed. Addressing youth employment challenges, therefore, requires not only expanding job creation, but also dismantling structural barriers that filter opportunity before young people can compete on equal footing.

The analysis of Nigeria’s youth employment landscape demonstrates that labour market outcomes are shaped by structural imbalances, oversaturation in informal sectors, constrained formal absorption, and unequal access



mediated by networks and socio-economic background. However, these patterns do not emerge in isolation. They are embedded within, and influenced by, policy choices, institutional arrangements, and political incentives that shape how opportunities are created, distributed, and regulated. To understand why informality persists, why aspirations are repeatedly redirected, and why access remains filtered, it is necessary to examine the policy environment itself.

## 4.2. YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICY AND POLITICAL PRIORITIES

While the preceding section examined the structural features of Nigeria's youth labour market, understanding why these conditions persist requires turning to the policy and political environment that shapes them. Youth employment outcomes are not solely the product of demographic pressure or private sector weakness; they are primarily a product of policy direction (or lack of it), fiscal prioritisation, institutional coordination, and political incentives. In other words, the youth employment crisis is as much a governance issue as it is a labour market issue.

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, stakeholders consistently acknowledged that Nigeria does not lack policy frameworks addressing youth development, skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, and employment generation. Numerous strategies, action plans, and intervention programmes exist at the Federal and State levels. However, the evidence suggests a persistent gap between policy articulation and policy implementation. Youth awareness of government programmes remains limited; funding is often insufficient or irregular, and institutional fragmentation undermines coherence and continuity.

Moreover, youth employment occupies a complex position within political priorities. It is rhetorically prominent, frequently referenced in manifestos, speeches, and development plans, yet operationally constrained by competing fiscal pressures, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and, in some cases, patronage dynamics. The allocation of opportunities, whether through recruitment, grants, or training schemes, is often perceived as uneven, reinforcing distrust among young people who already face structural barriers in the labour market.

This section, therefore, interrogates the policy ecosystem through a political economy lens. It examines not only the existence of youth employment policies but also their implementation pathways, funding realities, institutional coordination mechanisms, and the extent to which political considerations shape access and outcomes. By situating youth employment within broader governance structures, this analysis seeks to explain why the structural imbalances identified in Section 3.1 persist despite a proliferation of policy initiatives.

The first subsection presents a summary and analysis of the desk review of youth employment policies in Nigeria (See annex 2 for youth policies and programs in Nigeria). The subsequent subsections explore: the alignment between policy frameworks and labour market realities; political will, budgeting, and prioritisation; (iii) policy continuity and institutional coordination; and youth participation and voice in policy design. Together, they illuminate how political and institutional dynamics shape both the possibilities and limits of youth employment reform in Nigeria.

## 4.3. DESK REVIEW OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT POLICIES IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's response to youth unemployment has been characterised by a proliferation of policies, programmes, and strategic frameworks spanning multiple sectors and administrations. This policy landscape reflects a sustained recognition of youth unemployment as a critical development challenge, as well as a political priority with implications for economic growth, social stability, and national security. However, the desk-based review of youth employment policies reveals a paradox: while policy attention is abundant, coherence, implementation effectiveness, and measurable impact remain uneven.

At a foundational level, Nigeria's youth employment policy architecture is anchored in broad national frameworks such as the **National Youth Policy** and the **National Employment Policy**, which articulate government commitment to job creation, human capital development, and decent work. These frameworks establish normative principles for labour market governance, youth empowerment, and inclusive economic participation. However,



their broad and aspirational nature often limits their operational utility. While they provide strategic direction, they lack sufficiently detailed implementation pathways, clear accountability mechanisms, and enforceable instruments required to translate policy intent into measurable outcomes.

Building on these overarching frameworks, more targeted strategies such as the **Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP)** represent attempts to create a more coordinated and structured response. NIYEAP adopts a comprehensive approach organised around employability, entrepreneurship, employment creation, and equal opportunity. Its design reflects alignment with global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Decent Jobs for Youth initiative, and it explicitly seeks to reduce fragmentation across youth employment interventions. However, as observed in the desk review, the effectiveness of NIYEAP is constrained by familiar systemic challenges, including weak institutional coordination, limited monitoring systems, and insufficient financing. The absence of consistently costed implementation plans, clearly defined agency roles, and robust tracking mechanisms undermines its ability to function as a true coordinating framework.

In parallel, Nigeria has deployed a series of programme-based interventions aimed at addressing youth unemployment through skills development, entrepreneurship support, and temporary employment generation. These include large-scale initiatives such as **N-Power**, **YESSO**, and **YouWin!**, as well as more recent programmes such as the **Three Million Technical Talent (3MTT)** initiative, the **National Youth Skills Programme (NYSP)**, and the **Skill-Up Artisans (SUPA)** programme. Collectively, these interventions reflect a multi-pronged strategy that combines income support, vocational training, digital skills development, and enterprise promotion.

These programmes demonstrate several strengths. They often provide direct income support, enhance access to skills training, and target emerging sectors such as digital technology, renewable energy, and agribusiness. Initiatives like 3MTT, for instance, signal a strategic recognition of the digital economy as a potential source of large-scale employment, while programmes such as SUPA acknowledge the importance of formalising and upgrading skills within the informal sector. Similarly, entrepreneurship-focused interventions such as the Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme and YouWin! attempt to reposition youth as job creators rather than job seekers.

However, despite their diversity and ambition, these programmes exhibit recurring limitations. A central challenge is scale mismatch, most programmes reach only a fraction of the youth population relative to the magnitude of unemployment. Even large-scale interventions such as N-Power, while impactful at the individual level, have had a limited aggregate effect on national unemployment rates. This reflects a broader structural constraint: programme-based interventions, regardless of design quality, cannot fully compensate for insufficient labour demand within the wider economy.

A second and more persistent issue relates to sustainability and continuity. Many programmes are time-bound, politically driven, or dependent on fluctuating funding streams. As a result, they often lack clear exit strategies, long-term integration into labour market systems, or pathways for beneficiaries to transition into stable employment. The discontinuation or redesign of programmes across political cycles further reinforces a pattern of policy discontinuity, limiting cumulative impact.

Third, the desk review highlights weak integration between policy design and labour market realities, particularly in relation to skills development. While numerous programmes focus on training, the quality, relevance, and depth of training remain inconsistent. This contributes to a persistent education–employment mismatch, where graduates and trainees possess credentials but lack market-relevant competencies. In many cases, training interventions are not sufficiently linked to industry demand, private sector participation, or job placement mechanisms.

A critical gap emerging from the review is the limited strategic focus on demand-side job creation. While many policies emphasise skills development and entrepreneurship, fewer provide a coherent framework for expanding labour demand at scale. Notably, the policy landscape shows limited integration with broader economic strategies such as industrial policy, trade policy, and MSME development frameworks. This disconnect constrains the ability of youth employment policies to align with sectors capable of generating mass employment.



The **Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP)** represents a partial exception, particularly in its emphasis on job creation through sectoral interventions in agriculture, manufacturing, and MSMEs. However, its design as a crisis-response mechanism limits its long-term structural impact. While it demonstrates the potential of coordinated, sector-focused interventions, its short-term orientation highlights the absence of a sustained, integrated employment strategy embedded within national economic planning.

Another significant constraint relates to financing, budgeting, and expenditure transparency. The desk review reveals limited publicly available data on budget allocations, expenditure patterns, and financial tracking for many youth employment policies. This lack of fiscal transparency undermines accountability and makes it difficult to assess value for money or programme effectiveness. Furthermore, inconsistent funding flows constrain programme scale and continuity.

Institutional capacity and coordination challenges further compound these issues. Youth employment interventions are implemented across multiple ministries, agencies, and levels of government, often with overlapping mandates and limited coordination. This fragmentation leads to duplication of efforts, inefficient resource allocation, and inconsistent implementation quality across regions. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems exacerbate this problem, limiting the ability to generate evidence, learn from past interventions, and adapt policies accordingly. Underlying these structural and institutional constraints are broader governance challenges. Issues such as bureaucratic inefficiency, limited accountability, and corruption affect programme delivery, resource allocation, and beneficiary selection processes. These governance deficits not only reduce policy effectiveness but also shape youth perceptions of fairness and access, reinforcing distrust in formal systems.

Overall, the desk review reveals that Nigeria's youth employment policy landscape is characterised by policy abundance but implementation fragility. The challenge is not the absence of ideas, frameworks, or initiatives, but the lack of alignment between policy design, institutional capacity, financing mechanisms, and labour market realities. This analysis reinforces key findings from the primary data. The policy–implementation gap identified in KII and FGDs is not merely perceptual; it is structurally embedded within the design and execution of youth employment policies. Similarly, the persistence of informality, precarity, and unequal access to opportunity reflects deeper systemic issues that extend beyond individual programmes.

Addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria therefore requires a shift from fragmented, programme-based interventions toward a coherent, long-term, and system-wide policy approach. Such an approach must integrate demand-side job creation, align education and skills development with industry needs, ensure sustainable financing, strengthen institutional coordination, and embed accountability mechanisms. Without such alignment, the proliferation of policies will continue to yield limited impact relative to the scale of the challenge.

#### 4.3.1. Policy-Implementation Gap

Across Nigeria, a consistent theme emerged from both institutional stakeholders and youth participants: Nigeria does not suffer from a shortage of youth employment policies, rather, it suffers from a persistent and systemic gap between policy formulation and policy implementation. The presence of frameworks, action plans, and intervention schemes has not translated into sustained impact at the level of young people's lived experiences. Institutionally, youth employment policy is framed around coordination, regulation, and strategic oversight rather than direct service delivery.

A senior official from the Federal Ministry of Youth Development in Abuja articulated the Ministry's positioning:

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*“Our mandate is a very simple one. It’s about formulating, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating policies and programmes for youths. We stand as a regulator, as the middleman between agencies, between stakeholders, between young people and the government, and do this solely by*



*formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes.” NG\_KII\_RI\_33*

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However, implementation realities reveal deep constraints.

A civil society actor in Kaduna articulated this distinction clearly:

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*“Nigeria doesn’t lack policies. We lack implementation and sustainability. If we can implement even 10% of the policies we already have, life will be better. Implementation and domestication, taking policies down to where they are needed, are what we need, not more policies.” NG\_KII\_CS\_02 (Kaduna)*

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This is further amplified by a respondent from Oyo State:

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*“Nigeria is very good at policy making, but the major problem is that beyond policy making, what efforts are actually put into implementation? I think that’s where the problem actually lies. When it’s time for implementation, you see that it’s either the whole is politicized or some individuals just bring in their corrupt tendencies. We have fantastic policies on paper, but when it comes to implementation, it becomes a problem.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This statement captures a central paradox in Nigeria’s youth employment landscape. Policy production is active and visible; documents are developed, initiatives are launched, and programmes are announced. However, implementation mechanisms, funding consistency, institutional coordination, monitoring systems, and long-term sustainability planning are weaker and often fragmented. As a result, many initiatives fail to scale beyond pilot stages or are discontinued when administrative priorities shift.

Public sector respondents in Oyo reinforced this perception from within government structures:

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*“They bring in policies, but they are never implemented.” NG\_KII\_PUS\_31 (Oyo)*

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Here, the issue is not external critique but internal acknowledgement. Even officials tasked with operationalising programmes recognise bottlenecks between design and execution. These bottlenecks include delayed budget releases, insufficient allocation, bureaucratic overlap, procurement constraints, and political interference. Policies may exist formally, but their translation into accessible opportunities is inconsistent.

Monitoring challenges compound these constraints. Various submissions by implementing agencies reveal this challenge and its wider implications. This reveals an institutional recognition of policy–outcome gaps.

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*“After one year, two years, we lose track of what these people have become. And we don’t have that data to inform decisions. You know, if we have such data, long-term data, we can go back and say, oh, what can we*



## *do better?" NG\_KII\_RI\_33*

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Perhaps most revealing, however, is the perspective of youth themselves. In Oyo State, when FGD participants were asked whether they were aware of major federal employment and skills programmes, such as the 3 Million Technical Talents (3MTT), Nigeria Youth Investment Fund (NYIF), Industrial Training Fund (ITF), and National Information Technology Development Agency (NITTDA), the response was unequivocally NO, meaning that they were not aware of these major federal employment and skills programmes.

This lack of awareness signals a breakdown in outreach and communication. Policies cannot produce impact if their intended beneficiaries are unaware of their existence. Even well-designed programmes lose effectiveness if dissemination mechanisms are weak or access channels are opaque. The awareness gap suggests that implementation challenges extend beyond funding and coordination to include public engagement and information flow.

Across states, the policy implementation gap manifests in several recurring patterns:

- **Fragmented Delivery:** Multiple agencies operate parallel youth programmes without integrated tracking or coordination.
- **Funding Instability:** Programmes are subject to irregular financing, limiting continuity.
- **Weak Monitoring and Evaluation:** Feedback loops between implementation and redesign are underdeveloped.
- **Political Discontinuity:** Changes in administration often lead to rebranding or abandonment rather than refinement.
- **Limited Youth Engagement:** Youth are often consulted late (if at all) in policy cycles, reducing ownership and responsiveness.

The cumulative effect of these weaknesses is a perception that youth employment policies are symbolic rather than transformative. Youth see announcements but do not consistently experience outcomes. Stakeholders observe frameworks but struggle with delivery. Consequently, trust in institutional capacity diminishes. Importantly, this gap also contributes to the structural labour market conditions outlined in Section 3.1. When policies intended to expand skills training, entrepreneurship financing, or job matching fail to scale effectively, the informal sector continues to function as the default absorber of labour. In this way, weak implementation indirectly reinforces the structural imbalance between supply and demand.

The youth employment crisis in Nigeria is not primarily a problem of policy absence. It is a problem of weak implementation, limited outreach, funding instability, and policy discontinuity. Without strengthening the institutional mechanisms that translate policy intent into sustained practice, new frameworks risk replicating the same cycle of announcement without impact.

### **4.3.2. Political Will, Budgeting, and National Priorities**

Beyond the technical challenges of implementation, the evidence from study suggests that youth employment occupies an ambiguous position within Nigeria's political and fiscal priorities. While it features prominently in public discourse, manifestos, and policy statements, the allocation of financial and institutional resources often does not match its rhetorical importance. This tension between visibility and viability raises questions about the depth of political commitment to structural youth employment reform.

Stakeholders across the three states consistently emphasised funding as a central constraint. In Oyo State, a public sector respondent pointed directly to resource limitations as the primary obstacle to policy effectiveness:

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*"Funding is the major problem." NG\_KII\_PUS\_34 (Oyo)*

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This acknowledgement reflects broader fiscal pressures faced by both federal and state governments. Competing demands, including infrastructure, debt servicing, security, and recurrent expenditures, constrain the budgetary space available for youth employment initiatives. As a result, programmes designed to address skills development, entrepreneurship financing, or job creation may receive insufficient allocation or experience delayed disbursement. Closely linked to the problem of funding is the perennial problem of corruption in governance and administration. A respondent identified corruption as a structural impediment:

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*“There are several challenges, but I believe corruption is one of the major ones. For example, in some government institutions, there are cases of ghost workers [fictitious workers whose monthly salaries are paid into the pockets of corrupt officials]. Recently, about 3,000 ghost workers were uncovered in Katsina State. This represents jobs that could have gone to real individuals.”*  
NG\_KII\_AR\_31

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Administrative inefficiencies and leakage directly affect employment access and fiscal allocation. In Kaduna, respondents noted that youth employment is frequently included in policy agendas and strategic plans, yet sustained financing remains uncertain. Civil society actors observed that while youth-focused interventions are often launched with visibility, they are not always embedded within long-term budgetary frameworks. This contributes to a cycle in which initiatives are announced, piloted, and subsequently scaled back or discontinued due to fiscal shortfalls.

Abuja respondents highlighted an additional dimension: political timing. Youth employment tends to receive heightened attention during electoral cycles, when unemployment figures are mobilised as campaign issues. However, after elections, priorities may shift. This episodic attention reinforces perceptions that youth employment is politically salient but structurally under-prioritised.

The political economy of budgeting further complicates the picture. Even when allocations exist on paper, execution rates may be low. Bureaucratic bottlenecks, procurement delays, and administrative inefficiencies weaken the translation of budgetary commitment into tangible opportunity. Moreover, limited transparency around expenditure tracking makes it difficult for youth or civil society actors to hold institutions accountable.

The consequences of underfunding are visible in multiple areas:

- Training programmes unable to scale beyond limited cohorts;
- Entrepreneurship schemes that disburse funds to a few beneficiaries relative to demand;
- Weak monitoring systems due to insufficient staffing or operational budgets;
- Inadequate infrastructure investment to support digital inclusion.

At the same time, private sector actors emphasised the need for stronger state–market coordination. Employers noted skill gaps but rarely reported structured collaboration with public institutions to address them systematically. This disconnect suggests that political prioritisation of youth employment has not yet translated into a coherent, cross-sectoral strategy linking education, industry, finance, and labour regulation.

Importantly, fiscal constraint alone does not fully explain the gap. Respondents across states also pointed to political mediation of opportunity, where recruitment processes, grants, or programme access are influenced by networks or discretionary decision-making. Such practices dilute the impact of limited resources by diverting them away from merit-based allocation.

The findings indicate that youth employment occupies a rhetorically elevated but fiscally constrained and often distorted space within national and state priorities. It is recognised as important, yet insufficiently institutionalised within durable funding and accountability frameworks.



The difficulties associated with labour market entry, widely reported in the qualitative data, despite Government rhetorics, are clearly reflected in national-level statistics on unemployment dynamics. The secondary analysis indicates that 58.7% of unemployed youths are seeking their first job, compared to 41.3% who have previously been employed (See Annex 3, Table 2). This reinforces recurring narratives from young respondents who described prolonged job searches after completing education, often without success.

Disaggregation by demographic characteristics further deepens this insight. Younger youths (15–24 years) account for the majority (over 60%) of first-time job seekers, confirming that early labour market entry is particularly constrained (See Annex 3, Table 3). Additionally, female youths constitute a larger share of first-time job seekers, reflecting gendered barriers already identified in the qualitative findings, including limited access to networks, mobility constraints, and social expectations. Urban areas also show higher concentrations of first-time job seekers, which aligns with qualitative evidence of intense competition for limited formal opportunities in cities such as Abuja and Ibadan. These patterns collectively underscore that entry into the labour market is not only delayed but also uneven across gender, age, and location.

Budgetary allocation, execution consistency, and institutional coordination do not yet reflect the scale of the challenge posed by youth unemployment in Nigeria. Without sustained fiscal commitment and insulation from short-term political cycles, youth employment initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

### 4.3.3. Policy Consistency and Continuity

Beyond questions of funding and political will, another recurring concern across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states is the lack of policy consistency and institutional continuity. Stakeholders repeatedly described a governance environment in which youth employment initiatives are vulnerable to administrative transitions, bureaucratic fragmentation, and shifting political priorities. As a result, programmes are frequently redesigned, rebranded, or abandoned rather than refined and institutionalised.

In Kaduna, a respondent pointed to a pattern of discontinuity linked to changes in leadership. One academic observed:

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*“So, it’s just the government waking up tomorrow and changing. You can even sit down with the government and plan something, and that’s when they change their mind.” NG\_KII\_CS0\_02 (Kaduna)*

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This cycle of reinvention creates instability within the policy ecosystem. Instead of building incrementally on existing programmes, strengthening weak components and scaling successful ones, new administrations often prioritise visibility and differentiation. Youth employment initiatives become markers of political identity rather than components of a long-term, institutionalised strategy. The result is fragmentation rather than cumulative reform. In Kaduna, government actors described similar challenges at the implementation level. One respondent noted how bureaucratic resistance and internal dynamics can stall reform processes:

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*“Your file will be dumped; the system will frustrate you until you leave.” NG\_KII\_PM\_15 (Kaduna)*

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This statement illustrates how institutional inertia undermines continuity. Even when policy frameworks exist, weak administrative follow-through and internal bottlenecks can disrupt execution. Over time, such disruptions erode institutional memory, as programme staff rotate or exit and documentation systems remain weak. A respondent provides strong evidence of an institutional disconnect between government policy processes and grassroots actors.



He describes failed attempts to engage government agencies:

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*“For about six months, we needed to just let the Government know what was going on. So, we reached out to them. Every entity was blocked. Till now, we’ve not been able to reach out to them... to even tell them this is what we are doing.” NG\_KII\_CS\_45 (Oyo)*

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He further notes that consultation processes often lack genuine incorporation of stakeholder input:

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*“They just want to hear from you; the input doesn’t matter. At the end of the day, they just bring people together, give them food, take pictures, post on social media, and everyone goes home.” NG\_KII\_CS\_45 (Oyo)*

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These insights reinforce earlier findings regarding performative consultation processes without substantive policy integration.

Beyond implementation gaps and politicised allocation, a recurring theme is the weak institutional linkage between research production and policy formulation. Evidence exists, expertise exists, academic institutions are generating studies, data, and sectoral analyses. Yet respondents consistently suggest that these knowledge outputs rarely shape decision-making in a structured or systematic way.

In Oyo State, an academic respondent (NG\_KII\_AR\_43) articulated this frustration clearly:

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*“Most of the policies that are being put in place are not a product of our research. Do our policymakers even make an effort to harvest information and ideas from this research? It may surprise you that, as a researcher, you have conducted research on something that your school or institute is already doing, yet they are not making the calls; they are not even aware of the effects. It’s just like we do what we do for the sake of an academic exercise.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This statement points to a structural disjuncture between knowledge generation and governance practice. While universities and research institutes produce scholarship, policy cycles appear to operate independently of systematic evidence integration. Research becomes peripheral rather than foundational to policy design.

The respondent reinforces this by contrasting Nigeria’s context with systems where academic gatekeeping is aligned with policy needs, arguing that in some countries, policy actors actively consult peer-reviewed research when designing reforms. In Nigeria, however, research is perceived as academically valuable but institutionally disconnected from state decision-making processes.

This disconnect deepens earlier findings on monitoring and evaluation weaknesses. If programme outcomes are not systematically tracked, and if academic research is not harvested to inform redesign, policy systems become cyclical rather than iterative, frequently launching new, disjointed initiatives without structured learning from previous interventions.

The implication is significant: youth employment reform requires not only better policies and stronger implementation but also an institutionalised evidence-to-policy pipeline. Without structured mechanisms that embed research within policy formulation, monitoring frameworks, and reform design, institutional memory remains weak, and reform



efforts risk being repetitive rather than progressive.

In this sense, the research–policy gap is not merely an academic complaint; it is a governance constraint that limits adaptive capacity within Nigeria’s youth employment ecosystem.

Youth participants also implicitly highlighted the consequences of discontinuity through their lack of awareness of ongoing national programmes. When initiatives are inconsistently communicated, rebranded, or short-lived, beneficiaries struggle to track or trust them. This weakens public confidence and discourages sustained engagement.

The implications of policy inconsistency are significant:

- a) **Loss of Institutional Learning:** Programmes that are discontinued prematurely do not generate long-term data or feedback loops.
- b) **Erosion of Trust:** Youth perceive government interventions as unreliable or politically motivated.
- c) **Inefficient Resource Use:** Repeated programme redesign consumes administrative and financial resources without guaranteeing improved outcomes.
- d) **Fragmented Service Delivery:** Overlapping mandates across ministries and agencies persist without coordinated consolidation.

Furthermore, discontinuity reinforces the structural labour market dynamics identified in Section 3.1. When youth cannot rely on stable policy pathways, whether in skills training, entrepreneurship financing, or job matching, they default to informal and self-driven solutions. The absence of durable institutional scaffolding thus indirectly strengthens informal labour markets.

Policy consistency does not require uniformity across administrations, but it does require institutionalisation. Effective youth employment reform depends on embedding programmes within legal frameworks, stable budget lines, and cross-administration commitments that survive electoral cycles. Without such institutional anchoring, initiatives remain vulnerable to political turnover.

The challenge facing youth employment policy in Nigeria is not only insufficient funding or weak implementation; it is also the absence of durable continuity. Frequent programme reinvention, bureaucratic fragmentation, and politically driven resets prevent cumulative progress. Sustainable reform requires insulating youth employment strategies from short-term political shifts and embedding them within stable institutional structures.

### 1.1.3 Political Interference and Patronage

A recurring and deeply consequential theme across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states is the role of political interference and patronage in shaping access to employment opportunities. While formal recruitment systems, programme guidelines, and merit-based procedures exist on paper, respondents across stakeholder groups described informal mechanisms that mediate who ultimately benefits. These mechanisms operate not as isolated incidents, but as structural features of the opportunity landscape.

In Oyo State, a senior civil service official acknowledged the tension between formal meritocratic procedures and political influence:

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*“Most of the time, the Commission wants to recruit on merit, but sometimes that decision is jeopardised by political influences.” NG\_KII\_PUS\_31 (Oyo)*

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This statement is significant because it reflects internal recognition of the problem. It suggests that institutional actors may intend to uphold merit-based recruitment, yet political pressures, whether from political officeholders, influential stakeholders, or quota negotiations, can distort outcomes. Such distortions may not always be visible in official records, but they shape perceptions and experiences of fairness.



In Kaduna, similar concerns were raised from an academic perspective:

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*“To be honest, the biggest challenge is nepotism. A lot of jobs still go to people based on who they know rather than what they know. It really discourages qualified youths.” NG\_KII\_AR\_08 (Kaduna)*

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This observation reflects the broader social perception that networks, connections, and informal affiliations significantly influence employment outcomes. In contexts where job opportunities are scarce, the belief that access is mediated by “who you know” rather than “what you know” has profound implications. It discourages trust in formal systems, incentivises networking over skill development, and reinforces inequality between those with access to elite circles and those without.

While direct allegations of transactional recruitment were more strongly articulated in Abuja in earlier sections, the pattern across states suggests that patronage is not geographically isolated. It manifests in different forms, such as political recommendation letters, discretionary shortlisting, preferential access to grants, or informal influence over selection panels, but the structural effect is similar: the distribution of opportunity is unevenly mediated.

The implications of systemic patronage extend beyond individual employment outcomes. They shape the broader political economy of youth employment in several ways:

- a) **Erosion of Meritocracy:** When recruitment processes are perceived as politicised, the motivation to invest in skill acquisition may weaken.
- b) **Reinforcement of Inequality:** Youth from privileged or connected backgrounds gain disproportionate access.
- c) **Weak Institutional Legitimacy:** Trust in public institutions declines, particularly among educated but excluded youth.
- d) **Distorted Incentives:** Political loyalty may be rewarded over competence, affecting institutional performance.

Importantly, patronage operates within a context of scarcity. Where employment opportunities are abundant and transparent, political interference may have a limited systemic effect. However, in a labour market already constrained by oversupply and limited absorption capacity, even minor distortions carry amplified consequences. When access is filtered through informal networks, the perception of fairness diminishes, and social frustration intensifies.

The evidence across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo suggests that political interference is not episodic or anecdotal. Rather, it forms part of the structural environment within which youth navigate employment pathways. Patronage in youth employment access is systemic, not incidental. It operates alongside formal procedures, shaping perceptions and outcomes in ways that reinforce inequality and undermine institutional trust. Addressing youth unemployment requires not only expanding opportunities but also strengthening transparency, accountability, and insulation of recruitment processes from political influence.

#### 4.3.4. Youth Voice in Policy Design

A critical dimension of the youth employment policy landscape concerns the extent to which young people meaningfully participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the policies intended to serve them. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, the evidence suggests that while youth participation is often referenced rhetorically, its practical depth and influence remain limited.

Stakeholders frequently described youth engagement as consultative rather than formative. In Kaduna, a civil society respondent noted:



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*“When we look at involvement of CSOs in meaningful policy designs and initiatives so far, we can only attest to being included only during policy review. In certain policy developments, CSOs might not be engaged at the first stage of the process. But at a later stage during review or contributions there are MDAs that engage CSOs in the planning processes to gather information, facts, and data that will help them better plan and strategize.”*  
NG\_KII\_CS0\_04 (Kaduna)

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This observation reflects a broader pattern in which youth organisations and civil society actors are invited to validate or comment on draft policies, rather than to shape foundational priorities or frameworks. Participation occurs, but often late in the policy cycle, after core decisions have already been made. As a result, youth contributions may influence minor adjustments rather than structural direction.

In Abuja, respondents suggested that youth engagement processes sometimes function symbolically. One academic implied that participation mechanisms exist but may not substantially alter outcomes:

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*“Included? I can’t say. I can’t really say a lot of them are included, but I would say that I’ve heard of organizations that bring in NGOs that specialize in those areas to help facilitate policies that can help their recruitment spaces.”* NG\_KII\_CS0\_17 (Abuja)

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This distinction between validation and design is critical. Validation implies endorsement of pre-existing decisions; design implies co-creation. When youth participation is confined to endorsement stages, policy ownership remains concentrated within political and bureaucratic elites.

At the community level, FGDs revealed limited awareness of structured avenues for policy engagement. In Oyo State, participants demonstrated unfamiliarity with major federal youth employment programmes. The absence of awareness suggests not only outreach gaps, but also limited two-way communication between institutions and beneficiaries. If youth are unaware of programmes, it is unlikely they are substantially influencing their structure.

Youth with stronger networks are more likely to access consultation platforms, leadership forums, and policy roundtables. Those from marginalised backgrounds may remain excluded from even the spaces designed for “youth engagement.”

Across states, the pattern that emerges is one of stratified participation. Urban, educated, and networked youth are more likely to be represented in policy discussions, while rural youth, artisans, gig workers, and young women with limited mobility are less visible in formal policy arenas. Consequently, policies may reflect the perspectives of a narrow subset of youth rather than the diversity of lived experiences documented in FGDs.

The limited depth of youth voice has important implications:

- a) **Policy-Reality Disconnect:** Without grounded input from diverse youth populations, programmes risk misalignment with actual labour market constraints.
- b) **Weak Ownership:** Youth may view policies as externally imposed rather than collectively shaped.
- c) **Reduced Accountability:** When beneficiaries are not embedded in monitoring mechanisms, feedback loops remain weak.

At the same time, youth agency outside formal policy structures is significant. Across all three states, young people described self-organised training initiatives, peer mentorship networks, and digital learning communities. These bottom-up efforts demonstrate capacity for leadership and innovation. However, they operate largely outside



institutional frameworks rather than being integrated into them.

Thus, the challenge is not youth disengagement; it is institutional under-integration of youth perspectives. Meaningful participation would require early-stage co-design processes, decentralised consultation mechanisms, and transparent feedback systems that demonstrate how youth input shapes outcomes.

Youth voice in policy design exists, but it is uneven, consultative, and often symbolic. Participation tends to occur at validation stages rather than agenda-setting stages, and representation is skewed toward more connected groups. Strengthening youth employment policy, therefore, requires moving from tokenistic consultation toward structured co-creation and inclusive participation mechanisms that reflect the diversity of Nigeria's youth population.

#### 4.4. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION REALITIES

While the preceding section examined policy intent, political prioritisation, and participation dynamics, the effectiveness of youth employment reform ultimately depends on the institutions responsible for translating policy into practice. Policies do not implement themselves; they rely on administrative systems, coordination mechanisms, financing structures, monitoring frameworks, and bureaucratic capacity. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, respondents consistently highlighted institutional fragmentation, capacity constraints, and weak inter-agency coordination as critical barriers to delivering meaningful youth employment outcomes.

The evidence suggests that Nigeria's youth employment architecture is characterised by overlapping mandates across ministries, departments, and agencies, often operating in parallel rather than in alignment. Federal and state programmes coexist without strong vertical integration, while local-level implementation capacity varies significantly. In such an environment, even well-designed policies struggle to achieve scale or sustainability. Funding delays, limited data systems, and bureaucratic inertia further weaken the translation of strategic frameworks into tangible results.

This section shifts the focus from political commitment to institutional functionality. It interrogates how mandates are distributed, how coordination is managed, how resources are mobilised and deployed, and how monitoring and accountability systems operate in practice. By examining the implementation realities that underpin youth employment initiatives, this analysis seeks to explain why policy ambition frequently outpaces delivery, and why structural labour market challenges persist despite repeated reform efforts.

##### 4.4.1. Institutional Mandates and Coordination

The effectiveness of youth employment interventions depends not only on policy intent but on the clarity, alignment, and coordination of the institutional actors responsible for implementation. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, the institutional framework for youth employment was described as extensive but fragmented, with multiple ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) operating within overlapping mandates and without consistently effective coordination mechanisms.

At the federal and state levels, responsibility for youth employment is distributed across several institutional domains, including ministries of labour, youth development, education, trade and industry, science and technology, and economic planning. In addition, specialised agencies oversee skills development, entrepreneurship promotion, vocational training, and digital innovation. For instance, in Oyo State, there is a parastatal, the Oyo State Agency for Youth Development, saddled with the responsibility of building well-informed and productive youth with appropriate skills for self-reliance. While this multiplicity reflects recognition of youth employment as a cross-cutting issue, it also creates challenges in ensuring coherence.

In Kaduna, a public sector respondent described how bureaucratic fragmentation affects implementation:

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*“Sometimes the policies are there, but implementation becomes difficult*



*because different agencies have roles, and coordination is not always smooth.” NG\_KII\_PM\_15 (Kaduna)*

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This observation highlights a core structural issue: institutional mandates may be individually clear but collectively misaligned. When agencies pursue parallel initiatives without integrated planning or shared accountability frameworks, duplication of effort and gaps in service delivery can emerge. Some youth may receive overlapping interventions, while others remain unreached.

In Abuja, academic and policy stakeholders noted that youth employment initiatives often exist as standalone programmes rather than components of a unified labour market strategy. This fragmentation weakens the system’s ability to track outcomes comprehensively or scale successful interventions. Without centralised coordination, lessons learned in one programme may not be transferred to others.

At the state level in Oyo, institutional actors acknowledged both their formal mandate and practical constraints. One respondent explained the structured nature of recruitment processes within the civil service while also recognising external pressures:

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*“We have procedures and guidelines, but there are times when external influences affect the process.” NG\_KII\_PUS\_31 (Oyo)*

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This statement underscores the complex relationship between formal institutional design and operational reality. Even where mandates and procedures are defined, implementation may be shaped by broader political and administrative dynamics.

Civil society organisations also play a complementary role in youth employment, particularly in skills development and training. In Kaduna, a civil society respondent described how non-state actors often fill gaps left by public institutions:

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*“So as civil society organizations, we try to bridge the gap where government interventions are not reaching. We step in to provide capacity building, training, and awareness for young people so that they can understand the opportunities available and how to access them. Because government programmes cannot reach everyone, there are always gaps, especially for marginalized youth, and that is where we come in.” NG\_KII\_CS\_02 (Kaduna)*

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While this reflects the resilience and adaptability of the broader ecosystem, it also highlights uneven institutional reach. Reliance on non-state actors to fill systemic gaps may improve access for some youth but does not substitute for coordinated public sector leadership.

Coordination challenges are further compounded by weak vertical integration between federal, state, and local levels. Federal programmes may be designed centrally but implemented locally without sufficient adaptation to regional labour market realities. Conversely, state-level initiatives may lack access to federal data, funding streams, or technical support.

The consequences of fragmented mandates and weak coordination include:

- Duplication of programmes across agencies,



- Inefficient use of limited resources,
- Inconsistent beneficiary targeting,
- Weak monitoring and evaluation systems,
- Reduced scalability of successful interventions.

From a political economy perspective, fragmentation also diffuses accountability. When multiple institutions share responsibility, it becomes more difficult to attribute success or failure clearly. This can reduce incentives for institutional learning and reform.

At the same time, the presence of multiple actors reflects recognition that youth employment is a multidimensional challenge requiring cross-sectoral engagement. The issue, therefore, is not so much about the existence of multiple mandates but the absence of sufficiently strong coordination mechanisms to align them effectively. The fragmentation observed across youth employment interventions reflects not only coordination challenges but also deeper structural divisions within government. Responsibility for skills development, employment creation, enterprise support, and industrial policy is distributed across multiple ministries and agencies, each operating with distinct mandates, budgets, and accountability frameworks. These institutional silos limit the ability to design and implement integrated, demand-led employment strategies.

Several respondents pointed to a culture of “turf protection,” where agencies prioritise institutional autonomy over collaboration. In such contexts, coordination becomes administratively complex and politically sensitive, particularly when reforms require redefining roles or consolidating functions.

From a structural perspective, the separation between institutions responsible for skills supply (often located within education systems) and those responsible for labour demand and economic planning creates a systemic disconnect. This arrangement can result in parallel systems that operate independently rather than as part of a unified labour market strategy.

Applying a political economy lens, these structural arrangements persist because they are embedded within established governance systems, resource control mechanisms, and bureaucratic incentives. Reforming them requires not only technical redesign but also negotiation of institutional power and authority.

Nigeria’s institutional framework for youth employment is extensive but insufficiently integrated. Multiple agencies operate within overlapping mandates, yet coordination mechanisms remain weak. As a result, implementation is fragmented, efficiency is reduced, and impact is uneven. Strengthening institutional coordination, through clearer role delineation, integrated planning, shared data systems, and stronger accountability frameworks, is essential to translating policy intent into sustained employment outcomes for youth.

#### **1.1.4 Implementation Capacity and Financing Gaps**

Beyond fragmented mandates and coordination challenges, stakeholders across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states identified implementation capacity and financing constraints as central barriers to effective youth employment delivery. Even where policies are well-articulated and institutional responsibilities defined, the capacity to execute programmes at scale remains limited by fiscal pressures, human resource gaps, infrastructural weaknesses, and weak monitoring systems.

A recurring theme across all states was funding inadequacy. Youth employment initiatives compete with other urgent public expenditures, including infrastructure development, debt servicing, health, education, and security. In constrained budgetary environments, youth programmes are often underfunded relative to demand. This leads to limited beneficiary reach, delayed disbursements, and the inability to sustain programmes beyond pilot stages. Sustainability requires predictable funding flows, trained personnel, monitoring frameworks, and institutional continuity. Where financing is irregular or heavily donor-dependent, programme longevity becomes uncertain. Donor-supported initiatives, though impactful in the short term, may not always be embedded within durable state financing structures. When donor cycles end, programmes risk contraction or termination unless domestic funding mechanisms are established. This creates a cycle of pilot-driven experimentation rather than long-term



institutionalisation.

Capacity constraints extend beyond finance. Administrative systems often lack adequate staffing, technical expertise, and digital infrastructure to manage large-scale youth programmes effectively.

In Abuja, stakeholders highlighted weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Without robust tracking systems, it is challenging to determine whether youth who complete training programmes secure employment, sustain businesses, or improve their income levels over time. The absence of reliable longitudinal data limits evidence-based reform and adaptive policymaking.

Financing gaps also directly affect programme quality. Training initiatives may operate with limited equipment, outdated curricula, or insufficient stipends for participants. Entrepreneurship schemes may disburse capital to only a fraction of eligible applicants. Infrastructure investments necessary to support digital employment, such as broadband expansion and stable electricity, remain uneven.

From a political economy perspective, limited implementation capacity reinforces structural labour market constraints. When skills programmes cannot scale, the mismatch between education and employment persists. When entrepreneurship funding is insufficient, capital constraints continue to redirect youth into overcrowded informal sectors. When monitoring is weak, inefficiencies remain undetected and unreformed.

Importantly, the scale of youth demand magnifies these capacity limitations. Nigeria's youth population is large and growing. Even well-designed programmes may appear ineffective if they reach only a small proportion of eligible beneficiaries. This scale mismatch between need and delivery capacity contributes to frustration and erodes confidence in government initiatives.

The cumulative evidence across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo, therefore, suggests that youth employment implementation is constrained by both fiscal scarcity and administrative capacity gaps. Addressing one without the other would be insufficient. Increased funding without strengthened institutional systems may not yield improved outcomes; conversely, efficient systems without adequate resources cannot operate at a meaningful scale. Implementation capacity and financing gaps significantly undermine youth employment policy effectiveness. Limited and unstable funding, administrative constraints, digital infrastructure weaknesses, and underdeveloped monitoring systems restrict programme reach and sustainability. Without strengthening both financial commitment and institutional capability, youth employment interventions are unlikely to achieve the scale and durability required to alter structural labour market outcomes.

### 1.1.5 Education-Labour Market Disconnect

One of the most consistent findings across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states is the persistent disconnect between formal education systems and labour market demands. Stakeholders from academia, the private sector, and youth focus groups repeatedly highlighted a skills mismatch that undermines employability and reinforces underemployment. This disconnect is not confined to one region or sector; rather, it reflects a nationally consistent structural challenge.

In Oyo State, focus group participants were asked to rate how well their education prepared them for the world of work. Responses ranged between 2 and 4 out of 10, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction with the relevance and practical applicability of formal schooling. These ratings signal not merely isolated frustration but systemic inadequacy. Youth perceive a significant gap between classroom learning and workplace expectations.

An academic respondent in Oyo reinforced this critique, acknowledging limitations within curriculum reform efforts:

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*"It's partial, the courses that I mentioned earlier that have been introduced cannot cover everything." NG\_KII\_AR\_39 (Oyo)*

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This statement suggests that while attempts have been made to modernise curricula or introduce entrepreneurial components, reforms remain incremental and insufficiently comprehensive. The structure of higher education continues to prioritise theoretical knowledge over applied, industry-aligned competencies. As a result, graduates often leave institutions without practical exposure, digital fluency, or work-ready skills.

Private sector actors echoed similar concerns. A fintech employer in Oyo observed:

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*“When you look at young people coming into the industry, most of them actually have potential. You can see that they are willing to learn, and they are energetic. But the major issue is that they do not have the required skills for the roles they are applying for. So, as an employer, you find yourself training them on things they were already certified to know. It becomes an additional cost and time investment for the business.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44 (Oyo)*

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This perspective is particularly significant because it comes from a growth-oriented sector that could potentially absorb skilled youth. The employer’s acknowledgement of “potential” indicates that the issue is not inherent incapacity, but preparation gaps. Employers identified deficiencies in digital competencies, soft skills, deadline management, and problem-solving ability. These are skills increasingly demanded in modern labour markets, especially within technology-driven industries.

In Kaduna, the youth themselves articulated the disconnect between education and employability. One FGD participant remarked:

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*“If I had relied on what I was taught in university, I doubt I would get employed.” FGD Kaduna*

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This statement captures the lived reality of many graduates who find that formal qualifications alone do not translate into job readiness. It also explains why youth increasingly turn to self-directed learning, online courses, peer networks, informal apprenticeships, and digital training platforms to supplement formal education.

The education–labour market disconnect manifests in several interrelated ways:

- **Curriculum–Industry Misalignment:** Academic programmes often lag behind evolving market demands, particularly in digital and technical fields.
- **Insufficient Practical Exposure:** Limited internship opportunities, industry partnerships, and hands-on training reduce workplace preparedness.
- **Weak Soft Skills Development:** Communication, teamwork, and professional etiquette are not consistently embedded in curricula.
- **Digital Literacy Gaps:** As noted in earlier sections, even basic digital competencies remain uneven across graduate cohorts.

From a political economy perspective, this mismatch shifts the burden of employability from institutions to individuals. Youth are expected to self-finance additional training, seek external certifications, and independently acquire market-relevant skills. This privatisation of skill acquisition exacerbates inequality, as those with financial resources and digital access can adapt more easily than those without.

Moreover, the mismatch reinforces broader labour market segmentation. High-skill private sector roles remain inaccessible to many graduates, while the informal sector continues to absorb youth with limited formal preparation.



This dynamic contributes to underemployment and occupational drift, as graduates accept roles unrelated to their fields of study.

Importantly, the disconnect does not imply that education lacks value altogether. Rather, it suggests that current structures do not sufficiently bridge the transition from school to work. Without stronger institutional collaboration between educational institutions and industry, the gap is likely to persist.

The education–labour market mismatch is nationally consistent across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo. Formal education systems are perceived as only partially aligned with labour market realities, leaving graduates underprepared for emerging sectors. Addressing youth unemployment requires systemic curriculum reform, strengthened industry partnerships, expanded practical training opportunities, and improved digital and soft skills integration within educational frameworks.

Beyond curriculum gaps and skill deficiencies, the findings point to a deeper structural issue: the persistent failure to align skills providers and consumers in Nigeria’s labour market. Tertiary institutions and technical training centres remain the largest producers of skills, yet their engagement with labour market demand, particularly in high-potential sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, energy, and trade, remains weak and inconsistent. As a result, training systems operate largely in isolation from the sectors they are meant to serve.

From a political economy perspective, this misalignment is not merely a technical coordination failure but reflects institutional incentives and governance arrangements. Skills providers are often evaluated based on enrolment, certification, and completion rates rather than employment outcomes, while employers have limited structured channels to influence curriculum design or training standards. This creates a system where supply is continuously generated without corresponding demand integration.

International experience suggests that demand-led training models, such as dual training systems and competency-based education frameworks, can improve alignment. However, even where such models are introduced, they often remain under-resourced or weakly institutionalised.

The findings suggest that reform is constrained not by lack of knowledge, but by competing institutional mandates, weak accountability for outcomes, and limited incentives for cross-sector collaboration. Without addressing these structural constraints, efforts to improve skills development are likely to continue producing limited labour market impact.

#### **4.4.2. Digital Divide as Emerging Inequality**

As Nigeria’s labour market increasingly integrates digital platforms, computer-based recruitment systems, online training modules, and remote work opportunities, digital competence and infrastructure access are emerging as critical determinants of employability. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, respondents identified the digital divide, not only in terms of access to devices and connectivity, but also in terms of digital literacy, as a growing source of inequality within the youth employment landscape.

In Oyo State, a public sector official reflecting on civil service recruitment processes described the digital literacy gap encountered during computer-based testing (CBT) as limiting for some applicants. This observation captures a profound structural challenge. As recruitment systems modernise and shift toward digital interfaces, basic computer skills become prerequisites for participation. Youth who lack exposure to computers or internet-based systems are immediately disadvantaged—not because of intellectual incapacity, but because of limited access and training. In effect, digital literacy becomes a gatekeeping mechanism embedded within institutional processes.

The divide is not limited to recruitment systems. In the private and gig economy, reliable internet connectivity and stable electricity are foundational requirements for participation. A gig worker in Oyo described the infrastructural constraints directly:



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*“The Internet is really a challenge... power [electricity] is a big factor.” NG\_KII\_YOU (Oyo)*

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This observation highlights how basic infrastructure shapes opportunity. Even where youth possess the necessary skills to engage in digital work, such as freelancing, remote services, or data-related tasks, unreliable internet connectivity and inconsistent electricity supply reduce productivity and income stability. Those who can afford backup power solutions, high-speed broadband, or data subscriptions gain an advantage over those who cannot. Across states, digital skills are increasingly tied to access to emerging sectors such as fintech, remote consulting, software development, digital marketing, and online entrepreneurship. Employers in Oyo’s fintech sector emphasised the growing importance of competencies in data analysis, artificial intelligence, and digital tools. However, without structured digital skill integration within formal education systems (as discussed in the previous subsection), many youth must self-finance additional training.

Digital divide is also pronounced in training institutions tasked with preparing youth for a technology-driven labour market. While national policy rhetoric increasingly emphasises ICT competence, AI literacy, and digital innovation, institutional infrastructure realities present a constraining counterpoint.

An academic respondent from Oyo State describes the gap between curriculum ambition and material capacity:

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*“For example, you will see a department that has, let’s say, fifty students doing an ICT-related program, and when you go into their computer room, you will see that they do not have up to twenty computers. Then, in terms of modern facilities or software that could be installed on those computers and Internet needed for all these programs to thrive effortlessly, you discover that most times they are not available. And even in instances where they are available, what is the state of maintenance? The maintenance is rather poor.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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From the perspective of training institutions, this is not merely a hardware shortage; it is a structural bottleneck in skills transmission. When departments with large student cohorts operate with limited computer access and irregular electricity, learning becomes rotational, theoretical, or demonstration-based rather than immersive and practice-intensive. Students may understand ICT conceptually but lack repeated, hands-on engagement necessary for workplace fluency.

Moreover, inadequate maintenance compounds the problem. Even where infrastructure exists, outdated software, unreliable connectivity, and poorly serviced equipment reduce instructional effectiveness. The result is a partial exposure model: students are introduced to digital tools but not sufficiently embedded in digital work environments. This institutional digital divide has cascading effects. First, it undermines universities’ capacity to align with 21st-century labour market demands. Second, it shifts the burden of advanced digital skill acquisition onto individual students after graduation, often requiring private self-funding. Third, it contributes to employer perceptions, such as those expressed by private sector actors, that graduates require retraining upon entry into the workplace. Importantly, this gap exists despite curricular relevance. The same academic respondent had earlier defended Nigerian curricula as largely comparable internationally. The constraint, therefore, is not necessarily outdated syllabi but infrastructural capacity and resource sustainability. Universities may design forward-looking programmes, but without sufficient electricity, ICT infrastructure, connectivity, and maintenance culture, digital transformation remains aspirational rather than fully operational.

Thus, from the training institute perspective, the digital divide is embedded within educational institutions themselves. If digital transformation is to serve as a pathway for youth employment expansion, universities and training centres



must be equipped not only with updated curricula but with adequate electricity, infrastructure, sustained investment, and maintenance systems capable of supporting large student populations.

In this sense, digital transformation potential is constrained less by ambition than by institutional capacity deficits. Bridging this gap requires capital investment, governance reforms in maintenance systems, and stronger alignment between education financing and national digital economy priorities.

The digital divide operates along multiple dimensions:

- a) **Access to Devices:** Ownership of laptops or reliable smartphones is uneven.
- b) **Connectivity Quality:** Broadband penetration and affordability vary significantly by region.
- c) **Electricity Stability:** Frequent power outages disrupt productivity.
- d) **Digital Literacy:** Basic computer skills are not uniformly developed across educational institutions.
- e) **Advanced Technical Skills:** Access to training in high-demand digital competencies is often limited to urban centres or private platforms.

Geography amplifies these disparities. Urban youth in Abuja may have greater exposure to digital ecosystems, yet still face affordability barriers. In parts of Kaduna and Oyo, particularly peri-urban and rural communities, infrastructural deficits are more pronounced. Thus, the digital divide reinforces spatial inequality within the labour market.

From a political economy perspective, digital exclusion risks creating a new stratification layer within youth employment. As more formal and semi-formal processes like job applications, training enrolment, grant submissions, and recruitment testing move online, those lacking digital capacity are filtered out before merit can even be assessed. In this way, digital competence becomes a structural prerequisite rather than an optional enhancement. Importantly, the digital divide is not static. It is widening as technology adoption accelerates globally. Youth who cannot access digital infrastructure or training risk long-term marginalisation from higher-growth sectors of the economy. This dynamic intersects with socio-economic background: youth from wealthier households are more likely to afford devices, data, and supplementary training, thereby compounding inequality.

Digital skills and infrastructure are becoming new stratifiers within Nigeria's youth labour market. Access to connectivity, devices, and digital competence increasingly determines who can participate in modern employment pathways. Without deliberate investment in digital inclusion—through infrastructure expansion, affordable broadband, and integrated digital literacy within education systems, the digital divide will deepen existing socio-economic inequalities and further segment youth employment outcomes.

#### 4.4.3. Governance Challenges, Patronage, and Elite Capture

Beyond issues of funding, coordination, and technical capacity, the effectiveness of youth employment interventions in Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states is shaped by deeper governance dynamics. Respondents across stakeholder groups pointed to patterns of patronage, political interference, and elite capture that distort the allocation of opportunities and weaken institutional credibility. These dynamics operate not as isolated anomalies, but as embedded features of the broader political economy.

Institutions may have established procedures and guidelines designed to ensure fairness and transparency. However, these formal mechanisms coexist with informal political pressures that shape outcomes. Recruitment processes, grant allocations, and programme beneficiary selection can become sites of negotiation rather than neutral administrative decisions.

In Kaduna, a similar concern was expressed from an academic perspective:

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*“When we talk about employment in this country, especially in the public sector, merit is not always the only determinant. There are instances where people apply, they meet the criteria, they write the exams, but at the end of*



*the day, the outcome does not reflect performance alone. A lot of jobs still go to people based on who they know. So, even when young people are qualified, if they do not have the right connections, it becomes very difficult for them.” NG\_KII\_AR\_08 (Kaduna)*

This perception reinforces the idea that access to employment is mediated through networks rather than merit alone. In environments characterised by labour scarcity, even small distortions in allocation processes have amplified consequences. When opportunities are limited, patronage does not merely advantage a few, it structurally excludes many.

In earlier discussions in Abuja, stakeholders suggested that certain employment opportunities are influenced by transactional practices, reinforcing youth perceptions that entry into prestigious or stable positions requires connections or financial leverage. While such claims are difficult to quantify, their prevalence in interviews signals declining trust in institutional neutrality.

Elite capture also manifests in programme design and implementation. Where youth employment initiatives are administered without transparent beneficiary selection criteria or robust monitoring systems, politically connected individuals or groups may disproportionately benefit. This can occur through discretionary shortlisting, opaque application processes, or limited public communication regarding eligibility criteria.

The consequences of governance challenges are multifaceted:

- a) Erosion of Institutional Trust:** Youth lose confidence in formal recruitment and funding mechanisms.
- b) Reduced Incentive for Skill Investment:** If outcomes are perceived as politically determined, motivation to compete on merit may decline.
- c) Reinforcement of Socio-economic Inequality:** Youth from privileged or connected backgrounds consolidate advantage.
- d) Weak Accountability:** When informal influence shapes decisions, monitoring and grievance mechanisms are less effective.

Importantly, governance challenges intersect with earlier themes of implementation capacity and digital access. Even well-funded programmes risk capture if oversight systems are weak. Digitalisation of processes, such as computer-based testing, may reduce some forms of discretion, yet digital illiteracy and infrastructural gaps can introduce new forms of exclusion.

From a political economy perspective, patronage persists partly because employment itself is politically valuable. Jobs confer income, status, and loyalty. In contexts of high unemployment, the allocation of employment opportunities becomes a powerful instrument of political influence. This dynamic can entrench informal networks within formal systems.

However, it is also important to note that not all institutional actors endorse or perpetuate these dynamics. Several respondents demonstrated awareness of governance challenges and expressed commitment to procedural integrity. The issue, therefore, is not universal institutional failure, but systemic vulnerability to informal pressures.

Governance challenges, patronage, and elite capture significantly shape youth employment outcomes across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo. These dynamics distort merit-based allocation, reinforce inequality, and erode institutional trust. Addressing youth unemployment requires not only expanding opportunities and strengthening capacity, but also reinforcing transparency, accountability, and insulation of employment-related processes from political interference. Without governance reform, even well-designed youth employment initiatives risk reproducing existing patterns of exclusion.

#### **4.4.4. Monitoring, Accountability, and Trust**

Effective youth employment policy does not end at programme rollout; it depends critically on monitoring systems,



accountability mechanisms, and feedback loops that ensure transparency, learning, and responsiveness. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, respondents highlighted weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks, limited grievance channels, and declining trust in institutional processes. These governance gaps undermine not only programme effectiveness, but also youth confidence in the state's ability to deliver equitable outcomes.

One of the clearest indicators of accountability weakness is limited awareness among youth regarding rights, labour protections, and programme oversight structures. In Oyo State, FGD participants were largely unaware of labour regulations or formal complaint mechanisms related to employment conditions. This absence of awareness reflects a broader communication and enforcement gap. If beneficiaries do not know their rights or do not believe that reporting mechanisms will produce results, formal protections remain symbolic.

Public sector respondents also acknowledged monitoring limitations. In Kaduna, an official remarked:

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*“If there were effective monitoring systems, we wouldn't be having these issues.” NG\_KII\_PM\_15 (Kaduna)*

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This statement suggests recognition within institutions that monitoring systems are underdeveloped or inconsistently applied. Weak data collection, limited post-programme tracking, and inadequate evaluation tools make it difficult to assess whether youth training programmes translate into sustained employment or income gains. Without longitudinal tracking, policy redesign is based on assumptions rather than evidence.

Across states, respondents indicated that many youth employment initiatives lack structured feedback loops. Youth are rarely engaged in systematic post-intervention surveys or impact assessments. Civil society actors sometimes fill this gap informally, but these efforts are not always integrated into official decision-making processes. Consequently, programme shortcomings may persist across cycles.

Trust is closely linked to accountability. Where youth perceive recruitment processes as opaque or politically mediated (as discussed in Section 3.3.5), trust in institutions erodes. In Abuja and Kaduna, youth expressed scepticism about the fairness of employment allocation, which in turn discourages sustained engagement with formal programmes. Even in Oyo, where structured civil service procedures exist, acknowledgement of political interference weakens confidence in system integrity.

Digitalisation offers both opportunities and challenges in this context. Computer-based testing and online application portals can enhance transparency by standardising processes. However, as noted earlier, digital exclusion may produce new forms of inequity if access and literacy gaps are not addressed.

From a political economy perspective, weak monitoring and accountability systems create space for inefficiency, patronage, and policy discontinuity. Without reliable performance metrics and public reporting, it becomes difficult to hold implementing agencies responsible for outcomes. This diffusion of accountability reduces incentives for institutional learning and reform.

The consequences are cyclical:

- Weak monitoring limits evidence-based improvement,
- Limited improvement sustains poor outcomes,
- Poor outcomes erode youth trust,
- Reduced trust lowers participation and engagement,
- Lower engagement weakens feedback loops further.

Breaking this cycle requires strengthening data systems, improving transparency in beneficiary selection and budget execution, establishing accessible grievance mechanisms, and institutionalising youth-inclusive monitoring processes.



Monitoring and accountability systems remain underdeveloped within Nigeria's youth employment framework. Weak evaluation mechanisms, limited grievance channels, and opaque processes undermine both programme effectiveness and institutional trust. Strengthening accountability is not merely a technical adjustment; it is foundational to restoring confidence, improving impact, and ensuring that youth employment interventions achieve durable and equitable outcomes.

## 4.5. LIVED EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

While the preceding sections examined the structural, policy, and institutional dimensions of youth employment, the full implications of these dynamics are most clearly understood through the lived experiences of young people themselves. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, focus group discussions reveal how labour market imbalances, policy gaps, governance weaknesses, and digital inequalities translate into everyday realities. Youth employment is not experienced merely as an economic statistic; it is felt in income instability, constrained mobility, psychological strain, and recalibrated aspirations.

Young people describe navigating a labour market that demands flexibility but offers limited security, that values credentials but rewards connections, and that encourages entrepreneurship without guaranteeing protection. Many are employed yet financially stretched; qualified, yet occupationally misaligned; ambitious, yet structurally constrained. Their narratives illuminate the human dimension of structural imbalance, how precarious work shapes identity, dignity, and trust in institutions.

The discussions also reveal that youth employment today increasingly occurs within a fragmented ecosystem of informal work, gig labour, short-term contracts, and hybrid livelihood strategies. Participants reported that many young people simultaneously pursue multiple income streams—remote digital work, creative industries, service sector roles, and artisan trades. As one participant explained when asked about common jobs among youth:

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*“Most people are doing technical and remote jobs. Others are engaged in content creation, crypto trading, and skills-based work such as make-up, hairstyling, and knitting.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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These observations reflect the diversification of youth livelihood strategies in response to limited formal employment opportunities. Rather than relying solely on traditional salaried work, many young people combine multiple informal or digital income streams to remain economically viable.

This section shifts the analytical lens from systems to subjects. It explores how youth define dignified work, how they cope with underemployment and workplace precarity, how gender and vulnerability shape their experiences, and how repeated institutional shortcomings influence levels of trust, agency, and civic engagement. By centring youth voices, this analysis provides essential insight into the social and psychological consequences of Nigeria's employment landscape, insights that are critical for designing reforms that are not only technically sound but also socially responsive.

### 4.5.1. Dignity, Precarity, and Status Degradation

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, youth narratives reveal that employment is not evaluated solely in terms of income. Young people repeatedly described work in terms of dignity, respect, purpose, and psychological well-being. While many participants acknowledged the importance of “having something to do,” they also drew a clear distinction between mere survival and dignified employment.

In Oyo State, one FGD participant emphasised that artisan work can be dignified, provided adequate tools and conditions are available:



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*“These jobs are dignifying... if they have tools.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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Other FGD participants consistently associated dignified work with personal autonomy and the ability to maintain work-life balance. One participant defined dignified work as:

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*“Something that I don’t get exhausted from, I get my peace, and I get what I am paid to work for.” NG\_FGD\_YGD (Oyo)*

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This statement reflects a nuanced understanding of dignity. The issue is not necessarily the type of work itself, but the conditions under which it is performed. Youth do not inherently reject craftwork or manual labour; rather, they object to undercapitalisation, overcrowding, and income instability that undermine its sustainability.

Another participant emphasised flexibility as a key component of dignity in employment:

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*“My goal has always been to work anywhere, anytime... being able to work in transit when travelling and not be tied to one office for the rest of your life. Most importantly, a job that can maintain my lifestyle.” NG\_FGD\_YGD (Oyo)*

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For many participants, dignified work was closely tied to psychological well-being and freedom from exploitative work conditions. One youth explained that dignity in employment meant:

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*“Something I can do that I won’t lose myself in it... something that is very flexible and not so toxic.” NG\_FGD\_YGD (Oyo)*

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Youth perceptions of dignity extend beyond income to recognition, respect, and procedural fairness. A gig worker offered a relational definition of dignified work:

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*“For work to be dignified and fulfilling, it must be work that you enjoy. Also, the person you are working with must respect you for your skills and who you are. It must not be that because they are paying you, they talk to you anyhow or disrespect you. Personally, for me, dignified work will mean that the values I am bringing, the skills I am bringing, will be appreciated, not just monetarily, but also in terms of interactions that come in the course of delivering that service.” NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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However, across states, many participants described a persistent gap between effort and reward. In Abuja, one participant captured this imbalance bluntly:

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*“The energy you put in is not equal to the income you get at the end of the day.” FGD Abuja, Participant 8*

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This sentiment was echoed in Kaduna during an FGD session:

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*“The job and the pay do not correspond.” (FGD Kaduna).*

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When one respondent was asked whether the standard of dignified and fulfilling work is widely met, he concluded:

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*“Generally, I would say less of what you would expect.” NG\_KII\_GE\_42*

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Such statements reflect a broader sense of economic injustice. Youth perceive that their labour, often intensive and multi-sourced, is not adequately compensated. The resulting strain erodes the intrinsic dignity of work. The emotional toll of precarious employment was particularly pronounced in Kaduna. One participant described the anxiety associated with a toxic workplace:

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*“Every time my boss called, my heart skipped a beat.” FGD Kaduna*

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This quote underscores the psychological dimension of precarity. Employment insecurity is not only financial; it can generate stress, fear, and diminished self-worth. Work environments lacking fairness, stability, or respect undermine dignity even when income is present.

In Abuja, emotional detachment emerged as a coping strategy. One participant described their relationship to work in purely transactional terms:

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*“You work, you go home, you collect your pay, no attachment.” FGD Abuja, Participant 1*

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This form of detachment signals a protective response to unstable conditions. When employment lacks security or progression pathways, youth may disengage emotionally to reduce vulnerability.

Oyo participants similarly articulated frustration with the limited distribution of opportunity:

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*“Opportunities like that can never go round.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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This statement reflects a recognition of scarcity, not just of jobs, but of quality jobs. When prestigious or well-paying positions are few and perceived to be politically mediated, the majority of youth anticipate exclusion. Over time, such expectations can shape self-perception and social identity.

However, despite these aspirations, many participants described working conditions characterised by underpayment, delayed compensation, and exploitative labour practices. A content creator explained how poor remuneration pushed them to change employers:

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*“Originally, I worked with a company, and I tried writing contents for them but they were not paying me very well. So, I moved to another company...”*

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*once I do my job, they just pay up unlike the other one.” NG\_FGD\_YGD  
(Oyo)*

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Another participant described being pressured into performing the work of multiple employees for the pay of a single worker:

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*“They started with saying help us do this small work and they brought three big jobs... I told them you want me to do the job meant for three persons and you are only paying for one person. That’s just sheer wickedness.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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These narratives demonstrate how employment precarity manifests not only through unstable income but also through exploitative work practices and blurred job descriptions.

Precarity also manifests in occupational drift—young people working outside their field of training due to limited employment opportunities. Several participants acknowledged that their current work bears little relationship to their academic training. One participant explained:

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*“I studied Microbiology... but what they were offering was just too little. I had to take some online courses and now I am doing customer service and freelance writing.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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Another participant noted:

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*“When you are done with school, you hardly see a job that fits what you studied. After trying and seeing how difficult it was, I decided to take another opportunity.”  
NG\_FGD\_YGN\_05 (Oyo)*

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Such experiences illustrate the disconnect between Nigeria’s education system and labour market realities. At the same time, youth continue to articulate aspirations tied to purpose and creativity. In Kaduna, one participant rejected purely monetary definitions of work:

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*“Any job that doesn’t allow me to be creative, no matter how much they pay, I won’t commit my five days to it.” FGD Kaduna*

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This statement highlights that dignity encompasses autonomy and self-expression. Youth seek not only income, but alignment between work and identity.

Taken together, the narratives from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo suggest that youth employment is characterised by a tension between resilience and erosion. Young people demonstrate adaptability, juggling multiple jobs, upskilling independently, and navigating precarious environments. Yet this resilience often masks structural strain.

Precarity manifests in several interconnected ways:



- Income instability and underpayment,
- Occupational drift away from trained fields,
- Emotional stress and workplace toxicity,
- Status anxiety linked to unmet expectations,
- Detachment as a coping mechanism.

These experiences cumulatively shape how youth perceive the value of work itself. When employment fails to provide stability, recognition, or progression, dignity becomes conditional and fragile.

The lived experiences of youth across Nigeria reveal that the employment crisis is also about dignity. Precarious income, unstable conditions, and perceived unfairness erode the social and psychological value of work. Addressing youth employment requires policies that prioritise job quality, fair remuneration, safe workplaces, and meaningful career pathways, not merely the expansion of employment numbers.

#### 4.5.2. Gendered and Vulnerability-Based Constraints

While precarity and income insufficiency cut across youth populations, the lived experiences documented in Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo reveal that these challenges are not evenly distributed. Gender norms, socio-economic background, geographic location, disability status, and social networks shape who accesses opportunity, who remains excluded, and who bears disproportionate risk. Youth employment is not merely an economic phenomenon, it is a stratified social experience shaped by structural inequalities.

Participants consistently noted that recruitment processes, funding opportunities, and even workplace treatment can vary significantly depending on gender, background, or perceived social status. These inequalities create uneven starting points within the labour market, meaning that some youth must overcome multiple layers of disadvantage before they can access employment.

Across discussions, participants described how these structural inequalities operate informally through perceptions, stereotypes, and social expectations that shape hiring decisions and career pathways.

#### 4.5.3. Gendered Mobility and Occupational Constraints

Gender dynamics emerged clearly in discussions of employment access and workplace treatment. Participants highlighted how gender stereotypes influence both hiring decisions and working conditions.

One participant recounted an experience of explicit gender discrimination during recruitment:

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*“I went to apply for a receptionist job last December when I was trying to get some money, and they told me I was qualified, but they cannot give it to me because I am male.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_05 (Oyo)*

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While this case illustrates discrimination against a male applicant, participants also emphasised the vulnerability of women in certain sectors. One female participant explained that some job interviews involve inappropriate expectations:

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*“Another thing for us females when we are going for some job interviews, you meet some ridiculous and funny people, and they tell you to do some things before you get the job.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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Corroborating this submission, another respondent highlights structural barriers affecting women’s advancement:



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*“Some people feel like they cut the wings of women in high positions because they believe they are not supposed to be there... we have a lot of work to do.” NG\_KII\_CS\_45 (Oyo)*

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Such experiences highlight how gender norms intersect with employment precarity. Women may face pressure to navigate inappropriate demands, while men may encounter exclusion from roles stereotypically associated with women. Both dynamics demonstrate that labour market access is mediated by gendered expectations rather than purely meritocratic considerations.

The inequalities in employment outcomes identified in the qualitative analysis are strongly substantiated by both descriptive and regression-based quantitative findings. The multinomial regression results show that female youths are consistently less likely to be employed compared to males across all survey years, with statistically significant negative coefficients (See Annex 3, Figure 2). This aligns closely with qualitative narratives highlighting gender-based constraints, including care responsibilities, social norms, and restricted access to economic opportunities. Women have to balance work with family expectations, limiting their ability to engage fully in the labour market. In Abuja, youth participants also raised concerns about safety and workplace environment, particularly for women in certain sectors. While not always expressed as overt discrimination, references to toxic workplaces and unsafe conditions suggest gendered vulnerabilities layered onto already precarious employment.

#### **4.5.4. Socio-Economic Background and Network Inequality**

Beyond gender, socio-economic status emerged as a powerful determinant of employment outcomes. Youth from financially secure families are better positioned to access internships, relocate for opportunities, acquire additional certifications, or wait out periods of unemployment without immediate income pressure. In contrast, youth from low-income households face urgent survival imperatives. Youth lacking access to such networks face layered exclusion. During the discussion, participants collectively described nepotism as a common barrier to opportunity. One participant explained:

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*“Nepotism means getting a job because you are from a rich family or because you got a reference.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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Another participant expanded on this dynamic:

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*“For every funding or grant there are limited slots. If someone has five slots, he will not reach out to people that he doesn’t know; he will reach out to people in his circle.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_05 (Oyo)*

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Participants also noted that access to employment opportunities can depend on institutional prestige or educational background. One participant described how job applicants are sometimes evaluated based on the perceived status of their university:

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*“When you go for job interviews, and they ask where you went to school, and you say Federal and someone else went to xx University (a private university), they pick the private University person even if the Federal graduate has a First Class.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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Such narratives illustrate how employment access can be filtered through informal hierarchies of privilege rather than competence.



In Abuja, concerns were raised about elite capturing recruitment processes:

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*“Some jobs are sold. If you don’t know someone, you don’t enter.” NG\_KII\_AR\_30 (Abuja)*

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When employment access is perceived as mediated through connection or financial leverage, youth from less privileged backgrounds are structurally disadvantaged regardless of competence.

#### 4.5.5. Capital Constraints and Professional Barriers

Financial capital also emerged as a critical barrier to employment mobility. Participants explained that many professional pathways require startup capital, training fees, or certification costs that are inaccessible to young people without financial support.

One participant described how high training costs can discourage youth from pursuing technical careers:

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*“I wanted to study cybersecurity at MIT, and they asked me to bring two million naira. At that point, I was discouraged because cybersecurity is not something you can learn easily on YouTube.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_05 (Oyo)*

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Similarly, participants emphasised that business ideas often remain unrealised due to a lack of capital. As one youth explained:

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*“A lot of people have business ideas, and they just need capital to start. If they get a loan, they can create their own jobs.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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These comments reflect a broader structural issue: while entrepreneurship is frequently promoted as a solution to youth unemployment, the financial ecosystem required to support youth-led enterprises remains underdeveloped.

#### 4.5.6. Digital Exclusion as Emerging Vulnerability

Digital work and online freelancing are increasingly viewed as viable employment alternatives for youth. Participants acknowledged that digital platforms have created new pathways for earning income, particularly through remote work, content creation, and freelance services.

However, access to these opportunities is uneven. While some participants noted that digital tools are widely available, others emphasised that meaningful participation requires skills, devices, connectivity, and training. One participant described the rapid expansion of digital learning platforms:

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*“Everything you want to learn is on YouTube, basically.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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At the same time, participants emphasised that many training opportunities remain superficial:

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*“They teach at the surface; they do not go deeply into it. Even entrepreneurial skills are taught, but not in depth.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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This highlights a gap between the availability of digital learning resources and the depth of training required to compete in global digital labour markets.

Participants also identified infrastructure constraints such as data costs and electricity shortages as barriers to digital participation.

#### 4.5.7. Psychological and Social Exclusion

Beyond material constraints, youth described feelings of marginalisation linked to repeated exclusion from opportunities. Repeated exposure to precarious employment conditions can generate feelings of frustration, discouragement, and exclusion. Many participants described a sense that the system does not fairly reward effort or merit.

In some cases, young people resort to alternative coping strategies when legitimate opportunities appear inaccessible. During the discussion, participants acknowledged that some unemployed youth turn to illicit online activities as survival strategies:

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*“To be sincere, many start looking for internet fraud activities.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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Another participant added:

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*“They go into internet fraud and start scamming people.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_04 (Oyo)*

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While such statements do not justify these activities, they illustrate the desperation that can arise when economic opportunities remain limited.

Participants also emphasised the emotional burden of repeated rejection and workplace exploitation. One participant summarised this frustration bluntly:

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*“The choices of young Nigerians are just reducing.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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Such sentiments highlight the psychological consequences of structural unemployment.

Across states, vulnerability is cumulative. A young woman from a low-income rural household without political connections, digital access, or financial capital faces intersecting barriers that extend far beyond skill acquisition. These layered disadvantages shape not only employment outcomes but also confidence, civic engagement, and long-term mobility.

Gender norms, socio-economic background, political connections, and digital access function as structural filters within Nigeria’s youth labour market. Employment opportunity is not accessed on a level playing field; it is mediated by intersecting vulnerabilities that compound disadvantage. Addressing youth unemployment requires targeted inclusion strategies that explicitly confront gendered barriers, capital constraints, digital inequality, and network-based exclusion.



#### 4.5.8. Youth Apathy, Trust Deficits, and Social Exclusion

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, youth narratives reveal a pattern that is often mischaracterised as apathy. However, a closer reading of the transcripts suggests that what appears as disengagement is more accurately understood as fatigue—an emotional and psychological response to persistent structural constraint, repeated exclusion, and perceived systemic unfairness.

Participants described how corruption and lack of accountability undermine the effectiveness of youth programmes. One participant explained:

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*“If funding is available, the money is cut into pieces, and the remaining balance is pocketed.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_0 (Oyo)*

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Another participant highlighted how some training programmes prioritise publicity over real outcomes:

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*“The program was supposed to last seven days, but before the end of the first day, it was already on TV that they succeeded in doing the program... and people were not even learning.” NG\_FGD\_YGN\_04 (Oyo)*

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Participants also noted that youth rarely have formal channels to influence policy decisions. One participant explained that social media has become the primary avenue for expressing dissatisfaction:

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*“The only place we have is X, that’s Twitter... that’s where we vent our anger and complain.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_05 (Oyo)*

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These comments illustrate how trust deficits emerge when youth perceive that institutional processes are unresponsive or exclusionary.

In Kaduna, the emotional toll of precarious employment was described in stark personal terms. Fear of dismissal, exploitation, or reprimand creates an atmosphere of uncertainty that undermines well-being. Over time, such experiences can erode trust—not only in individual employers, but in broader labour market structures. Here, detachment functions as self-protection. When work does not provide stability, progression, or recognition, youth may withdraw emotionally to avoid further disappointment. This transactional approach to employment reflects diminished expectations of institutional reciprocity.

Youth recognise that high-quality or prestigious opportunities are few and, in many cases, politically mediated. Such awareness shapes how they engage with formal systems. If opportunity is perceived as finite and filtered, motivation to compete may weaken—not due to lack of ambition, but due to diminished confidence in fairness.

Across all three states, youth described navigating a labour market where merit competes with connection, where policies exist but are inconsistently implemented, and where income rarely aligns with effort. These conditions produce layered emotional responses:

- Anxiety about job security,
- Frustration with perceived inequality,
- Detachment from institutional processes,
- Reduced trust in government programmes,
- Migration aspirations as exit strategies.



Importantly, none of the narratives suggest an absence of desire for meaningful work or civic participation. Rather, youth demonstrate resilience through multiple strategies: self-upskilling, gig work, peer mentorship, entrepreneurship, and migration planning. However, repeated structural barriers shape how they engage with institutions.

The perception that recruitment is influenced by connection, captured earlier in statements such as “You must be connected to people in top positions before you can get prestigious, high-paying jobs” reinforces distrust. When opportunities are perceived as unevenly distributed, participation declines.

This trust deficit has broader social implications. Youth who disengage from formal systems may become more reliant on informal networks or external migration pathways. Civic engagement may weaken if institutional responsiveness is perceived as limited. Over time, emotional fatigue can solidify into social exclusion.

From a political economy perspective, youth “apathy” is therefore not a primary cause of employment challenges; it is a downstream effect. Structural imbalances, governance weaknesses, patronage dynamics, and income insecurity collectively generate emotional strain. Youth disengagement emerges as an adaptive response to repeated disappointment.

Youth across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo are not disengaged because they lack ambition or civic consciousness. They are fatigued by systemic unfairness, precarious conditions, and constrained opportunity pathways. Addressing youth employment requires not only economic reform but also institutional practices that rebuild trust, enhance transparency, and demonstrate that effort and merit can translate into equitable outcomes.

## 4.6. PRIVATE SECTOR, INFORMALITY, AND YOUTH AGENCY

While previous sections have examined structural imbalances, policy constraints, institutional weaknesses, and lived experiences of precarity, youth employment in Nigeria is also shaped by the evolving role of the private sector and the adaptive strategies of young people themselves. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises and artisan networks to fintech firms and digital gig platforms, functions both as a critical absorber of youth labour and as a site of new opportunity and vulnerability. At the same time, youth are not merely passive recipients of labour market conditions; they actively construct pathways through entrepreneurship, freelancing, peer-led training, and informal innovation.

However, the relationship between youth agency and market structure is complex. Informality dominates large segments of private economic activity, offering accessibility but limited protection. High-growth sectors such as technology and digital services provide potential upward mobility, yet demand skills and infrastructure that remain unevenly distributed. Employers cite skill gaps and productivity concerns, while youth describe capital constraints and regulatory burdens. In this context, youth agency operates within constrained ecosystems, innovative and resilient, yet often unsupported by stable institutional scaffolding.

This section explores how private sector dynamics, informal labour markets, regulatory environments, and youth-driven initiatives intersect to shape employment outcomes. It examines employer perspectives on labour demand, the growth of gig and digital work, the persistence of informality, and how young people are creating opportunities beyond formal state frameworks. Together, these insights deepen understanding of how youth navigate and reshape Nigeria’s labour market from within.

### 4.6.1. Employer Perspectives and Labour Demand

Understanding youth employment outcomes requires examining not only the supply side, skills, aspirations, and agency, but also the demand side of the labour market. Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, private sector actors provided insight into how employers perceive young job seekers, the competencies they value, and the constraints they face in expanding labour absorption.

An employer in Oyo describes the growing role of youth within digital and technology-driven sectors. He notes:



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*“I would say most of our employees are youth. The tech space basically comprises more of youths, and we try to also employ more of them because they are more innovative and they have ideas to share.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_46 (Oyo)*

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He also highlights how digital labour markets operate through platform-based recruitment and referrals:

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*“Most use platforms like Upwork to enter the space... many will tell you that they get their jobs through referrals on LinkedIn... and sometimes you don’t even request their portfolio since someone has recommended that their work is good.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_46 (Oyo)*

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This reinforces the increasing role of informal professional networks and digital platforms in labour matching. Employers consistently acknowledged the potential of Nigerian youth. In Oyo State, a fintech employer emphasised this optimism:

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*“Most of them have potential, but do not have the required skills.” NG\_KII\_PRS (Oyo)*

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This statement captures a recurring theme across employer interviews: the issue is not an absence of intelligence or capacity, but a gap between available skills and industry needs. Employers in digital and technology-driven sectors highlighted the importance of competencies such as data analysis, artificial intelligence, financial modelling, digital marketing, and structured problem-solving. However, they reported that many graduates lack exposure to these areas during formal education.

The same fintech respondent noted broader concerns regarding workplace readiness:

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*“Beyond technical skills, there is also the issue of work attitude. Some young ones do not have the required work etiquette. You see cases where punctuality is a problem, or they don’t understand workplace culture. Some don’t meet deadlines, and you have to keep reminding them about deliverables. In a private business environment, this directly affects productivity because time is money. So apart from skills, discipline and professionalism are things we still struggle with when hiring young people.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44 (Oyo)*

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Here, the skills gap extends beyond technical expertise to include soft skills, time management, communication, accountability, and professional discipline. Employers suggested that workplace norms are not systematically integrated into university curricula, leaving firms to absorb the cost of additional onboarding and training. At the same time, employers recognised that when youth are adequately prepared, performance improves significantly. The fintech employer remarked:

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*“In the private sector, especially in a performance-driven environment like*



*ours, remuneration is tied to value creation. If you get the job done, you command fair wages. But if productivity is low or supervision is constantly required, it becomes difficult for an employer to justify higher pay. We are running a business, and the numbers must make sense.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44 (Oyo)*

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This comment suggests that performance-based remuneration systems are possible within certain private sector environments. However, entry into such systems requires prior skill alignment—an entry barrier many youths struggle to cross.

In Abuja, private sector respondents noted the competitiveness of available positions. Employers receive large volumes of applications for limited roles, allowing them to select candidates with advanced skills or prior experience. This reinforces the structural labour supply imbalance described earlier in the chapter.

Some employers also highlighted regulatory and operating constraints that limit their ability to expand employment. Although not always framed as direct criticism of youth, concerns were raised about taxation, bureaucratic processes, and macroeconomic instability affecting business growth. Where firms operate within tight margins or uncertain policy environments, their capacity to hire and train youth diminishes.

Importantly, employers acknowledged that certain sectors, particularly digital services and fintech, are expanding. However, this expansion is uneven and concentrated in urban centres with stronger infrastructure. Even within these growth areas, recruitment standards are rising. As one respondent observed, advanced competencies in emerging technologies are increasingly critical:

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*“Data analysis and AI are very critical.” NG\_KII\_PRS (Oyo)*

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The demand for such skills highlights the acceleration of technological transformation within parts of Nigeria’s economy. Yet this also deepens segmentation between digitally prepared youth and those excluded by infrastructural or educational gaps.

Employer interviews further revealed tension between expectations and investment. While firms emphasise skill gaps, structured collaboration between private sector actors and educational institutions remains limited. Apprenticeship systems, internship pipelines, and curriculum co-design mechanisms are not uniformly institutionalised. As a result, the burden of alignment often falls on youth to self-upskill rather than on systems to co-evolve.

From a labour demand perspective, several patterns emerge:

- a) **Selective Expansion:** Growth is occurring in niche sectors (fintech, digital services), but absorption capacity remains limited relative to youth supply.
- b) **Rising Skill Thresholds:** Employers prioritise digital and soft skills, raising entry barriers.
- c) **Limited Onboarding Investment:** Firms often expect job-ready candidates rather than having to provide extensive training.
- d) **Operational Constraints:** Regulatory and macroeconomic instability affect hiring capacity.

At the same time, employers’ recognition of youth “potential” signals opportunity. The challenge lies in bridging the preparation gap and creating structured transition pathways between education and employment.

From a political economy perspective, employer perspectives illustrate that youth unemployment cannot be addressed solely through supply-side interventions. Expanding skills without strengthening labour demand ecosystems risks reproducing underemployment. Conversely, supporting private sector growth without inclusive skill development deepens inequality.



Employers across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo recognise the potential of Nigerian youth but identify significant skill and work-readiness gaps. Labour demand is growing selectively in high-skill and digital sectors, yet absorption capacity remains constrained by both skill mismatch and broader economic conditions. Effective youth employment reform requires stronger alignment between education systems, private sector needs, and supportive regulatory environments to ensure that youth potential translates into sustained labour demand.

#### 4.6.2. Regulatory Burdens and Hiring Disincentives

Employers also pointed to regulatory and macroeconomic constraints that limit their capacity to expand hiring. From their perspective, labour demand is shaped not only by skill availability but by the broader business environment within which firms operate.

Private sector respondents in Oyo highlighted the cumulative weight of operational costs, taxation, and compliance requirements. In Oyo State, a fitness and wellness employer provided insight into how certain policy frameworks, though legally grounded, create financial pressures that indirectly shape employment decisions.

He first highlighted land use and property-related obligations:

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*“There is a policy around land use. You get a property, there’s a fee that you have to still pay every year, that’s one. And then when you are a business, there’s a different tax you are supposed to pay than when you are an individual, and of course, if you look at that amount, it’s almost equivalent to buying another property somewhere else. That policy is not really nice.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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This statement illustrates how recurring multiplicative taxes, particularly when scaled differently for businesses, can significantly increase the cost of expansion. For firms seeking to open additional branches—thereby creating new jobs—these cumulative obligations become deterrents rather than neutral compliance requirements.

Even more striking is the example of waste disposal regulation:

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*“A private individual can’t be paying as little as ₦20,000 for waste disposal in a month, and then you come to my business and say I’m supposed to pay ₦800,000 per month. Now, that is not a fair policy for businesses like ours. I will rather save money to pay for waste management so that the Government does not shut me down, so that means more work on the existing staff, and I am not bringing in new staff because I am saving money to pay for waste.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_44*

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Here, the employment implication is explicit. Faced with high compliance costs, the firm reallocates resources toward regulatory survival rather than labour expansion. Instead of hiring additional staff to manage growing demand or improve service quality, management intensifies workload for existing employees to preserve cash flow for statutory payments.

When compliance costs escalate—particularly where perceived as disproportionate to actual service usage—they influence firm behaviour in three ways:

- a) **Expansion Delay:** Businesses postpone opening new branches, limiting new job creation.
- b) **Hiring Freeze:** Firms avoid recruiting additional staff, even when operational demand exists.
- c) **Work Intensification:** Existing employees absorb increased responsibilities, potentially exacerbating



burnout and precarity.

From a political economy perspective, regulatory frameworks intended to standardise public goods provision can unintentionally distort employment incentives if cost structures are misaligned with firm scale or sector realities. Particularly in youth-intensive service sectors such as fitness, hospitality, retail, and SMEs, such burdens can suppress labour absorption.

Importantly, the respondent does not reject regulation outright. Rather, the concern centres on proportionality and duplication. When compliance requirements are perceived as excessive, duplicative, or detached from operational realities, they shift from governance tools to expansion constraints.

In the wider economic environment living costs are rising rapidly for everyone. For private firms, wage adjustments to keep pace with inflation increase operational expenses, potentially discouraging new hires. In fintech and digital sectors, employers described the need for highly skilled employees who can add immediate value. Given competitive pressures, firms often prefer experienced candidates to reduce training costs. This creates a paradox: youth are told to gain experience, yet entry-level positions are limited because firms hesitate to invest in extensive onboarding.

Some employers suggested that regulatory frameworks do not adequately incentivise youth hiring. There are limited tax breaks, wage subsidies, or structured apprenticeship support schemes that reduce the cost of recruiting inexperienced workers. In the absence of such incentives, firms prioritise productivity and risk mitigation. At the same time, regulatory inconsistencies contribute to informality. Where compliance costs are high or enforcement uneven, smaller firms may operate outside formal structures. This limits access to formal employment contracts, social protection schemes, and structured career pathways for youth. Informality thus becomes not only a survival strategy for workers but also a rational adaptation for businesses navigating complex regulatory environments.

From a political economy perspective, regulatory burdens intersect with hiring incentives in several ways:

- a) **Cost Sensitivity:** High compliance and operational costs discourage payroll expansion.
- b) **Risk Aversion:** Employers favour experienced candidates to minimise training investment.
- c) **Limited Incentive Structures:** Few systematic policies encourage youth-specific recruitment.
- d) **Informality as Evasion:** Complex regulation can unintentionally push firms toward informal operations.

Employers highlighted the cumulative effect of multiple burdens combined with economic volatility. In such an environment, youth employment expansion becomes secondary to business survival.

This dynamic reinforces structural labour market patterns identified earlier in the chapter. If firms face constraints that discourage hiring, and youth face skill gaps that raise entry barriers, the result is continued segmentation: a small pool of highly skilled youth compete for formal roles, while the majority navigate informal and precarious pathways. Regulatory burdens, operational costs, and limited hiring incentives constrain private sector labour demand across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo. While employers recognise youth potential, economic and regulatory pressures discourage large-scale recruitment of inexperienced workers. Addressing youth unemployment, therefore, requires not only skills development, but also reforms that lower hiring risks, streamline regulatory processes, and incentivise structured youth inclusion within formal enterprises.

### 4.6.3. Informality, Policy Evasion, and Gig Work

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, informality remains the dominant absorber of youth labour. However, the nature of informality is evolving. While traditional artisan trades and petty commerce continue to provide entry points for survival income, a parallel form of digital informality, gig work, freelancing, and platform-based services is emerging. Both forms offer accessibility, yet both operate within weak regulatory frameworks, limited protections, and high vulnerability to market fluctuation.



In Oyo State, focus group participants described the saturation of local informal markets:

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*“There may be 3 or 4 tailors on the same street... It’s usually very difficult to get enough customers.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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This observation illustrates how low entry barriers lead to overcrowding. Informality absorbs excess labour not because it is growth-generating, but because it is available. However, oversaturation depresses earnings and intensifies competition. Income instability becomes normalised.

Access to capital, tools, equipment, and workspace determines whether an informal enterprise can generate viable income. Without such support, craftwork becomes subsistence-level rather than growth-oriented. The interviews also highlight the attractiveness of gig work due to its earning potential, particularly when payments are denominated in foreign currency.

The employer explains:

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*“The pay is good because most times it is in dollars... even when you are dealing with people that are here in Nigeria, they will still tell you that they charge in dollars. It’s more or less like you are working in Nigeria but being valued in dollars.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_46 (Oyo)*

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However, he notes that income stability depends heavily on skill reputation:

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*“For someone who is mid-high, they get jobs very well... most times you get jobs from recurring clients... people will also refer you to others. All these things determine the stability of your income.” NG\_KII\_PRS\_46 (Oyo)*

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This reflects the informal reputation-based economy that characterises digital freelance labour. Gig platforms provide flexibility and, in some cases, access to global markets. However, participation depends heavily on reliable infrastructure. Moreover, gig workers operate without social protection, minimum wage guarantees, or enforceable labour rights. Income fluctuates based on client availability and algorithmic ranking systems.

In Abuja, youth described adopting transactional attitudes toward precarious work:

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*“You work, you go home, you collect your pay, no attachment.” FGD Abuja*

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This detachment reflects awareness that gig and informal roles rarely offer career progression or security. Work becomes short-term and output-driven, rather than institutionally anchored. From an employer and policy perspective, informality can also represent regulatory evasion. Where compliance costs are high or tax regimes are complex, small businesses may operate outside formal registration frameworks. While this reduces overhead for firms, it limits access to credit, training support, and social security systems. For youth employees, this means the absence of formal contracts, pension contributions, health insurance, and grievance mechanisms.



Informality operates on both sides of the employment relationship:

- **For youth:** It provides entry but little protection.
- **For businesses:** It reduces compliance burden but limits scalability.
- **For the state:** It constrains tax revenue and regulatory oversight.

Gig work complicates this picture further. It is often technically formal (through platform registration), yet substantively informal (due to the absence of labour protection). Youth working remotely for foreign clients may earn competitively, yet they remain outside national labour frameworks. This creates regulatory grey zones that current policy frameworks have not fully addressed.

Importantly, youth agency is evident within this landscape. Many participants described self-directed skill acquisition, peer collaboration, and entrepreneurial experimentation. Informality is not purely passive adaptation; it is also a site of innovation. However, innovation occurs within constraints. Capital scarcity, infrastructural gaps, and policy ambiguity limit scalability.

The intersection of informality and policy evasion also reinforces inequality. Youth with capital and digital access can leverage gig platforms effectively, while those without remain confined to overcrowded local markets. Without deliberate formalisation pathways that reduce compliance burden while extending protection, segmentation will deepen.

From a political economy perspective, informality persists because it performs a stabilising function. It absorbs demographic pressure and mitigates visible unemployment. However, it does so at the cost of wage adequacy, labour protection, and long-term productivity growth.

Informality, both traditional and digital, remains central to youth employment across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo. While it offers accessibility and flexibility, it is characterised by income instability, weak protection, and limited upward mobility. Gig work introduces new opportunities but also new vulnerabilities. Addressing youth employment requires not eliminating informality, but formalising opportunity, reducing regulatory burdens while extending social protection and enabling scalable enterprise growth.

#### 4.6.4. Digital Pathways and Youth Innovation

Despite structural imbalances, policy discontinuities, regulatory burdens, and infrastructural gaps, youth across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states are not passively navigating the labour market. Instead, many are actively constructing alternative pathways through digital skills acquisition, peer-led training, freelancing, and online entrepreneurship. These adaptive strategies reveal both resilience and systemic gaps: youth innovation is often compensating for institutional weakness.

Rather than waiting for formal institutional programmes, youth in Oyo are creating community-based training ecosystems. Free classes, peer mentorship, and informal bootcamps serve as entry points into digital fields such as coding, graphic design, and data analytics. However, these initiatives often operate without structured funding, certification frameworks, or sustained institutional support.

In Kaduna, a civil society actor described leveraging accessible tools to bridge digital skill gaps:

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*“We use WhatsApp and phones to teach digital skills.” NG\_KII\_CS\_02  
(Kaduna)*

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Where broadband access and formal training centres are limited, mobile-based learning platforms become substitutes. While such methods expand reach, they also highlight infrastructural constraints; digital learning is occurring within limited bandwidth environments.



In Abuja, freelancers pointed to the earning potential of digital pathways when skill alignment and internet connectivity converge:

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*“You can earn way more than ₦100,000... even at entry-level.” FGD Abuja*

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This remark signals the transformative potential of remote and digital work. Entry-level freelance roles in content creation, programming, digital marketing, and virtual assistance can generate income levels exceeding those of many local formal positions. For digitally equipped youth, online platforms offer access to global markets and foreign currency earnings.

However, this emerging digital opportunity space operates within regulatory and protection gaps. When asked about social protections for gig workers, a respondent in Oyo stated plainly that

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*“None that I know of.” NG\_KII\_GIG (Oyo)*

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This absence of protection underscores the vulnerability embedded within digital innovation. Gig workers lack structured labour rights, pension schemes, insurance coverage, and formal dispute resolution mechanisms. Income volatility, platform dependency, and algorithmic ranking systems introduce new forms of precarity. Thus, digital pathways simultaneously represent empowerment and exposure. Youth are:

- Self-financing upskilling initiatives,
- Building peer learning networks,
- Accessing remote income streams,
- Circumventing local labour market congestion.

Yet they are also:

- Operating without formal safety nets,
- Dependent on unstable infrastructure,
- Exposed to global competition without regulatory support.

From a political economy perspective, youth-driven digital innovation highlights both opportunity and institutional lag. Where public policy has not fully aligned education systems, digital infrastructure investment, and labour regulation with emerging market realities, youth are filling the gap. However, adaptation at the individual level cannot substitute for systemic reform.

The expansion of digital pathways may gradually reduce geographic constraints, allowing youth in Kaduna or Oyo to access global clients. However, without broader digital inclusion strategies, these opportunities risk deepening inequality between connected and disconnected youth.

Importantly, digital innovation demonstrates that youth are not apathetic or disengaged. They are proactive, creative, and responsive to shifting economic terrain. Their agency is evident in grassroots training efforts, informal tech communities, and experimentation with online platforms. Yet this agency operates within fragile ecosystems. Youth across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo are actively innovating through digital pathways, creating training networks and accessing remote income streams despite systemic constraints. However, their adaptation is compensating for institutional weakness rather than being supported by it. Without strengthened digital infrastructure, inclusive training systems, and labour protections for gig workers, the transformative potential of youth innovation will remain uneven and vulnerable.

## 4.7. POLITICAL ECONOMY INSIGHTS

The evidence from this research suggests that Nigerian youth do not face a simple failure of ambition or effort. Rather, they confront a system in which labour supply outpaces demand, policy frameworks outpace



implementation, digital opportunity outpaces basic infrastructure, and meritocratic aspirations collide with patronage realities. Employment becomes not only an economic resource but a political asset, distributed through networks, constrained by fiscal priorities, and mediated by institutional capacity. Informality stabilises demographic pressure but normalises precarity. Youth agency compensates for structural gaps but cannot substitute for systemic reform. This section synthesises the cross-cutting patterns emerging from Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo to draw higher-order political economy conclusions. It interrogates the gap between rhetoric and reality, examines employment as a site of political transaction, explores the normalisation of precarious work, and reflects on how youth navigate and reshape constrained systems. By moving from description to structural interpretation, this analysis clarifies why incremental reforms may be insufficient and why durable change requires alignment between economic policy, governance reform, and institutional accountability.

#### 4.7.1. Rhetoric vs Reality in Youth Employment Policy

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, youth employment occupies a prominent place in political discourse. It appears in speeches, development plans, campaign promises, and public announcements. However, the lived realities documented in this study reveal a persistent gap between rhetorical commitment and material impact. Youth employment is highly visible in narrative, but uneven in delivery.

In Kaduna, one civil society actor observed the cyclical nature of youth-focused initiatives:

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*“One of the problems we keep seeing is that when a new administration comes in, they want to introduce their own programmes. They rarely continue what the previous administration started, even if it was working. So, you have projects that are abandoned halfway. It then becomes difficult to build sustainability because each government wants to put its own stamp on youth empowerment.” NG\_KII\_CS (Kaduna)*

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This comment reflects a perception that youth employment programmes are often framed as political signals, markers of responsiveness, rather than embedded within long-term institutional reform. Initiatives may be launched with visibility, but continuity and scale remain uncertain.

In Abuja, an institutional respondent described the disconnect between policy ambition and administrative capacity:

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*“We have a number of policies on youth employment and development. The documents exist. The strategies exist. The issue is not necessarily the absence of frameworks. The problem is the capacity to implement them effectively. The structures that should drive these policies are either under-resourced or poorly coordinated, so you don’t see the intended impact on the ground.” NG\_KII\_AR (Abuja)*

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Here, the issue is not the absence of planning but the insufficiency of operational infrastructure. Policies exist on paper, yet the systems required to implement them: coordinated agencies, stable financing, and monitoring mechanisms remain underdeveloped. The gap between document and delivery widens as programmes fail to reach intended beneficiaries.

At the community level in Oyo, youth reflected on how policies are experienced from below. When asked about access to structured government employment schemes, one participant responded:



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*“You just hear about it on the news.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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This statement captures the distance between public announcement and personal access. Policy becomes something observed rather than experienced—visible in media, invisible in lived reality.

In Kaduna FGDs, youth described a broader sense of repetition without transformation:

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*“We’ve been hearing about youth empowerment for years.” FGD Kaduna*

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The emphasis on “hearing” rather than “seeing” underscores the symbolic dimension of policy rhetoric. Youth recognise the language of empowerment, but do not consistently observe structural shifts in opportunity. In Abuja, another respondent framed the issue in terms of prioritisation:

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*“Youth employment is talked about, but when it comes to budgeting, it’s not always first.” NG\_KII\_AR (Abuja)*

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This perspective reinforces the fiscal dimension of the rhetoric–reality gap. Political discourse elevates youth employment, yet budget allocation and execution may not align proportionately with the scale of the demographic challenge.

Collectively, these testimonies reveal three structural features of the rhetoric–reality divide:

- a) **Visibility Without Reach:** Programmes are announced broadly but reach a limited proportion of youth.
- b) **Innovation Without Institutionalisation:** New initiatives are launched without embedding previous lessons into durable frameworks.
- c) **Prioritisation Without Protection:** Youth employment is politically salient but vulnerable to fiscal and administrative constraints.

From a political economy perspective, this gap is not accidental. Youth employment is politically attractive as a rhetorical commitment because it resonates with a large demographic constituency. However, translating rhetoric into structural reform requires redistributing resources, confronting patronage networks, reforming institutional processes, and sustaining long-term investment—actions that carry higher political and fiscal costs.

Thus, rhetoric persists partly because it is low-cost relative to systemic transformation. Announcements generate visibility, but structural reform demands sustained institutional alignment.

Importantly, youth responses to this gap are complex. While frustration is evident, outright rejection of state engagement is rare. Many participants still express hope that reforms could succeed if implemented effectively. However, repeated cycles of promise without transformation contribute to trust erosion and cautious engagement. The findings across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo reveal a consistent rhetoric–reality gap in youth employment policy. Political discourse foregrounds youth empowerment, yet delivery mechanisms remain fragmented, underfunded, and unevenly accessible. Bridging this gap requires shifting from episodic programme launches to sustained institutional reform, aligning fiscal commitment with demographic urgency, and ensuring that policy visibility translates into measurable and inclusive impact.

#### **4.7.2. Employment as a Political Transaction**

From the findings of the study, employment emerges not only as a livelihood mechanism but also as a politically mediated resource. In contexts where formal jobs are scarce and demand significantly exceeds supply, access to employment can become embedded within broader systems of influence, negotiation, and loyalty. The findings



suggest that employment, particularly within the public sector and high-value formal roles, is often perceived as a transactional asset within political networks.

In Kaduna, a respondent reflected on how recruitment processes can be informally influenced:

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*“There are instructions that come from above.” NG\_KII\_PM (Kaduna)*

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This statement hints at hierarchical intervention within administrative systems. While formal procedures may exist, informal directives can shape outcomes. Employment decisions, particularly in public institutions, may be influenced by political considerations that extend beyond merit.

A respondent from the academic sector provides a particularly revealing insight into how political allocation logics distort efficiency:

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*“You are talking about an area that has, let’s say, 5000 residents, and you are going to allocate to them the number of resources that you would allocate to an environment that has 500 members. What we should have should be a function of the number of people that actually dwell or operate in that environment.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This expands the transactional employment thesis beyond recruitment networks to include macro-level resource allocation. Employment is not only distributed through personal mediation but also through politically negotiated geographic balancing. Where allocation is guided by symbolic equity rather than demographic demand, high-pressure labour markets receive diluted intervention, exacerbating youth competition.

Thus, employment becomes embedded within distributive politics. Scarce jobs, programme slots, and training investments become commodities in a broader system of political negotiation.

In Abuja, a stakeholder described how recommendation culture operates:

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*“You see people moving around with [recommendation] letters.” NG\_KII\_AR (Abuja)*

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Employment is not always pursued solely through open competition; it is navigated through networks of endorsement and influence. Such practices blur the boundary between formal merit-based recruitment and relational allocation. In Oyo, one participant explained how opportunity access is understood at the community level:

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*“If you don’t align yourself [with political or social affiliation], you may wait long.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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In a labour market marked by scarcity, perceived alignment with influential actors becomes a strategic consideration for some youth.

Another respondent in Kaduna highlighted the broader social implications of such systems:



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*“It’s not always about qualification; sometimes it’s about relationship.” NG\_KII\_CS (Kaduna)*

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This observation reinforces the perception that employment allocation can function as a relational exchange rather than a purely competitive process. In such environments, jobs become instruments of reciprocity, distributed to consolidate alliances, reward loyalty, or strengthen patronage networks.

When allocation frameworks prioritise political optics, quota logic, or symbolic geographic balance over actual demographic and economic need, resources become diluted in high-pressure labour markets while being over-concentrated in lower-demand contexts. In densely populated urban or peri-urban areas, where youth competition is highest, this distortion can intensify unemployment and underemployment pressures.

The respondent concludes with a broader governance diagnosis:

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*“Until we get to that point where we can address our issues beyond politicking, we may not get it right.” NG\_KII\_AR\_43*

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This statement situates youth employment within a wider political economy logic: allocation mechanisms are not neutral administrative processes but politically mediated decisions shaped by bargaining, representation claims, and distributive incentives. As long as resource flows are influenced more by political negotiation than by demographic data and labour market evidence, policy efficiency will remain compromised. In this sense, youth unemployment is not only an economic phenomenon but also a reflection of institutional allocation incentives embedded within Nigeria’s federal governance structure.

From a political economy perspective, this dynamic is structurally rational within a context of limited opportunities. When the number of aspirants far exceeds available positions, employment becomes a high-value commodity. Political actors may use job allocation strategically to build or maintain influence. At the same time, youth seeking access may invest in relational capital as a parallel strategy to skill development.

However, transactional employment allocation carries systemic consequences:

- a) **Distortion of Meritocracy:** Perceptions of relational allocation undermine belief in fair competition.
- b) **Reinforcement of Inequality:** Youth without access to influential networks face compounded disadvantage.
- c) **Reduced Institutional Legitimacy:** Public trust in recruitment systems weakens.
- d) **Incentive Misalignment:** Loyalty may be prioritised over competence, affecting institutional performance.

Importantly, employment as a political transaction is not uniformly experienced across all sectors. Private firms with performance-driven models may prioritise competence more strictly. However, where public sector roles remain highly coveted due to perceived stability, political mediation appears more salient.

The transactional framing also influences youth behaviour. Rather than viewing employment pathways as strictly skill-based, some youth interpret them as hybrid arenas, requiring both competence and connection. This perception shapes career strategies, social networking practices, and engagement with political actors.

At the same time, not all institutional actors endorse this dynamic. Several respondents across the states expressed frustration with interference and emphasised commitment to procedural fairness. The persistence of transactional practices reflects systemic vulnerability rather than universal institutional intent.

In contexts of scarcity, employment in Nigeria operates partly as a political transaction, mediated by networks,



influence, and alignment. While not uniformly applied, this dynamic shapes perceptions and behaviours across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo. Addressing youth unemployment requires not only expanding job creation, but also insulating recruitment processes from informal mediation and reinforcing transparent, merit-based allocation systems. Without such safeguards, employment will continue to function as a currency of influence rather than a neutral outcome of competence.

### 4.7.3. Normalisation of Precarity

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states, precarious employment is no longer described as a temporary misfortune; it is increasingly treated as the expected condition of youth economic life. Interviews and FGDs suggest that unstable income, multiple job-holding, delayed career progression, and uncertain contracts have become normalised within youth narratives. Rather than viewing precarity as a deviation from stable employment pathways, many participants describe it as the default reality.

In Kaduna, one participant explained how career plans evolve in response to instability:

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*“For me, the way things are now, you cannot just sit down and expect that one job will solve all your problems. Even when you get a job, the pay is not always enough to meet your needs. Sometimes you get a job that is not exactly what you studied in school, but you still take it because you need something to start with. You just have to adjust. You have to adjust your expectations, adjust your lifestyle, and sometimes adjust your career path. If you keep waiting for the perfect job that aligns with everything you want, you might wait for a very long time. So most of us just adapt and try to make the best out of whatever opportunity comes our way.” FGD Kaduna*

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This simple phrase captures adaptive resignation. Adjustment replaces expectation. Long-term planning gives way to short-term survival strategies. Employment becomes fluid, provisional, and opportunistic rather than structured and linear.

In Abuja, a young respondent described the necessity of diversification:

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*“I would like to say that you would hardly find a youth who has just one source of income. You just have to put your hands into so many things to be able to pay your bills. To be comfortable, not like the extra, just be comfortable.” FGD Abuja*

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This comment reflects the widespread practice of income stacking, combining formal roles, side businesses, freelance gigs, and short-term contracts. While diversification demonstrates resilience, it also signals income insecurity. Stability is not assumed; redundancy is self-created.

In Oyo State, a participant reflected on income unpredictability in informal work:

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*“Some weeks are good, some weeks nothing comes.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03  
(Oyo)*

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This oscillation between surplus and scarcity reinforces financial volatility. Budgeting, savings, and long-term investment become difficult when income flows are inconsistent. Over time, such instability shapes expectations downward—youth learn to anticipate fluctuation rather than demand stability.



Another respondent in Kaduna described contract insecurity:

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*“You don’t even know if you’ll still be there next year.” FGD Kaduna*

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Short-term contracts, probation extensions, and informal employment arrangements undermine continuity. The absence of written agreements or structured progression paths further entrenches uncertainty.

Even among digitally engaged youth, precarity persists. In Abuja, a freelancer described platform dependency:

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*“If the client disappears, that’s it.” FGD Abuja*

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Gig work offers flexibility and potentially higher earnings yet lacks enforceable safeguards. Platform-based employment shifts risk onto workers, who absorb fluctuations in demand without institutional support. Importantly, these narratives rarely frame precarity as injustice alone; they often present it as reality. Youth speak pragmatically, focusing on coping rather than contestation. This internalisation reflects adaptation to structural conditions. However, it also signals diminished expectation of systemic protection.

The normalisation of precarity has several political economy implications:

- a) **Reduced Demand for Reform:** When instability is expected, mobilisation for structural change may weaken.
- b) **Shift Toward Individual Coping:** Youth invest in self-upskilling and diversification rather than institutional engagement.
- c) **Intergenerational Impact:** Delayed savings, asset accumulation, and family formation affect broader socio-economic stability.
- d) **Institutional Disengagement:** If stable employment is perceived as unattainable, trust in formal labour systems declines.

At the same time, the persistence of aspiration alongside precarity is notable. Youth continue to pursue education, digital training, and entrepreneurial ventures despite uncertainty. Adaptation does not eliminate ambition; it reshapes its horizon.

From a structural perspective, precarity becomes normalised when labour supply consistently exceeds demand, when regulatory frameworks fail to enforce protection, and when institutional reform lags behind economic transformation. Under such conditions, instability is routinised.

Across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo, precarious employment has become an expected feature of youth economic life. Income volatility, short-term contracts, and diversified coping strategies are internalised as normal rather than exceptional. The normalisation of precarity reflects adaptation to structural imbalance, but it also signals lowered expectations of institutional protection. Addressing youth unemployment requires not only job creation, but deliberate efforts to restore stability, enforce labour protections, and re-anchor dignity within employment systems.

#### 4.7.4. Youth Agency Beyond the State

While much of the preceding analysis has focused on structural constraints, institutional weaknesses, and governance challenges, the evidence across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo states also reveals a parallel and equally important dynamic: youth are actively constructing opportunity beyond formal state systems. In contexts where public programmes are perceived as limited, politicised, or inaccessible, many young people are redirecting their energy toward self-organised, market-driven, and peer-supported pathways.

In Kaduna, one participant captured this orientation toward self-reliance:



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*“Shortly before I finished NYSC [National Youth Service], I took it upon myself to learn quite a number of things that would give me the ability to earn from my knowledge... because if I had only relied on the knowledge I gained from the university, I doubt I would be able to grow myself.” FGD Kaduna*

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This statement reflects a pragmatic recalibration of expectation. Rather than positioning the state as the primary guarantor of opportunity, youth increasingly treat it as peripheral. The responsibility for employment generation shifts inward, onto individual initiative and informal networks.

In Abuja, a freelancer described the logic of bypassing local constraints through digital markets:

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*“From my observation, I would say youth go for online remote jobs, mostly foreign, which normally pays in dollars and not in Naira. Your client doesn’t have to be in Nigeria.” FGD Abuja*

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This perspective signals a strategic decoupling from domestic labour market limitations. Remote work platforms allow youth to access transnational income streams, reducing dependence on local institutional ecosystems. Global digital markets become alternative opportunity structures.

In Oyo State, a participant explained how peer networks substitute for formal support:

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*“We share what we learn among ourselves.” NG\_FGD\_YGD\_03 (Oyo)*

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This form of horizontal knowledge exchange illustrates grassroots capacity building. Youth communities, both physical and digital, serve as informal incubators, replacing structured government-sponsored training with collaborative learning.

Another respondent in Kaduna reflected on entrepreneurial adaptation:

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*“You just start small and grow it.” FGD Kaduna*

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Micro-enterprise becomes both a survival mechanism and an aspiration pathway. While capital constraints remain significant, incremental scaling replaces formal employment as a mobility strategy.

Importantly, youth agency beyond the state does not imply hostility toward government. Rather, it reflects adaptive rationality. When institutions are perceived as slow, politicised, or under-resourced, youth redirect effort toward domains they can influence directly, digital platforms, peer networks, micro-enterprises, and international markets. However, this outward turn has structural implications:

- a) **Privatisation of Risk:** Youth bear the full burden of market volatility, capital investment, and failure.
- b) **Inequality of Starting Point:** Those with digital access, capital, and networks are better positioned to succeed independently.
- c) **Reduced Institutional Accountability:** As youth disengage from state systems, pressure for institutional



reform may diminish.

- d) Fragmented Collective Voice:** Individualised coping strategies may weaken coordinated advocacy for systemic change.

At the same time, youth innovation demonstrates significant untapped potential. The emergence of peer-led training initiatives, digital freelancing ecosystems, and micro-enterprise networks suggests that Nigerian youth possess adaptability and entrepreneurial drive. What is often missing is structured support, affordable finance, reliable infrastructure, legal protection, and integrated scaling pathways.

From a political economy perspective, youth agency beyond the state both compensates for and conceals institutional weakness. Informal and digital innovation absorb demographic pressure and reduce visible unemployment, yet they do so without fundamentally restructuring labour demand or strengthening governance systems. The system stabilises through youth resilience.

Nevertheless, these adaptive strategies should not be interpreted as disengagement from national development. Rather, they signal a shift in where youth locate opportunity and authority. The state is no longer the sole or primary gateway; markets, platforms, and peer networks increasingly share that role.

A critical but often underexplored dimension of the youth employment challenge is the structural misalignment between skills production systems and labour market demand. While this is frequently framed as a technical issue of curriculum relevance, the evidence suggests a deeper political economy constraint. Institutional actors responsible for skills provision and those representing labour market demand operate within separate accountability systems, budget structures, and performance incentives. As a result, alignment is not naturally incentivised within the system. Even where reforms are proposed, they often require redistributing authority, redefining mandates, or reallocating resources across institutions, changes that may encounter resistance. Thus, the persistence of skills mismatch reflects not only system inefficiency but also the political and institutional costs associated with reform.

Youths are actively constructing employment pathways beyond formal state structures. Through digital markets, peer-learning networks, and micro-enterprises, they demonstrate resilience and innovation in the face of systemic constraints. However, this agency operates within uneven ecosystems and transfers risk onto individuals. Sustainable youth employment reform requires not only recognising youth ingenuity but aligning institutional frameworks to support, protect, and scale these bottom-up innovations rather than leaving them to function in isolation.

## 4.8. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The evidence from the study reveals that Nigeria's youth employment challenge is neither singular nor purely economic. It is structural, institutional, and political. Across regions, similar patterns emerge: labour supply consistently outpaces demand; informal sectors absorb excess labour without guaranteeing stability; policy frameworks exist, but implementation is fragmented; and access to opportunity is mediated by networks, gender norms, socio-economic background, and digital inclusion.

### 4.8.1. Structural Imbalance as the Foundation

At its core, the youth employment crisis reflects a demographic–economic mismatch. Youth population growth exceeds the absorptive capacity of the formal economy. Informality becomes the default stabiliser, accessible but precarious. Underemployment, income volatility, and occupational drift are widespread. Even formal employment does not consistently guarantee wage adequacy or upward mobility. Precarity is no longer exceptional; it is normalised.

### 4.8.2. Policy Abundance and Institutional Fragility

Nigeria does not lack youth employment policies. Across states, stakeholders acknowledge the presence of frameworks, empowerment schemes, and intervention programmes. However, the transition from policy articulation to sustained implementation remains weak. Funding instability, fragmented mandates, limited monitoring systems,



and political discontinuity undermine continuity and scale. Rhetoric is abundant. Delivery is uneven. The policy-implementation gap is compounded by governance dynamics. Recruitment processes and programme allocation are perceived to be vulnerable to political influence. Employment, particularly in high-value sectors, functions partly as a transactional asset within influence networks. This erodes meritocratic trust and reinforces inequality.

#### 4.8.3. Education, Digital Transformation, and Emerging Stratification

The education–labour market disconnect further entrenches structural imbalance. Employers consistently report skill gaps, both technical and behavioural, while youth report insufficient practical preparation. As digital sectors expand, the digital divide emerges as a new axis of inequality. Youth with connectivity, devices, and advanced digital skills access global markets; those without remain confined to saturated local economies. Digital opportunity exists, but unevenly.

#### 4.8.4. Lived Experience: Fatigue, Adaptation, and Conditional Trust

Youth narratives reveal emotional strain, strategic detachment, and recalibrated expectations. What appears externally as apathy is, in reality, fatigue produced by repeated structural constraint. Youth are not disengaged from ambition; they are cautious about institutional reliability.

At the same time, they demonstrate resilience. They diversify income streams, build peer learning networks, explore gig platforms, and initiate grassroots digital training efforts. Youth agency is vibrant, but compensatory. It fills institutional gaps rather than being structurally supported by the state.

#### 4.8.5. Private Sector Dynamics: Potential and Constraint

Employers recognise youth potential but cite skill mismatch, regulatory burdens, and economic volatility as constraints on hiring. Labour demand is growing selectively—particularly in digital and fintech sectors—but remains limited relative to supply. Regulatory complexity and cost sensitivity discourage large-scale recruitment of inexperienced workers.

Thus, labour demand, institutional capacity, and skill preparation remain misaligned.

#### 4.8.6. Political Economy Insight

Taken together, the findings point to four higher-order political economy dynamics:

- a) **Scarcity Amplifies Mediation:** When jobs are few, allocation becomes politically and socially mediated.
- b) **Informality Stabilises but Stagnates employment:** It absorbs labour but entrenches precarity.
- c) **Youth Resilience Masks Structural Weakness:** Adaptation prevents crisis escalation but reduces pressure for systemic reform.
- d) **Rhetoric Substitutes for Reform:** Policy visibility often outpaces institutional durability.

The youth employment challenge reflects incentive misalignment between political cycles and long-term reform, between policy ambition and fiscal commitment, between educational output and labour demand, and between youth innovation and institutional scaffolding.

#### 4.8.7. Implication for Reform

Incremental programme launches are unlikely to resolve these structural tensions. Durable change requires:

- Institutional insulation of recruitment and programme allocation from political interference;
- Stable and predictable financing frameworks,
- Stronger coordination across federal, state, and local levels,
- Systematic alignment between education systems and labour demand,
- Digital infrastructure expansion and inclusion,
- Regulatory reform that reduces hiring risk while protecting workers,
- Formalisation pathways that extend protection without overburdening the enterprise.

Youth employment in Nigeria is ultimately a governance issue embedded within the economic structure. Addressing it requires systemic alignment rather than episodic intervention.



## 5. POLICY OPTIONS AND STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings from this study demonstrate that Nigeria's youth employment challenge is systemic rather than episodic. It reflects structural labour market imbalance, fragmented policy implementation, governance vulnerabilities, education–industry misalignment, digital inequality, and regulatory constraints affecting private sector hiring. Youth resilience has partially compensated for institutional weakness, but adaptation alone cannot deliver sustainable transformation.

This chapter proposes strategic policy options organised around four reform pillars: strengthening policy design and coordination; improving implementation and accountability; stimulating demand-side job creation and private sector engagement; and advancing inclusion-focused, regionally responsive interventions. The recommendations move beyond programme proliferation toward structural alignment.

### 5.1. STRENGTHENING POLICY DESIGN AND COORDINATION

#### 5.1.1. Institutionalising a Long-Term Youth Employment Strategy

One of the most consistent weaknesses identified across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo is the episodic nature of fragmented youth employment policy and programs, which in most cases are not backed up by legislations and budget. Programmes are launched with visibility, yet often lack continuity, institutional embedding, and long-term fiscal commitment. To address this structural fragility, youth employment reform in Nigeria must transition from short-term interventionism to a legislatively anchored, multi-year national strategy that survives political transitions and aligns all tiers of government under a unified framework.

At the core of this reform should be the development of a **ten-year National Youth Employment Strategy** (NYES), backed formally by legislation and integrated into medium-term fiscal planning. Such a strategy would move youth employment from the realm of policy rhetoric to that of statutory obligation. Embedding the framework in law would reduce vulnerability to administrative turnover and discourage programme reinvention with each political cycle. To ensure durability and bipartisan continuity, the Federal Government should sponsor and pass a **Youth Employment and Skills Development Act** that:

- a) Mandates the development of a 10-year National Youth Employment Strategy (NYES);
- b) Requires state-level alignment frameworks;
- c) Establishes annual reporting obligations to the National Assembly;
- d) Creates enforceable monitoring and accountability provisions.

Embedding youth employment within statutory law reduces vulnerability to administrative discontinuity and political rebranding.

The strategy should articulate measurable, time-bound targets that reflect both employment quantity and quality. These targets should not focus solely on reducing unemployment rates, but also address job quality, income adequacy, digital inclusion, formalisation rates, and gender equity. For example, benchmarks could include measurable increases in formal youth employment, expanded digital literacy across secondary and tertiary education systems, and targeted reductions in youth underemployment. Clear targets create accountability and allow progress to be objectively assessed over time.

Crucially, the strategy must harmonise federal, state, and local roles within a coherent policy architecture. The federal government should provide strategic direction, national targets, and financing frameworks, while states adapt implementation models to reflect local labour market realities. Local governments, in turn, should support beneficiary identification, outreach, and feedback collection. This vertical integration would reduce duplication and fragmentation, ensuring that national ambition translates into regionally responsive action.

Fiscal alignment is equally important. Youth employment reform cannot succeed if strategy and budget planning operate in parallel rather than in coordination. Multi-year budget commitments tied to strategic targets should be



integrated into the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF). Ring-fenced allocations for youth employment initiatives would reduce funding volatility and enhance programme sustainability. Where appropriate, blended financing models, combining public funds with private sector or development partner contributions, can expand reach while preserving government ownership.

Effective institutionalisation also requires structured coordination across ministries. Youth employment intersects with labour, education, finance, industry, agriculture, digital economy, and social protection sectors. A formal inter-ministerial coordination mechanism, operating with clear reporting obligations and shared data systems, would reduce policy silos and improve implementation coherence. Without such coordination, even well-designed strategies risk fragmentation at the execution stage.

*Table 4.1: Phase-Based Implementation Roadmap for National Youth Employment Strategy*

Phase	Timeline	Strategic Focus	Key Actions	Expected Outcome
<b>Phase 1</b>	Year 1–2	Institutional Foundation & System Setup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legislative passage of Youth Employment Strategy</li> <li>Establishment of integrated data systems and Labour Market Observatory</li> <li>National baseline labour market assessment</li> <li>Creation of inter-ministerial coordination framework</li> </ul>	Legal and institutional foundation established; reliable baseline data available; coordination mechanisms operational
<b>Phase 2</b>	Year 3–5	Structural Alignment & Expansion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large-scale education–industry curriculum alignment</li> <li>Expansion of digital infrastructure and inclusion programmes</li> <li>Rollout of youth hiring incentives (tax credits, wage subsidies)</li> <li>Formalisation pathways for informal enterprises</li> </ul>	Improved skill alignment; increased youth hiring; digital access widened; informal-to-formal transition strengthened
<b>Phase 3</b>	Year 6–10	Consolidation & Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consolidation of formal youth employment growth</li> <li>Extension of social protection mechanisms to youth workers (including gig workers)</li> <li>Longitudinal tracking of employment and income outcomes</li> </ul>	Sustained job quality improvements; strengthened labour protections; measurable long-term employment impact

Another critical pillar of institutionalisation is labour market intelligence. The establishment of a National Youth Labour Market Observatory would allow policymakers to track employment trends, sectoral demand shifts, digital skills penetration, and regional disparities. Evidence-based reform requires reliable and disaggregated data. Annual youth employment outlook reports could inform strategic adjustments and ensure policy responsiveness to economic transformation.

To prevent discontinuity across political transitions, formal continuity mechanisms should be embedded within the



strategy. Incoming administrations should be required to publish continuity statements outlining how they will sustain or adapt the national framework rather than abandon it. Programme audits prior to discontinuation should be mandatory, ensuring that reforms are refined rather than discarded. To aid this, Government should:

- Establish a formal Research–Policy Integration Unit within the proposed National Youth Employment and Coordination Council (NYECC);
- Mandate that all new youth employment programmes include documented literature review and empirical justification;
- Require periodic independent research reviews of major employment schemes;
- Commission universities and accredited research institutes to conduct outcome audits tied to budget renewal decisions.

Finally, meaningful stakeholder inclusion must be built into the governance of the strategy. Private sector representatives, youth-led organisations, civil society actors, and regional stakeholders should participate in advisory and review processes. However, representation must extend beyond urban elite networks to include rural youth, women, informal sector participants, and digitally excluded groups. Co-design enhances legitimacy and ensures that strategic ambition reflects lived realities.

Institutionalising a long-term youth employment strategy is not merely an administrative adjustment; it is a structural realignment. It transforms youth employment from a recurring political slogan into a measurable, financed, and coordinated national priority. Policy stability reduces reinvention, strengthens institutional memory, and signals to youth that employment reform is a sustained commitment rather than a cyclical announcement.

In the absence of such institutionalisation, programme proliferation will continue without cumulative impact. With it, Nigeria can begin shifting from fragmented interventions toward coherent and durable labour market transformation.

### 5.1.2. Establishing a Coordinated Youth Employment Council

One of the most persistent weaknesses identified by the study is institutional fragmentation. Multiple ministries and agencies operate youth-focused programmes, often with overlapping mandates, separate databases, inconsistent eligibility criteria, and limited inter-agency visibility. This duplication reduces efficiency, weakens accountability, and dilutes impact.

To address this structural challenge, a National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC) should be formally established as a high-level cross-ministerial governance body. The Council should serve not as an additional bureaucratic layer, but as a strategic integrator aligning policy, financing, data, and implementation across sectors and levels of government.

Table 4.2: Composition of the National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC)

Category	Representation	Role
Chair	Vice President or Designated Coordinating Minister	Political authority and cross-ministerial oversight
Core Ministries	Labour, Education, Trade and Industry, Finance, Digital Economy, Youth Development	Strategic alignment and implementation coordination
Supporting Ministries	Agriculture, Women Affairs, Planning, Trade	Sectoral integration
Data Institutions	National Bureau of Statistics, SMEDAN, ITF	Labour market intelligence
Private Sector	Chambers of Commerce, SME Associations, Tech Hubs	Demand-side alignment
Youth Representatives	Diverse youth networks (gender-balanced, regional inclusion)	Ground-level feedback and policy legitimacy



Development Partners (Observer Status)	Multilateral institutions	Technical support and financing coordination
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The National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC) should initially be established through an executive order to ensure rapid operationalisation, and subsequently embedded within the proposed Youth Employment and Skills Development Act to guarantee long-term institutional continuity. Anchoring the Council in legislation is essential to protect it from political transitions and administrative restructuring, ensuring that youth employment coordination becomes a permanent feature of national governance rather than a temporary initiative.

The Council’s mandate should be both strategic and operational. At its core, the NYECC should provide strategic policy alignment across ministries whose mandates intersect with youth employment, including labour, education, industry, finance, digital economy, agriculture, and youth development. By serving as a central coordinating authority, the Council would reduce duplication, clarify institutional responsibilities, and promote coherence in programme design and delivery.

In addition, the NYECC should oversee integrated planning and budgeting coordination. Youth employment interventions must be reflected not only in policy statements but also in medium-term expenditure frameworks and annual budget cycles. The Council would therefore ensure that employment targets are financially backed, that allocations are aligned with strategic priorities, and that funding streams across ministries are harmonised rather than fragmented.

A further critical responsibility of the Council would be consolidated labour market data governance. Fragmented data systems currently undermine evidence-based policymaking. The NYECC should establish unified data-sharing protocols, oversee the development of a national youth employment dashboard, and coordinate the production of annual labour market outlook reports. Reliable and integrated data will strengthen planning, monitoring, and adaptive reform. This reduces duplication and improves transparency.

**Table 4.3: Integrated Data Framework**

Data Source	Current Status	Proposed Integration Mechanism
NBS Labour Data	Periodic surveys	Annual harmonised reporting to NYECC
SMEDAN SME Data	Sector-specific	Linked enterprise–youth employment tracking
Education Institutions	Graduate data	School-to-work transition tracking
Digital Platforms	Fragmented	Voluntary reporting framework

Fragmented data systems currently undermine effective monitoring, accountability, and evidence-based reform in Nigeria’s youth employment ecosystem. To strengthen policy coherence and improve performance tracking, the National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC) should lead the consolidation of labour market data infrastructure. This should include the establishment of a National Youth Employment Dashboard for real-time tracking of programmes and outcomes, a unified beneficiary identification system (linked to the National Identification Number where feasible) to prevent duplication and improve targeting, formal inter-agency data-sharing protocols, and the publication of an Annual Youth Employment Outlook Report to guide strategic planning and public accountability.

The Council should also serve as the central body for monitoring and performance oversight. It would track implementation progress across ministries and states, review outcome indicators, publish periodic performance reports, and recommend course corrections where necessary. Embedding performance oversight within a high-level coordination body enhances accountability and reduces diffused responsibility.

Equally important is federal–state vertical integration. Youth employment realities differ significantly across regions, and effective reform requires structured collaboration between national and subnational governments. The NYECC



should therefore establish mechanisms through which state-level action plans align with national targets while retaining flexibility to respond to local labour market conditions.

*Table 4.4: Key Risks and Mitigation Strategies*

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Political resistance	Fragmentation persists	Legal anchoring through legislation
Inter-ministerial rivalry	Coordination breakdown	Clear mandate mapping and chair authority
Data privacy concerns	Data integration delays	Secure digital governance protocols
Bureaucratic inertia	Slow rollout	Performance-linked evaluation for agencies
Tokenistic youth inclusion	Legitimacy erosion	Transparent selection criteria for youth reps

Effective youth employment reform requires restructuring how governments manage the relationship between skills supply and labour demand. This includes:

- Establishing **cross-ministerial coordination platforms** linking education, labour, industry, and planning functions
- Embedding **labour market intelligence systems** into training design
- Creating **joint accountability frameworks** tied to employment outcomes rather than training outputs
- Exploring **private sector co-governance models** in skills development systems

Without structural realignment, coordination efforts are likely to remain limited in impact.

The findings highlight demographic-blind allocation practices driven by political balancing logic. To correct this:

- Resource allocation formulas should be tied to youth population density, labour market pressure indicators, and unemployment severity, not solely geographic equity logic.
- Federal transfers for youth employment programmes should include demographic weighting.
- Public dashboards should display state-by-state youth population, programme allocation, and beneficiary reach.
- Such transparency reduces politicised distortion and improves efficiency in high-pressure labour markets.

Finally, the Council must institutionalise private sector and youth stakeholder inclusion. Employers represent the demand side of the labour market and must be integrated into policy alignment processes. Youth representatives, drawn from diverse socio-economic and geographic backgrounds, should also participate meaningfully in advisory and review processes. Such inclusion enhances legitimacy, improves policy realism, and strengthens public trust.

### 5.1.3. Aligning Education and Industry Through Structured Co-Design

A central finding of this study is the persistent disconnect between Nigeria’s education system and labour market demand. Employers across sectors consistently report skill gaps, while youth describe insufficient practical preparation for work. Bridging this divide requires moving beyond curriculum revision toward structured, institutionalised co-design between education providers and industry actors. Education reform must become demand-informed rather than supply-driven.

First, industry advisory boards should be institutionalised within tertiary institutions, particularly in high-employment and growth-oriented fields such as technology, agriculture, manufacturing, renewable energy, and the creative economy. These boards, comprising private sector representatives, sector associations, and industry practitioners, should meet regularly with faculty leadership to review curriculum relevance, identify emerging skill demands, and recommend programme adjustments. Importantly, advisory boards should not be symbolic; their recommendations should be formally integrated into curriculum review cycles and accreditation processes.

Second, internship and apprenticeship components should be mandated in selected academic and technical programmes. Work-based learning should become a structured and credit-bearing requirement rather than an optional attachment. Government can support this transition by co-financing apprenticeship placements, providing incentives to firms that host interns, and developing national standards for internship quality and supervision.



Structured workplace exposure reduces transition shock from school to work and enhances employability. Third, the modernisation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) must be accelerated. Many vocational centres operate with outdated equipment, limited industry linkage, and insufficient digital integration. A comprehensive TVET reform programme should prioritise equipment upgrades, instructor retraining, certification alignment with industry standards, and digital competency integration. Sector-specific Centres of Excellence could be established in partnership with industry clusters to serve as regional training hubs aligned with local economic strengths.

Fourth, soft skills, digital literacy, and workplace readiness must be embedded across curricula at secondary and tertiary levels. Employers consistently emphasise communication skills, teamwork, time management, problem-solving, and professional etiquette as critical gaps. Digital literacy including basic data skills, online collaboration tools, cybersecurity awareness, and remote work competencies should be integrated into general education requirements rather than confined to specialised ICT programmes.

To ensure sustainability, education-industry alignment should be supported by a national framework linking the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour, industry associations, and accreditation bodies. Labour market intelligence data generated through the proposed National Youth Employment Dashboard should inform periodic curriculum updates.

Ultimately, aligning education with labour demand requires institutional collaboration rather than ad hoc consultation. Structured co-design mechanisms, mandatory workplace exposure, modernised vocational training, and integrated digital competencies will ensure that education produces graduates equipped not only with theoretical knowledge, but with market-relevant skills. Without such reform, the supply–demand mismatch will persist, reinforcing underemployment and limiting the transformative potential of Nigeria’s demographic dividend.

**Table 4.5: Structured Education-Industry Alignment Framework**

Reform Area	Current Gap Identified	Proposed Intervention	Lead Actors	Expected Outcome
Curriculum Design	Theoretical focus; weak industry input	Institutionalise Industry Advisory Boards	Universities, Polytechnics, Industry Associations	Market-relevant curricula
Work Experience	Limited practical exposure	Mandatory credit-bearing internships/ apprenticeships	Education Ministry, Employers, NYECC	Improved school-to-work transition
TVET Systems	Outdated equipment; low prestige	Modernise TVET centres; sector-specific Centres of Excellence	Federal and State Govts, Private Sector	Skilled technical workforce
Soft Skills	Weak communication and professionalism	Integrate soft skills modules across disciplines	Institutions, Accreditation Bodies	Improved employability
Digital Literacy	Uneven digital readiness	Embed digital competencies across all programmes	Education Ministry, Digital Economy Ministry	Workforce-ready graduates



Labour Market Feedback	No real-time curriculum adjustment	Annual Labour Market Outlook informing curriculum review	NYECC, NBS	Demand-informed education system
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## 5.2. IMPROVING IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### 5.2.1. Insulating Recruitment and Programme Allocation from Political Interference

One of the most corrosive dynamics identified in this study is the perception, and in some cases experience, of political interference in recruitment and programme allocation. Where employment opportunities are scarce, even isolated cases of patronage undermine public trust, distort meritocracy, and reinforce inequality. Restoring confidence in recruitment systems requires institutional safeguards that reduce discretionary manipulation and increase procedural transparency.

Insulating recruitment from political interference does not require eliminating political oversight, but it does require standardising and digitising processes in ways that reduce opaque decision-making. The goal is to transform recruitment from a discretionary administrative act into a traceable, rules-based process.

#### A. Digitising Recruitment Processes

Public sector recruitment and beneficiary selection for youth programmes should be conducted through secure, centralised digital platforms. These systems should:

- Use automated application tracking;
- Apply pre-defined eligibility filters;
- Record timestamped submissions;
- Generate audit trails for every stage of selection.

Digitisation reduces informal influence by limiting undocumented intervention points. Where physical submission and manual shortlisting dominate, vulnerability to interference increases.

#### B. Publishing Transparent Shortlisting Criteria

All recruitment exercises should publicly disclose:

- Minimum qualification thresholds;
- Scoring categories (e.g., experience, technical skill, aptitude test score);
- Weighting of each category;
- Cut-off scores for progression to interview stage.

Transparency shifts the burden of proof from applicants to institutions. When criteria are clearly articulated in advance, deviations become visible and contestable.

#### C. Publishing Anonymised Selection Scoring Frameworks

To strengthen credibility, institutions should publish anonymised summary scoring matrices after recruitment exercises. This could include:

- Total number of applicants;
- Number shortlisted;
- Score ranges;
- Aggregate demographic distribution (gender, region, disability inclusion).

Such disclosure increases confidence without violating privacy protections.

#### D. Establishing Independent Oversight Panels



An independent recruitment oversight mechanism should be introduced for:

- Federal and state civil service recruitment;
- High-value youth employment programmes;
- Large-scale public hiring initiatives.

Oversight panels should include:

- Civil society representatives;
- Professional associations;
- Independent human resource experts;
- Anti-corruption agency observers (where appropriate).

These panels would review compliance with published criteria and issue public integrity certifications.

### E. Strengthening Whistleblower and Grievance Mechanisms

Trust cannot be rebuilt without credible complaint pathways. Institutions should:

- Establish anonymous digital reporting channels;
- Guarantee non-retaliation protections;
- Provide clear timelines for grievance resolution;
- Publish summary grievance statistics annually.

Where whistleblower systems exist but lack enforcement credibility, uptake remains low. Legal protections and visible enforcement are essential.

*Table 4.6: Recruitment Integrity Reform Framework*

Reform Area	Current Vulnerability	Proposed Safeguard	Lead Institution	Accountability Tool
Application Process	Manual handling; informal access	Centralised digital recruitment portal	Civil Service Commission	Automated audit logs
Shortlisting	Discretionary filtering	Published scoring criteria	Recruiting Agency	Public eligibility checklist
Final Selection	Opaque panel decisions	Anonymised scoring publication	Oversight Panel	Post-recruitment disclosure
Oversight	Internal-only review	Independent recruitment observers	NYECC and Anti-corruption bodies	Annual compliance audit
Grievances	Weak complaint channels	Anonymous digital reporting system	Public Service Commission	Public grievance report

*Table 4.7: Risks and Mitigation in Recruitment Reform*

Risk	Impact	Mitigation Strategy
Political resistance	Reform stalled	Legal anchoring and public disclosure requirements
Digital manipulation	Data tampering	Secure, encrypted systems and audit logs
Token oversight panels	Weak accountability	Independent selection criteria and public reporting
Whistleblower retaliation	Low reporting	Enforceable legal protection and penalties
Capacity gaps	Poor implementation	HR training and digital system rollout support

If effectively implemented, insulating recruitment and programme allocation from political interference would have transformative institutional and social effects. First, it would strengthen meritocracy by ensuring that competence, qualifications, and performance, rather than informal networks, determine access to opportunity. Second, it would improve institutional credibility, as transparent and rules-based systems signal procedural integrity and reduce



perceptions of bias. Third, it would enhance youth trust in public institutions, particularly among educated but excluded groups who currently view recruitment processes with scepticism.

By reducing opportunities for informal influence, such reforms would also diminish the incentive for transactional job-seeking behaviours, shifting effort away from political alignment and toward skills development and performance. Over time, this would improve institutional performance, as recruitment systems that prioritise competence are more likely to produce efficient, professional, and accountable public service outcomes.

Transparency is not merely an administrative reform, it is a structural intervention. In labour markets marked by scarcity, where employment opportunities carry high social and economic value, procedural fairness becomes more than an ethical obligation; it becomes a stabilising governance tool. When recruitment systems are predictable, open, and contestable, public confidence strengthens, institutional legitimacy deepens, and the broader employment ecosystem becomes more resilient.

### 5.2.2. Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

A recurring weakness across youth employment interventions in Nigeria is the emphasis on activity-based reporting rather than outcome-based accountability. Programmes often report the number of beneficiaries trained, grants disbursed, or workshops conducted, yet provide limited evidence on whether participants secure employment, increase income, or sustain enterprises over time. Without structured monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, policy reform remains reactive and fragmented.

Strengthening M&E systems requires shifting from output monitoring (what was delivered) to outcome tracking (what changed as a result).

#### Developing Centralised Beneficiary Databases

Government should establish a unified, centralised beneficiary database for all publicly funded youth employment programmes. This database should:

- Assign unique beneficiary identifiers (linked to NIN where feasible);
- Record programme type, duration, sector, and funding source;
- Track demographic information (gender, location, vulnerability status);
- Prevent duplication of benefits across programmes.

A centralised system enhances coordination across ministries and ensures that beneficiaries are not repeatedly enrolled in short-term programmes without progression.

#### Tracking Post-Training Employment Outcomes (6 – 24 Months)

To assess real impact beyond programme completion, youth employment interventions should incorporate structured longitudinal follow-up at key intervals, specifically six, twelve, and twenty-four months after training or programme participation. Such tracking should capture meaningful outcome indicators, including employment status (formal employment, informal work, or self-employment), monthly income band, business survival rates for entrepreneurship beneficiaries, sector alignment between training received and current occupation, and job quality indicators such as contract status and wage adequacy. By systematically monitoring these indicators over time, policymakers can distinguish between short-term placement success and sustained economic mobility, identify high-performing interventions for scale-up, and redesign or discontinue programmes that fail to generate durable employment outcomes.

#### Publishing Annual Performance Reports

The NYECC, in collaboration with implementing ministries, should publish an Annual Youth Employment Performance Report detailing:



- Total programme beneficiaries;
- Employment outcomes by sector and region;
- Gender and vulnerability inclusion rates;
- Budget allocation vs execution rates;
- Cost-per-job metrics;
- Lessons learned and policy adjustments.

Public reporting strengthens transparency, enhances donor confidence, and reinforces institutional accountability.

### **Embedding Youth Representatives in Monitoring Committees**

To enhance legitimacy and responsiveness, youth representatives, drawn from diverse socio-economic and geographic backgrounds, should be formally embedded in monitoring and review committees. Their role should include:

- Providing beneficiary feedback;
- Participating in programme audits;
- Reviewing grievance cases;
- Contributing to annual evaluation reports.

Youth inclusion in monitoring shifts oversight from top-down administrative review to participatory governance.

### **Structured Monitoring Framework**

*Table 4.8: Output versus Outcome Monitoring Shift*

<b>Traditional Approach (Output-Focused)</b>	<b>Proposed Approach (Outcome-Focused)</b>
Number trained	% employed within 12 months
Amount disbursed	Income growth among beneficiaries
Workshops conducted	Business survival rate at 24 months
Programme enrolment figures	Job quality indicators (contract status, wage level)
Completion certificates issued	Sector alignment with training

### **Proposed Youth Employment Results Framework**

*Table 4.9: Youth Employment Results Chain*

<b>Level</b>	<b>Indicator Examples</b>
Inputs	Budget allocation; number of trainers; equipment procured
Outputs	Youth trained; internships completed; grants disbursed
Outcomes	Employment secured; income growth; business sustainability
Impact	Reduction in youth underemployment; improved wage adequacy; increased formalisation

This structured results chain ensures clarity between what is delivered and what is achieved.

### **Risk and Mitigation Matrix**

*Table 4.10: Monitoring System Risks and Safeguards*

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigation Strategy</b>
Data fragmentation	Incomplete impact tracking	Centralised digital platform
Privacy concerns	Resistance to data sharing	Secure data governance protocols
Low follow-up response	Weak longitudinal tracking	Incentivised follow-up surveys
Political suppression of negative findings	Weak accountability	Mandatory public reporting requirement



Capacity gaps in M&E	Poor-quality evaluation	Dedicated technical secretariat support
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### 5.2.3. Stabilising Financing Mechanisms

A common constraint across youth employment interventions is funding volatility. Even well-designed programmes falter when financing is delayed, reallocated, or insufficiently sustained. Implementation gaps are frequently less about policy design and more about fiscal unpredictability. To move from pilot-scale initiatives to durable structural reform, youth employment financing must become stable, protected, and performance-oriented.

**Ring-fenced Budget Lines for Youth Employment:** These are essential to prevent diversion of funds to competing priorities during fiscal pressure. Youth employment allocations should be clearly identified within national and state budgets rather than embedded indistinctly within broader ministry envelopes. Ring-fencing enhances visibility, strengthens accountability during budget oversight, and signals political commitment. It also enables clearer tracking of expenditure relative to employment outcomes.

**Multi-year Funding Commitments:** Many youth employment programmes operate on annual cycles that undermine continuity and discourage long-term planning. Embedding youth employment financing within medium-term expenditure frameworks (three to five years) allows implementing agencies to plan systematically, invest in infrastructure, build institutional capacity, and track longitudinal outcomes. Multi-year commitments reduce stop-start implementation and protect reforms from short-term fiscal fluctuations.

**Blended Financing Models Leveraging Public – Private Partnerships:** This approach can expand scale while preserving fiscal sustainability. Government resources can be strategically combined with private sector contributions, development finance, and philanthropic capital to support training, apprenticeships, and enterprise development. For example, wage subsidy schemes or apprenticeship co-financing arrangements can distribute cost burdens while incentivising employer participation. However, blended financing must be structured to reinforce public accountability rather than shift responsibility entirely to private actors.

**Transparent Disbursement Tracking Portals:** This is the final puzzle necessary for stabilising financing mechanisms. It is needed to monitor allocation and execution rates in real time. Publicly accessible dashboards can track how much funding has been allocated, released, and spent across programmes and states. Such transparency strengthens fiscal discipline, deters mismanagement, and builds public confidence. It also enables data-driven evaluation of cost-effectiveness and return on investment.

In sum, predictable and transparent financing is foundational to sustainable youth employment reform. Without ring-fenced allocations, multi-year commitments, blended funding mechanisms, and real-time fiscal tracking, even well-designed policies will struggle to scale. Stabilised financing transforms youth employment from a discretionary programme area into a structured national investment priority.

## 5.3. DEMAND-SIDE JOB CREATION AND PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT

While education reform and skills development are critical, they cannot resolve youth unemployment in isolation. The evidence across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo demonstrates that labour supply continues to outpace labour demand. Without deliberate strategies to expand job creation and reduce employer hiring risk, improved skills alone will intensify competition for limited positions. Sustainable reform requires shifting attention toward the demand side of the labour market, stimulating private sector growth, incentivising youth hiring, and lowering the cost of formal employment expansion.

### 5.3.1. Incentivising Youth Hiring

Private firms, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), often face significant cost and productivity risks when hiring inexperienced youth. Entry-level workers may require training, supervision, and adjustment periods before contributing fully to firm output. In a context of economic volatility, inflationary pressure, and regulatory complexity, many employers prefer experienced candidates or avoid expanding payroll altogether. Government



policy must therefore reduce the perceived and actual risk associated with hiring first-time youth employees. One practical instrument is the introduction of targeted tax credits for firms hiring first-time youth employees. Under such a scheme, employers could receive tax deductions proportional to the number of eligible youths hired and retained for a minimum period (e.g., 12 months). To prevent abuse, eligibility criteria should clearly define age thresholds, employment status (first-time formal employment), and retention duration. This approach lowers effective labour costs while encouraging formalisation.

In addition, time-bound wage subsidies for entry-level hires can offset short-term productivity gaps. Government could co-finance a percentage of wages for the first six to twelve months of employment, particularly in high-growth sectors or regions with elevated youth unemployment rates. Wage subsidy programmes must be carefully designed to avoid displacement effects (where firms replace existing workers with subsidised youth). Clear net job creation requirements and post-subsidy retention clauses are essential.

A complementary strategy is the expansion of apprenticeship co-financing schemes. Structured apprenticeship systems allow youth to gain practical skills while employers benefit from gradual productivity gains. Government can share training costs, provide stipends to apprentices, and offer certification support. Sector-specific apprenticeship frameworks particularly in manufacturing, agriculture value chains, renewable energy, and digital services can align training with market demand.

Finally, reducing compliance burdens for SMEs formalising youth employment can stimulate labour absorption. Simplified payroll registration procedures, reduced statutory contribution thresholds for small firms, and streamlined tax filing requirements lower administrative barriers. Formalisation incentives should be coupled with access to finance, digital tools, and advisory support to ensure that SMEs view formal hiring as advantageous rather than punitive.

*Table 4.11: Implementation Framework*

Instrument	Policy Mechanism	Expected Impact	Safeguard Against Abuse
Tax Credits	Deductible credits per retained youth hire	Lower effective hiring cost	Minimum 12-month retention requirement
Wage Subsidies	Government co-finances % of entry wage	Reduce entry-level productivity risk	Net job creation clause
Apprenticeship Co-Financing	Shared training cost model	Improve school-to-work transition	Certified training standards
SME Compliance Relief	Simplified registration and payroll rules	Encourage formal hiring	Digital reporting and audit system

## 5.4. STRATEGIC RATIONALE

Reducing hiring risk directly increases labour absorption capacity. When the cost of recruiting and training first-time youth employees declines, firms are more likely to expand payroll. Demand-side incentives therefore complement supply-side reforms. Skills development prepares youth for work; hiring incentives ensure that firms have economic motivation to employ them.

In labour markets characterised by scarcity and risk aversion, deliberate employer-focused incentives are not distortions; they are catalytic interventions. Expanding labour demand is essential if youth employment reform is to move beyond training programmes toward sustained, large-scale job creation.

### 5.4.1. Supporting High-Growth Sectors

Expanding youth employment at scale requires more than firm-level incentives; it demands strategic sector prioritisation. Not all sectors possess equal capacity to absorb labour, generate value addition, or scale sustainably.



Selective sector targeting, grounded in labour intensity, growth potential, and comparative advantage, can accelerate demand-side job creation. Based on labour market patterns and stakeholder insights, priority sectors should include the digital economy and fintech, agro-processing and agricultural value chains, renewable energy, creative and cultural industries, and manufacturing clusters.

The digital economy and fintech sector represent one of the fastest-growing opportunity spaces, particularly for urban and digitally literate youth. Nigeria's expanding startup ecosystem, remote service provision capacity, and increasing global integration create pathways for scalable employment. However, growth remains constrained by infrastructure gaps (electricity, internet connectivity, basic health care, for example), limited early-stage financing, and uneven regulatory clarity. Strategic investments in basic uninterrupted electricity, broadband expansion, innovation hubs, startup incubation programmes, and export-enabling digital policy frameworks can significantly increase youth absorption in this sector.

Agro-processing and agricultural value chains offer large-scale labour absorption potential, especially in states such as Kaduna and Oyo where agricultural production is already significant. Moving beyond primary production into value-added processing, storage, packaging, logistics, and distribution which require reliable electricity and road network, can generate diversified employment opportunities for rural and peri-urban youth. Public investment in rural infrastructure, electricity, feeder roads, cold storage facilities, aggregation centres, and improved access to affordable finance can stimulate youth-led enterprise development within agricultural value chains.

Renewable energy represents both an employment opportunity and a strategic development priority. As Nigeria confronts energy access gaps and climate commitments, investment in solar installation, mini-grid deployment, maintenance services, and green technology manufacturing can create technical and semi-skilled jobs. Structured training and certification programmes linked to renewable energy projects can facilitate youth integration into this growing field.

Creative and cultural industries including film, music, digital content creation, fashion, and gaming are increasingly important contributors to economic growth and youth employment. These sectors are highly youth-driven but often operate within informal ecosystems. Policy support should focus on intellectual property protection, access to creative financing, export promotion, and digital distribution infrastructure to unlock scalable opportunities. Manufacturing clusters, particularly in light manufacturing and industrial parks, remain essential for broad-based employment. Cluster-based industrial development can reduce production costs, facilitate shared infrastructure, and improve access to supply chains. Targeted investment in industrial zones linked to apprenticeship systems can generate structured entry pathways for youth.

## Sector Support Framework

Table 4.12: High Growth Sector Support Strategy

Priority Sector	Employment Potential	Key Constraints	Policy Support Measures
Digital Economy and Fintech	High-skilled, scalable, export-oriented	Broadband gaps; early-stage finance	Broadband expansion; innovation grants; startup financing; regulatory clarity
Agro-Processing and Value Chains	Rural and semi-skilled absorption	Infrastructure deficits (roads, electricity); limited credit	Electricity, cold storage; rural roads; value-chain financing; aggregation hubs
Renewable Energy	Technical and green jobs	Certification gaps; capital intensity	Training programmes; mini-grid support; green financing schemes



Creative Industries	Youth-led, global export potential	Informality; IP protection gaps	Creative grants; IP enforcement; export facilitation
Manufacturing Clusters	Large-scale labour absorption	Energy costs; infrastructure gaps	Industrial parks; tax incentives; cluster financing

Across these sectors, government support should focus on:

- Infrastructure investment, particularly in energy, broadband, transport, and logistics;
- Export facilitation, including simplified trade procedures and market access agreements;
- Innovation grants and competitive funding schemes for youth-led enterprises;
- Access to affordable finance, including blended credit guarantees;
- Regulatory streamlining to reduce entry and compliance burdens.

Sector targeting must remain evidence-based and periodically reviewed through labour market intelligence systems. Rather than dispersing limited resources across all industries, focused investment in high-growth, labour-absorbing sectors increases efficiency and measurable employment impact.

In sum, selective sector prioritisation transforms youth employment reform from broad ambition into strategic economic positioning. By aligning infrastructure investment, industrial policy, and youth training with high-growth sectors, the government can expand labour demand at scale and create durable pathways for youth economic mobility.

### 1.1.6 Formalisation Pathways for Informal Enterprises

Informality remains the dominant absorber of youth labour across sectors and regions. For many young Nigerians, informal enterprise is not a preference but a necessity—an accessible entry point in a labour market where formal opportunities are limited. However, while informality provides income, it often constrains growth, limits access to finance, excludes workers from social protection, and reinforces income volatility. Reform efforts must therefore avoid criminalising or penalising informal activity. Instead, formalisation should be designed as an enabling transition pathway—one that reduces barriers, expands opportunity, and offers tangible incentives for compliance. The first step is to simplify business registration processes. Many youth-led micro-enterprises operate informally due to administrative complexity, cost, and lack of information. Government should expand digital one-stop registration portals, reduce documentation requirements for micro-enterprises, and provide mobile registration clinics in underserved areas. Streamlined procedures lower entry barriers and reduce the perception that formalisation is bureaucratically burdensome.

Second, reform must address multiple taxation burdens that discourage formal transition. Youth entrepreneurs frequently cite overlapping levies from federal, state, and local authorities as a deterrent to registration. Harmonising tax regimes, introducing simplified flat-rate taxation for micro-enterprises, and eliminating redundant levies can reduce compliance anxiety. Tax reform should aim to broaden the base while lowering individual burdens, making formalisation economically rational rather than punitive.

Third, government should introduce micro-enterprise transition packages that bundle incentives with compliance support. These packages could include access to low-interest credit, bookkeeping and compliance training, digital payment tools, and market linkage assistance. Linking registration to immediate, visible benefits such as eligibility for credit guarantees or procurement opportunities creates positive motivation for formalisation. Compliance training ensures that newly formalised enterprises understand regulatory obligations and financial management practices. Fourth, social protection schemes must be extended to self-employed youth, including those operating micro-enterprises. Portable and flexible social insurance contributions, scaled to income levels, can provide access to health coverage, pension savings, and income protection mechanisms. Integrating informal workers into contributory social protection systems strengthens long-term economic security and reduces vulnerability to shocks.



Table 4.13: Formalisation Reform Framework

Reform Area	Current Barrier	Proposed Intervention	Expected Impact
Business Registration	Administrative complexity; cost	Digital one-stop portal; mobile registration drives	Increased voluntary registration
Taxation	Multiple levies; unpredictability	Harmonised and simplified micro-tax regime	Reduced compliance burden
Access to Finance	Limited collateral; informal records	Transition packages (credit and training)	Improved enterprise growth
Social Protection	Exclusion from safety nets	Portable, income-scaled contributions	Reduced vulnerability

Formalisation must be approached as a partnership rather than enforcement. When informal youth entrepreneurs perceive registration as a pathway to finance, protection, and growth rather than as a gateway to taxation alone transition becomes more likely. Conversely, punitive enforcement without enabling support may drive enterprises further underground.

In the broader political economy context, enabling formalisation strengthens productivity, broadens the tax base over time, enhances labour protection, and stabilises income streams. Given the centrality of informality in youth employment, reforming the pathway between informal survival and formal growth is essential for sustainable labour market transformation.

#### 5.4.2. Regulating and Protecting Gig Workers

Digital platforms and gig work are rapidly becoming an important component of youth employment, particularly in urban centres and among digitally skilled youth. Freelancing, ride-hailing, digital content creation, remote service provision, and platform-based micro-tasks provide flexible income opportunities and, in some cases, access to global markets. However, while digital work expands opportunity, it often operates in regulatory grey zones. Platform workers frequently lack formal contracts, income stability, social protection, and accessible grievance mechanisms. To ensure that digital labour markets contribute to sustainable employment rather than institutionalised precarity, digital opportunity must be paired with digital protection.

First, government should develop a regulatory framework that formally recognises platform workers as a distinct labour category. Existing labour laws often classify workers as either employees or independent contractors, leaving gig workers ambiguously positioned. A modern regulatory framework should clarify rights and obligations, define minimum standards for working conditions, and establish clear criteria for platform accountability. Recognition does not necessarily require imposing traditional employment structures but should ensure baseline protections. Second, policy reform should enable portable social protection contributions for gig and platform workers. Given the fluid and multi-platform nature of gig work, social protection systems must be flexible and income-responsive. Workers should be able to contribute proportionally to health insurance, pension schemes, and income protection funds regardless of employer permanence. Contributions could be shared between workers and platforms, with digital tracking mechanisms facilitating transparency.

Third, regulators should mandate platform transparency standards. Platforms operating within Nigeria should disclose key information related to payment algorithms, commission structures, rating systems, and dispute procedures. Transparency reduces exploitation risk and enables workers to make informed participation decisions. Regulatory agencies may require periodic reporting on worker numbers, earnings distribution, and complaint resolution metrics.

Fourth, the establishment of accessible dispute resolution mechanisms is critical. Gig workers often lack formal channels to contest unfair account suspensions, delayed payments, or contractual disputes. Dedicated digital labour tribunals or mediation units within labour ministries could provide streamlined grievance resolution. These



mechanisms should be affordable, time-bound, and technologically accessible.

**Table 4.14: Gig Worker Protection Framework**

Reform Area	Current Gap	Proposed Intervention	Expected Impact
Legal Recognition	Ambiguous worker classification	Formal regulatory category for platform workers	Clear rights and obligations
Social Protection	No pension/health coverage	Portable, income-based contribution system	Reduced income vulnerability
Platform Transparency	Opaque payment algorithms	Mandatory disclosure standards	Fairer compensation structures
Dispute Resolution	No accessible grievance channel	Digital labour mediation mechanisms	Improved worker protection

As digital labour expands, regulatory inertia risks entrenching new forms of insecurity. While flexibility is a defining feature of gig work, flexibility must not equate to vulnerability. A balanced regulatory framework can preserve innovation and entrepreneurship while ensuring baseline protections. Digital opportunity must be matched with institutional protection. Government must therefore develop regulatory recognition for platform workers, including:

- Portable pension contributions;
- Health insurance pooling options;
- Income volatility insurance pilots;
- Standardised dispute resolution channels.

In the broader context of youth employment reform, protecting gig workers strengthens labour market resilience and signals that digital transformation will not occur at the expense of worker dignity. As Nigeria positions itself within the global digital economy, ensuring fair and secure working conditions for platform workers becomes both an economic and governance imperative.

### 5.4.3. Proportional Regulatory Fee Scaling

Findings from private sector respondents, particularly in Oyo State, demonstrate that regulatory fee structures can significantly influence hiring decisions. When compliance obligations are fixed, inflexible, or poorly calibrated to business scale, firms often prioritise regulatory survival over workforce expansion. Youth employment reform must therefore incorporate proportionality into regulatory design.

Compliance frameworks should adopt a principle of economic sensitivity, ensuring that statutory levies reflect actual operational realities rather than rigid classification tiers. For example, waste disposal and environmental levies should be calculated based on measurable output metrics such as waste volume, facility size, or actual service usage, rather than broad business categories that may overestimate operational impact. Where fees are perceived as arbitrary or disproportionate, firms respond defensively by limiting expansion.

Similarly, land use charges and property-related business fees should be scaled according to business size, annual turnover, and employment generation capacity. Uniform fee structures applied across heterogeneous enterprises create regressive effects, disproportionately burdening small and medium-sized firms that are often the most labour-intensive and youth-employing.

In addition, regulatory systems should introduce employment-linked rebates or compliance credits for SMEs that demonstrate net youth hiring growth. Such mechanisms transform regulation from a static cost centre into a dynamic incentive tool. Firms that expand youth employment could benefit from graduated fee reductions, deferred payment schedules, or renewal discounts tied to verified employment records.

To ensure reforms are evidence-informed, regulatory agencies should institutionalise sector-specific impact assessments. Before revising fee structures or introducing new compliance requirements, agencies should evaluate



their potential labour market effects, particularly on youth-intensive sectors such as hospitality, retail, creative industries, digital services, and SMEs. Regulatory design must become employment-sensitive rather than revenue-maximising by default.

Embedding proportionality within compliance frameworks aligns regulatory governance with labour market objectives. When compliance costs are predictable, fair, and scale-adjusted, firms are more likely to reinvest retained capital into expansion and recruitment. In high youth unemployment contexts, regulatory rationalisation is not a deregulatory ideology; it is a labour demand strategy.

### 1.1.7 Elimination of Duplicative Compliance Requirements

Beyond fee scaling, regulatory fragmentation imposes cumulative burdens on enterprises. Where federal and state certification processes overlap, such as fire service inspections, environmental clearances, sanitation approvals, and business registrations, firms often undergo multiple parallel compliance procedures for substantively similar requirements. This duplication increases administrative costs, delays operational timelines, and diverts managerial attention away from growth.

To address this, certification processes should be harmonised into a unified compliance window. A single digital interface could allow businesses to submit documentation once, after which relevant agencies access shared data through coordinated verification systems. This reduces procedural redundancy without weakening oversight standards.

Mutual recognition frameworks between federal and state agencies should also be introduced. Where inspection criteria are substantively aligned, certification issued by one recognised authority should satisfy equivalent requirements at another administrative level. This reduces repetitive physical inspections and associated informal transaction risks.

Digitisation is critical to achieving this harmonisation. Electronic documentation systems, automated renewal reminders, integrated payment portals, and real-time compliance tracking can significantly reduce bureaucratic friction. For youth-intensive SMEs operating with thin margins, even modest reductions in compliance time and administrative expense can translate into additional hiring capacity.

Importantly, eliminating duplication does not imply weakening regulatory standards. Rather, it improves efficiency by reducing administrative layering. Regulatory coherence increases predictability, lowers transaction costs, and frees capital that can be redirected toward enterprise expansion and workforce growth.

In political economy terms, fragmented compliance systems often reflect institutional siloing rather than deliberate labour suppression. However, their cumulative effect can suppress hiring by increasing the fixed cost of formal operation. Streamlining compliance processes, therefore, functions as an indirect youth employment intervention, unlocking enterprise dynamism without requiring large fiscal outlays.

## 5.5. INCLUSION-FOCUSED AND REGIONALLY RESPONSIVE INTERVENTIONS

Youth employment reform cannot succeed if it assumes a level playing field. The findings across Abuja, Kaduna, and Oyo reveal that access to opportunity is shaped by gender norms, geography, socio-economic background, and digital access. Structural inequality influences who participates, who progresses, and who remains excluded. Therefore, youth employment strategies must move beyond aggregate job creation targets and explicitly address the layered constraints faced by vulnerable groups. Inclusion must be intentional, measurable, and embedded within programme design.

### 5.5.1. Gender Responsive Programming

Gender disparities in employment are not solely the result of skill gaps; they are shaped by mobility restrictions, unpaid care burdens, access to capital, occupational segregation, and safety concerns. Addressing these barriers requires structural facilitation rather than rhetorical commitment.



First, the Government should expand safe transport and mobility support for women, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. In many contexts, women face constraints in travelling to training centres, farms, industrial zones, or workplaces due to safety risks or social norms. Providing subsidised transport schemes, safe commuting partnerships, and community-based training centres can significantly increase female participation. Where feasible, integrating transport support into vocational or apprenticeship programmes can reduce dropout rates.

Second, childcare support within vocational centres and training institutions is essential. Unpaid caregiving responsibilities disproportionately affect young women, limiting their ability to participate in full-time training or employment. Establishing childcare facilities within technical training centres, industrial parks, or enterprise hubs can remove a critical participation barrier. Public–private partnerships can support sustainable childcare provision models.

Third, targeted financial inclusion mechanisms are necessary to expand capital access for female entrepreneurs. Women-led enterprises often face greater collateral constraints and limited access to credit. Dedicated grant windows, concessional loan schemes, credit guarantees, and financial literacy programmes for female youth entrepreneurs can close this gap. Linking capital support to mentorship networks and market access initiatives strengthens sustainability.

Fourth, policy should incentivise female participation in STEM and digital sectors, where wage premiums and growth opportunities are higher. This can include scholarship schemes, mentorship programmes, coding bootcamps for girls, industry partnerships, and gender-based admission targets in technology training programmes. Early intervention at the secondary school level is particularly important to reduce occupational segregation.

*Table 4.15: Gender Inclusion Implementation Framework*

Barrier Identified	Policy Response	Implementation Mechanism	Expected Impact
Mobility Constraints	Safe transport support	Subsidised transport; decentralised training hubs	Increased female training participation
Care Burden	Childcare provision	On-site childcare centres; PPP childcare models	Reduced dropout rates
Capital Access Gap	Targeted grants & credit	Female-specific funding windows	Growth of women-led enterprises
Occupational Segregation	STEM incentives	Scholarships; mentorship; digital bootcamps	Increased female participation in high-growth sectors

### Monitoring Gender Outcomes

To ensure effectiveness, gender-responsive programming should be accompanied by measurable indicators, including:

- Female participation rates in training programmes;
- Female employment placement rates
- Average income growth among female beneficiaries
- Female representation in STEM-related initiatives
- Retention rates for women in formal employment.

Gender-disaggregated data must be integrated into national youth employment dashboards to track progress systematically.

### Strategic Rationale

Gender inclusion requires structural facilitation, not rhetorical commitment. Addressing mobility, care, capital, and occupational barriers directly increases labour force participation and enhances economic productivity. Failure to



incorporate gender-responsive design risks reproducing inequality within youth employment reform efforts. By embedding gender-sensitive mechanisms into programme architecture, Nigeria can unlock underutilised talent, expand inclusive growth, and strengthen social stability. In contexts where demographic pressure intersects with structural inequality, inclusive reform is not only socially just, but it is economically strategic.

### 5.5.2. Regionally Differentiated Approaches

Nigeria's youth labour market is not homogeneous. The employment landscape in Abuja differs significantly from that of Kaduna and Oyo in terms of economic structure, sectoral composition, urbanisation patterns, digital penetration, and enterprise ecosystems. Uniform national programmes risk inefficiency when they fail to account for these regional variations. Effective youth employment reform must therefore incorporate territorially responsive design, aligning interventions with local comparative advantages and structural constraints. One-size-fits-all strategies dilute impact and waste scarce public resources.

#### **Abuja: Urban Innovation and High-Skill Ecosystems**

Abuja's labour market is characterised by a strong service sector presence, government institutions, professional services, and growing digital entrepreneurship. Youth in Abuja are more likely to possess tertiary education credentials and digital exposure, yet they face intense competition for limited formal roles. A regionally differentiated strategy should therefore prioritise the development of urban innovation hubs, startup incubation centres, and digital enterprise accelerators. Public investment in co-working spaces, innovation grants, tech incubation programmes, and access-to-finance schemes can stimulate high-skill job creation.

Additionally, structured linkages between universities, research institutions, and private tech firms can strengthen innovation pipelines. Abuja is well-positioned to become a national centre for fintech, policy-tech, edtech, and creative digital services. Supporting export-ready digital enterprises and global remote work integration would align with the city's comparative strengths.

#### **Kaduna: Agro-Industrial and SME Cluster Development**

Kaduna's economic structure includes significant agricultural production, agro-processing potential, and a developing SME ecosystem. Youth employment reform in Kaduna should focus on agro-industrial value chains and SME cluster development. Investments in aggregation centres, storage facilities, rural logistics infrastructure, and processing hubs can create both skilled and semi-skilled jobs. Cluster-based development, where related enterprises operate within shared industrial zones, can reduce operational costs and stimulate value addition. SME financing mechanisms, equipment modernisation grants, and technical advisory support are particularly relevant. Integrating vocational training with agro-processing facilities ensures that training aligns with regional labour demand. Strengthening linkages between farmers, processors, and distributors increases value retention within the state economy.

#### **Oyo: Artisan Modernisation and Digital Integration**

Oyo's labour market features a strong artisan and informal enterprise base, including tailoring, metalwork, carpentry, and small-scale trading. Many youths operate within informal clusters characterised by skill inheritance but limited technological upgrading. Reform strategies in Oyo should prioritise artisan modernisation and digital integration.

This can include upgrading toolkits and production equipment, establishing shared production facilities, introducing digital payment systems, and integrating e-commerce platforms to expand market reach. Digital literacy programmes targeted at artisans can enhance productivity and competitiveness. Formalisation incentives, cluster-based training, and access to micro-credit will enable transition from subsistence-level operations to growth-oriented enterprises.



Table 4.16: Comparative Regional Strategy Framework

Region	Economic Profile	Strategic Priority	Key Interventions	Expected Employment Impact
Abuja	Urban service and digital economy	Innovation hubs and tech ecosystems	Startup incubators; digital grants; research-industry linkages	High-skill job creation; export-ready enterprises
Kaduna	Agriculture and SME-driven economy	Agro-industrial and SME clusters	Processing hubs; rural logistics; SME financing	Semi-skilled and technical job expansion
Oyo	Artisan and informal enterprise base	Artisan modernisation and digital integration	Equipment upgrades; e-commerce access; cluster training	Income stabilisation and enterprise growth

### Implementation Considerations

To operationalise regional differentiation:

- Federal funding allocations should incorporate regional labour market assessments;
- State-level Youth Employment Action Plans must reflect local sector priorities;
- Performance metrics should be tailored to regional economic profiles;
- Inter-state knowledge-sharing forums should promote replication of successful models.

Regional targeting also allows more efficient allocation of infrastructure investment. Broadband expansion may be prioritised in urban innovation zones, while rural logistics and storage infrastructure may be prioritised in agro-industrial regions.

### Strategic Rationale

Regionally differentiated approaches maximise impact by aligning policy instruments with local economic ecosystems. Rather than dispersing resources thinly across uniform interventions, targeted strategies leverage comparative advantages and address context-specific constraints. This enhances cost-effectiveness, accelerates job creation, and improves sustainability.

In a diverse national economy, territorial responsiveness is not optional; it is essential. Youth employment reform must reflect the realities of place if it is to generate meaningful and inclusive economic transformation.

#### 5.5.3. Targeted Support for Vulnerable Youth

Youth employment challenges are not experienced uniformly. Structural inequality, household income, geographic location, disability status, educational attainment, and exposure to conflict significantly shape access to opportunity. Aggregate employment interventions often fail to reach those facing compounded disadvantage. To prevent the reproduction of inequality within reform efforts, targeted support mechanisms must be deliberately designed, adequately funded, and systematically monitored. Inclusion must be both intentional and measurable.

#### Youth from Low-Income Households

Young people from low-income households often face layered constraints, including limited access to capital, inability to afford training fees, digital exclusion, and immediate income pressure that discourages long-term skill investment. Targeted interventions should include subsidised training vouchers, stipends during vocational or apprenticeship participation, digital device grants, and preferential access to micro-credit. Linking youth employment programmes to existing social protection schemes can ensure that financial vulnerability does not prevent participation.



## Persons with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities remain disproportionately excluded from labour markets due to physical barriers, discrimination, inaccessible training facilities, and limited employer awareness. Reform strategies should mandate accessibility standards in vocational centres and digital platforms, provide assistive technologies, introduce disability-inclusive hiring incentives for employers, and enforce anti-discrimination provisions within recruitment frameworks. Data systems must disaggregate participation by disability status to ensure accountability.

## Rural Youth

Rural youth often face limited exposure to formal employment pathways, weak infrastructure, and reduced access to finance and digital connectivity. Targeted rural employment initiatives should prioritise agro-processing, rural enterprise development, mobile training centres, and decentralised digital hubs. Infrastructure investment, such as rural broadband, feeder roads, and storage facilities, directly enhances employability. Rural-focused financing instruments should incorporate flexible collateral requirements tailored to local realities.

## Conflict-Affected Populations

In areas affected by conflict or insecurity, youth face disrupted education, displacement, and trauma-related barriers. Employment programming in such contexts must integrate psychosocial support, accelerated learning pathways, livelihood grants, and community-based enterprise initiatives. Partnerships with local organisations and security agencies are essential to ensure safe implementation. Employment initiatives in conflict-affected regions can also serve as stabilisation mechanisms by reducing economic marginalisation.

## Out-of-School Youth

Out-of-school youth represent a particularly vulnerable group, often lacking formal qualifications required for structured employment programmes. Accelerated basic education, literacy and numeracy bridging programmes, and competency-based vocational certification pathways should be prioritised. Entry requirements for training initiatives should be flexible enough to accommodate non-traditional educational backgrounds. Outreach strategies must actively identify and recruit out-of-school youth rather than relying solely on digital application systems.

Table 4.17: Vulnerable Youth Inclusion Framework

Target Group	Primary Barrier	Policy Response	Monitoring Indicator
Low-Income Youth	Financial constraints	Training stipends, device grants, and micro-credit	Participation rate by income bracket
Persons with Disabilities	Accessibility and discrimination	Accessible centres; assistive tech; hiring incentives	% disability-inclusive placements
Rural Youth	Infrastructure and digital gaps	Rural hubs; agro-processing investment	Rural employment placement rate
Conflict-Affected Youth	Displacement and instability	Livelihood grants; psychosocial support	Programme retention rate
Out-of-School Youth	Educational gaps	Bridging education; flexible certification	% transition to employment or training

## Measurable Inclusion Targets

To ensure accountability, inclusion targets should be incorporated into national and state-level youth employment strategies, such as:

- Minimum participation quotas for vulnerable categories;



- Disaggregated employment outcome reporting;
- Gender and disability inclusion thresholds;
- Regional equity benchmarks.

Public dashboards should track inclusion metrics to prevent tokenism.

### Strategic Rationale

Targeted support for vulnerable youth is not a parallel social programme; it is integral to sustainable labour market reform. Failure to address structural disadvantage risks entrenching inequality and undermining social cohesion. By embedding measurable inclusion mechanisms within youth employment policy, government can ensure that reform reaches those most in need and transforms demographic pressure into inclusive economic growth.

Inclusion must therefore be deliberate, data-driven, and institutionally enforced. Without explicit targeting and accountability, vulnerable youth will remain at the margins of opportunity.

Table 4.18: Summary of Major Recommendations and Implementation Pathways

Reform Area	Major Recommendation	Implementation Pathway	Lead Actors	Timeframe
<b>Policy Design and Coordination</b>	Institutionalise 10-Year National Youth Employment Strategy	Legislative backing; integrate into MTEF; define measurable targets	National Assembly; Ministry of Labour; NYECC	Short to Medium Term
	Establish National Youth Employment Coordination Council (NYECC)	Executive order to legislative anchoring; inter-ministerial framework; state coordination units	Presidency; Key Ministries	Short Term
	Align Education and Industry	Industry advisory boards; mandatory internships; TVET modernisation; curriculum reform	Education Ministry; Industry Associations	Medium Term
	Insulate Recruitment from Political Interference	Digital recruitment portals; published criteria; oversight panels; grievance systems	Civil Service Commission; Anti-Corruption Agencies	Short Term
	Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation	Central beneficiary database; 6–24-month outcome tracking; annual reports; youth oversight inclusion	NYECC; NBS; Implementing Ministries	Short to Medium Term
	Stabilise Financing	Ring-fenced budgets; multi-year funding; blended finance; public tracking dashboards	Ministry of Finance; Budget Office	Medium Term
<b>Demand-Side Job Creation</b>	Incentivise Youth Employment	Tax credits; wage subsidies; apprenticeship co-financing; SME compliance reform	Finance Ministry; Labour Ministry	Short to Medium Term
	Support High-Growth Sectors	Targeted infrastructure; export facilitation; innovation grants; sector clusters	Industry; Trade; Digital Economy	Medium to Long Term
	Formalisation Pathways for Informal Enterprises	Simplified registration; tax harmonisation; transition packages; social protection extension	SMEDAN; Finance; State Governments	Medium Term



	Regulate and Protect Gig Workers	Legal recognition; portable social protection; platform transparency; dispute resolution mechanisms	Labour Ministry; Digital Economy Ministry	Medium Term
<b>Inclusion and Regional</b>	Gender-Responsive Programming	Safe transport; childcare centres; female capital grants; STEM incentives	Women Affairs; Education; Labour	Short to Medium Term
	Regionally Differentiated Strategies	Abuja innovation hubs; Kaduna agro-clusters; Oyo artisan modernisation	Federal and State Governments	Medium Term
	Targeted Support for Vulnerable Youth	Training stipends; disability inclusion; rural hubs; conflict-sensitive programming; bridging education	Labour; Social Protection; States	Short to Medium Term

Table 4.19: Implementation Sequencing Overview

Phase	Focus
<b>Phase 1 (Year 1–2)</b>	Legal framework; coordination council; recruitment reform; monitoring systems; ring-fenced funding
<b>Phase 2 (Year 3–5)</b>	Education–industry alignment; hiring incentives; sector cluster rollout; formalisation pathways
<b>Phase 3 (Year 6–10)</b>	Social protection expansion; gig regulation consolidation; sustained sector growth; longitudinal impact evaluation

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the structural, institutional, and political economy dimensions of youth employment in Nigeria, employing a multi-method research design which included a desk-based review of the country’s youth employment policies, analysis of secondary quantitative data on youth employment levels and trends, and qualitative field data collection through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions conducted nationally. The findings reveal that youth unemployment and underemployment are not merely labour market irregularities; they are systemic outcomes shaped by demographic pressure, uneven economic transformation, fragmented policy implementation, governance vulnerabilities, and persistent inequality.

Across regions, a common pattern emerges: labour supply continues to outpace labour demand; informality absorbs excess labour but normalises precarity; policy frameworks exist, but implementation is inconsistent; and access to opportunity is often mediated by networks, geography, gender, and socio-economic status. Youth are not lacking ambition or resilience. On the contrary, they demonstrate adaptability through entrepreneurship, digital innovation, income diversification, and peer-driven skill development. However, youth agency is compensating for institutional weakness rather than being structurally supported by it.

The political economy analysis underscores four central dynamics. First, acute employment scarcity amplifies competition and heightens perceptions of patronage, weakening trust in recruitment systems. Second, policy proliferation without coordination diffuses accountability and limits cumulative impact. Third, informality functions as a stabiliser in the short term but constrains productivity and long-term income security. Fourth, digital transformation is generating new opportunity pathways while simultaneously creating new forms of inequality.

The core implication is clear: youth employment reform cannot be reduced to training programmes or short-term empowerment initiatives. It requires systemic alignment across policy design, financing stability, labour demand expansion, institutional accountability, and targeted inclusion. Expanding skills without expanding demand will intensify competition. Launching new programmes without strengthening governance will perpetuate fragmentation.



Promoting digital opportunity without extending protection will entrench vulnerability.

The strategic recommendations presented in Chapter Five outline a reform pathway grounded in four pillars: institutional coherence through a legislatively anchored national youth employment strategy; strengthened implementation and accountability mechanisms; demand-side job creation through sector targeting and employer incentives; and deliberate inclusion measures addressing gender, regional disparities, and vulnerable youth. Together, these reforms aim to transform youth employment from episodic intervention to sustained economic restructuring.

Nigeria's demographic trajectory presents both risk and opportunity. If structural constraints persist, youth underemployment will continue to erode income stability, trust in institutions, and social cohesion. However, with coordinated reform, transparent governance, and demand-driven economic expansion, Nigeria's youth population can become a demographic dividend rather than a destabilising pressure.

The findings of this study do not suggest a lack of effort among young Nigerians. They reveal a system that requires deeper policy coherence and institutional alignment. Addressing youth unemployment requires moving beyond episodic empowerment programmes and reactive short-term initiatives toward the establishment of a sustainable national youth employment policy framework anchored in a strong central pillar of sustainable economic development and social legislation. Such a framework should provide long-term strategic direction, institutional continuity across political administrations, and a stable governance architecture capable of aligning labour market policy, education systems, private sector development, and digital economy opportunities. By embedding youth employment policy within a durable legislative and institutional structure, Nigeria can shift from fragmented interventions toward a coordinated system that reflects both the present realities and future aspirations of its youth population.

The findings of this study underscore that Nigeria's youth employment challenge is no longer a distant development concern; it is an immediate structural and governance imperative. The scale of the youth population, combined with persistent constraints in labour absorption, creates a narrowing window for effective policy response. While youth demonstrate resilience and adaptability, the accumulation of unmet expectations, prolonged economic precarity, and perceived inequities in access to opportunity risks deepening social and political instability.

Importantly, this trajectory is not inevitable. Countries that recognise their youth population as a strategic asset—and implement coherent policies to channel their energy into productive sectors—can achieve significant economic and social gains. Conversely, failure to act carries risks that extend beyond national boundaries, affecting regional stability and migration dynamics.

Addressing youth employment requires urgency, coordination, and sustained commitment. Incremental reforms will be insufficient. What is required is a deliberate shift toward long-term, system-level transformation that aligns economic policy, institutional design, and inclusive opportunity creation.

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## 8. Annex 1: Respondent Recommendation Matrix

State	Actor Category	Suggested Reform (From Respondent Narratives)	Thematic Area
Abuja	Academia (KII_AR)	Strengthen implementation capacity; policies exist but machinery is weak	Policy–Implementation Gap
Abuja	Public Sector (KII_PUS)	Develop long-term beneficiary tracking systems beyond initial training	Monitoring and Evaluation
Abuja	FGD Youth	Ensure announced programmes are accessible, not just publicised	Policy Reach and Visibility
Abuja	Freelancer (FGD)	Recognise and protect gig workers formally	Digital Labour Protection
Abuja	Academia	Prioritise youth employment in budgeting, not only rhetoric	Fiscal Prioritisation
Kaduna	Civil Society (KII_CS)	Ensure sustainability across administrations; stop reinventing programmes	Policy Continuity
Kaduna	Public Sector (KII_PM)	Insulate recruitment from political interference	Governance and Patronage Reform
Kaduna	Academia (KII_AR)	Improve electricity supply to support entrepreneurship	Infrastructure for Job Creation
Kaduna	FGD Youth	Expand practical skills training and internship opportunities	Education–Labour Alignment
Kaduna	FGD Youth	Strengthen transparency in public sector hiring	Meritocracy and Trust
Kaduna	CSO	Improve accountability and reduce corruption in programme implementation	Institutional Governance
Oyo	Academia (NG_KII_AR_43)	Allocate resources based on population size and labour pressure	Demographic-Sensitive Allocation



Oyo	Academia (NG_KII_AR_43)	Institutionalise research–policy integration	Evidence-Based Policymaking
Oyo	Academia	Improve ICT infrastructure in tertiary institutions	Digital Capacity in Training
Oyo	Academia	Maintain and upgrade digital facilities regularly	Institutional Infrastructure
Oyo	Private Sector (NG_KII_PRS_44)	Scale regulatory fees proportionally to business size	Regulatory Reform
Oyo	Private Sector	Eliminate duplicative federal/state compliance processes	Regulatory Harmonisation
Oyo	Private Sector	Link regulatory incentives to youth employment growth	Demand-Side Job Creation
Oyo	Gig Worker	Improve access to affordable internet and stable power	Digital Infrastructure
Oyo	Gig Worker	Establish social protection systems for gig workers	Digital Labour Protection
Oyo	FGD Youth	Expand access to affordable capital for entrepreneurs	Enterprise Support
Oyo	FGD Youth	Provide safe mobility options for women in work	Gender Inclusion
Oyo	Civil Service	Digitise recruitment systems to reduce influence	Governance Reform
Cross-State	Academia	Embed longitudinal outcome tracking (6–24 months)	Monitoring and Evaluation
Cross-State	Private Sector	Expand apprenticeship partnerships with universities	Skills and Industry Alignment
Cross-State	Youth Participants	Provide access to micro-credit and grants	Youth Entrepreneurship Support
Cross-State	CSOs	Increase community awareness of employment programmes	Policy Outreach
Cross-State	Employers	Reduce cost of doing business to enable hiring expansion	Labour Demand Expansion
Cross-State	Digital Youth	Create structured digital training hubs	Digital Economy Development
Cross-State	Multiple Actors	Improve data systems and centralised employment dashboards	Data Governance

## 9. Annex 2: Briefs on Youth Employment Policies, Strategies, and Programme Documents in Nigeria

### National Youth Skills Programme (NYSP) [2024]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Launched in 2024, the National Youth Skills Programme positions specialised skills as a lever to reduce youth unemployment over a five-year period (2024–2029), focusing on sectors with growth potential.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Led by the Federal Government with sectoral ministries and technical training institutions, reflecting a coordinated approach to skills pipeline development.



<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	N/A
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	The programme addresses high youth unemployment and a shortage of specialised, marketrelevant skills that constrain productivity and firm competitiveness.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The framing does not fully connect training supply to verified employer demand, and it underplays the role of privatesector leadership in shaping curricula, standards, and placements.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Reduce youth unemployment by 20% within five years through targeted skilling that leads to employment or selfemployment in priority sectors.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Deliver accredited training in agriculture, renewable energy, and the digital economy; foster workreadiness; and enable entrepreneurship where wage employment is limited.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Sectorspecific curricula, crossministerial coordination, and partnerships with accredited providers aim to align training with sector strategies and national diversification goals.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Without employerdefined occupational standards, labour market intermediation, and placement support, graduates may face underemployment. Financing for tools, certification fees, and startup capital is not clearly integrated.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Government, sector ministries, and a subset of privatesector actors contributed, providing technical scope and potential pathways to collaboration.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Youth bodies and broad employer associations (including SMEs) appear underrepresented, limiting responsiveness to realworld hiring practices and constraints.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Orchestrated through crossministerial governance with provider networks. Quality assurance, provider performance management, and tracer studies are critical to ensure relevance and outcomes.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Embed employer councils per sector, mandate onthejob training components, and link completion to recognised certifications. Add wage subsidies or apprenticeship incentives to ease entry barriers.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Earlystate roll-out with ambitious targets; capacity constraints, provider quality variability, and demandside absorption are emerging risks to monitor closely.

### Student Loan Programme [2024]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Introduced in 2024, the Student Loan Programme creates a government-backed facility to finance tuition and living costs for indigent students, expanding access to tertiary education. The student loan scheme is primarily available to students enrolled in public tertiary institutions in Nigeria (i.e., federal and state universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education), and does not currently extend to students in private institutions.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Managed by the Federal Ministry of Finance (in collaboration with relevant education agencies), positioning student finance as a pillar of human capital strategy.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	<a href="https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Students-Loans-Access-to-Higher-Education-Repeal-And-Re-Enactment-Act-2024.pdf">https://placng.org/i/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Students-Loans-Access-to-Higher-Education-Repeal-And-Re-Enactment-Act-2024.pdf</a>
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	Financial barriers prevent capable youths from accessing tertiary education, constraining employability, earnings potential, and social mobility.



<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The design may create a new burden — graduate indebtedness — while not addressing the root causes of rising education costs (underfunding of public institutions, inflation, infrastructure deficits). The Students Loans (Access to Higher Education) (Repeal and Re-enactment) Act, 2024 provides for income-contingent repayment of up to 10% of a beneficiary’s income commencing two years after NYSC, with provisions for deferment during unemployment.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Expand equitable access to higher education to boost human capital and, indirectly, long-term productivity and growth.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Provide loans that cover tuition and living expenses for learners from low-income households, with repayment structures intended to be manageable postgraduation.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Government-secured loans administered by designated agencies, potentially with income-contingent repayment or grace periods to ease transition into the labour market.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Although originally touted as interest-free, the revised Act introduces ambiguity regarding whether the loans are strictly interest-free, as repayment of “interest on loans” and other charges is listed among funding sources for the scheme. Without cost containment, graduate employability support, and robust repayment systems, default risk rises. There is limited attention to TVET pathways, which may offer faster, more affordable labour market entry.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Ministry of Finance and tertiary institutions, with potential coordination from student affairs bodies and bursary offices.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Student unions, employers, and credit-counselling experts could enhance design around affordability, repayment feasibility, and graduate pathways.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Central administration with processes for application, disbursement, and repayment monitoring; coordination with institutions for verification and academic standing.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Build credit education into orientation; consider income-linked repayment, hardship deferments, and public dashboards on uptake and repayment performance.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Newly introduced; key risks include administrative capacity to process and monitor loans at scale and elevated default rates if graduate employment remains weak.

### SkillUp Artisans (SUPA) Programme [2024]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	The SUPA Programme, rolled out in 2024, aims to professionalise artisan trades and raise the status and earnings of young artisans across the informal economy.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	A joint initiative of the Federal Government and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), harnessing ITF’s training and certification experience.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	Low certification rates, variable training quality, and limited formal recognition impair artisans’ employability, wage prospects, and mobility across projects and regions.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The policy underexplores deep-rooted stigma against vocational careers, finance and tool access constraints, and infrastructure bottlenecks that reduce productivity and quality.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Professionalise and formalise artisanal work through competency-based training, assessment, and licensing to improve employability and earnings.



<b>Policy objectives</b>	Provide structured training, recognise competencies through licensing and certification, and support transition to formality, including registration and compliance.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Competencybased curricula linked to national occupational standards, assessment centres, and recognised credentials that employers can trust.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Absent or limited posttraining business development, procurement access, and finance for tools and working capital; no clear strategy for demand generation (e.g., linking to public works or housing programmes).
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Government, ITF, and artisan associations bring training expertise and access to practitioner networks.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Construction firms, facility managers, and procurement bodies that could commit to hiring certified artisans; microfinance providers that could underwrite tool upgrade loans.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Joint FGNITF delivery with outreach to clusters and associations. Establishing regional assessment hubs and mobile training units would extend reach.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Embed recognition of prior learning (RPL), negotiate procurement preferences for certified artisans, and offer tool grants or leasetoown schemes tied to certification.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Ongoing, with scale and toolfunding challenges limiting uptake. Stronger demandside commitments and finance access would accelerate impact.

### Three Million Technical Talent (3MTT) Programme [2023]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Launched in 2023, 3MTT is a flagship initiative to develop a large pipeline of digital and technical talent aligned with the needs of a modern, innovationdriven economy.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Led by the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation & Digital Economy, reflecting a strategic bet on technology as a growth and employment engine.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	There is a significant shortfall in digital and technical skills required by employers, limiting competitiveness, productivity, and Nigeria's participation in global digital value chains.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The narrative may overprivilege technical hard skills while underweighting foundational education, soft skills, and clear posttraining employment pathways (placements, apprenticeships, freelancing pipelines).
<b>Policy goal</b>	Equip three million people with marketrelevant technical and digital skills within a defined period to expand the employable talent pool and stimulate job creation.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Build an innovationready workforce, support digital job creation domestically and in global remote markets, and strengthen the national tech ecosystem.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Deliver modular training via publicprivate partnerships with certified providers, align curricula with industry standards, and enable recognition through badges and certifications.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Job placement strategies, employer commitments, and quality assurance across providers need greater specificity. Support services (devices, data subsidies, mentorship) are crucial but not fully articulated.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Ministry leadership and private tech companies have been engaged, signalling industry partnership potential in curriculum design and capstone projects.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Employers beyond the tech sector (manufacturing, finance, health) who increasingly need digital skills, plus freelancing platforms and BPO firms that could absorb talent.



<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Implementation relies on accredited providers and partner networks. A robust M&E system with graduate tracer studies and employer feedback loops is essential to calibrate quality and relevance.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Introduce hiring consortia and guaranteed interview schemes, link top performers to internships, and create outcomebased funding that rewards providers for verified placements.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Ongoing, with infrastructure constraints (devices, connectivity, training facilities) and labour market absorption capacity as key limiting factors.

### SMEDAN Agribusiness Programme

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	An ongoing SMEDANled programme that aims to catalyse youth participation across agricultural value chains — from input supply to production, processing, logistics, and retail.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Implemented by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), with Federal Government support and partnerships across the agribusiness ecosystem.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	Youth unemployment persists in the face of untapped agribusiness potential. Barriers include limited business skills, weak market access, logistics costs, and perceptions that agriculture is lowstatus or lowreturn.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	Social perceptions and genderspecific barriers are underanalysed. Youth heterogeneity is overgeneralised, obscuring different needs across rural/urban settings and roles along the value chain.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Grow youthled agribusinesses to create jobs, raise incomes, and strengthen food security by unlocking market access and competitiveness.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Provide capacity building, link entrepreneurs to markets and value chains, and facilitate access to inputs, services, and buyers to accelerate firm growth.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Training in agribusiness management, value chain development support, and brokerage of market linkages, potentially coupled with facilitation for certification and standards compliance.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Gender inclusion is not explicit; access to affordable finance and derisking instruments (e.g., guarantees, warehouse receipts) is not clearly integrated; land tenure barriers remain unaddressed.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	SMEDAN and agribusiness stakeholders collaborate with Federal Government backing, aligning support with sector opportunities.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Financial institutions, offtakers, logistics providers, and land administration bodies should be more deeply embedded to resolve bottlenecks endtoend.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	SMEDAN leads with implementing partners operating at state and community levels, enabling localisation and sector focus.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Pair capacity building with bundled finance, input vouchers, and offtaker agreements; integrate climatesmart practices and quality certifications to access highvalue markets.



<b>Status of implementation</b>	Active but constrained by finance, land access, and infrastructure deficits that suppress scale and profitability.
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### Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) [2019, revised 2021]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	The Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP) was conceived as a national framework in 2019 to guide interventions from 2019 to 2023 and was revised in 2021 to extend the horizon through 2024. The revision acknowledged shifting macroeconomic headwinds, lessons from early implementation, and the need for greater alignment with evolving national development priorities and global labour trends.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Issued by the Federal Ministry of Youth Development (FMYSD) in 2019, with technical assistance from the ILO, the plan represents a coordinated attempt to unify the youth employment agenda, consolidate dispersed initiatives, and create an institutional anchor for multi-sector action. The ILO's involvement signalled a desire to embed international norms, evidence, and measurement discipline from the outset.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	<a href="https://www.ilo.org/media/381891/download">https://www.ilo.org/media/381891/download</a>
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	NIYEAP responds to persistently high youth unemployment, underemployment, and inactivity in a context of fragmented programmes and weak coordination. The policy aims to reduce duplication, improve resource efficiency, and channel interventions toward measurable labour market outcomes for young people across regions and demographics.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The problem framing is symptom-focused and thin on causal analysis. It does not sufficiently interrogate structural drivers (slow job growth, informality, regulatory hurdles), education-to-work transition failures (skills mismatch, weak career services), or spatial inequities. Quantifiable baselines and targets are missing, limiting trackability and accountability. Contextual factors such as insecurity, gender norms, and disability inclusion are underdeveloped.
<b>Policy goal</b>	To provide a harmonised, comprehensive framework that connects policy, programmes, and partnerships into a coherent national playbook for youth employment, enabling strategic prioritisation, coordination, and scaling of interventions with demonstrable outcomes.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Organised around the "4Es": (1) Employability through relevant skills and work readiness; (2) Entrepreneurship development that grows youth-led MSMEs; (3) Employment creation via sector strategies and enabling regulation; and (4) Equal opportunity to ensure inclusion of women, persons with disabilities, rural youth, and conflict-affected populations.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	The plan calls for an integrated approach that aligns with Decent Jobs for Youth and the SDGs, positions FMYSD as the convening coordinator, and leverages cross-ministerial actions (education, labour, industry, ICT, agriculture). It envisages standardised programme design, shared indicators, and partnership platforms with development partners and the private sector to mobilise finance, expertise, and placements.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Youth participation mechanisms are not embedded in governance, risking misalignment with needs. Resource mobilisation and medium-term financing strategies lack specificity. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is underspecified, weakening feedback loops for course correction. Without subnational implementation blueprints, state-level adoption and adaptation can be uneven.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	FMYSD led with ILO support, engaging select government agencies and international partners. This mix provided technical credibility and potential for donor coordination but may have leaned technocratic at the expense of grassroots input.



<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Youths themselves — including women, outofschool youth, persons with disabilities, and representatives from rural and conflictaffected areas — were not explicitly centred in design, and employers (beyond highlevel institutions) were not visibly integral to shaping pathways to jobs.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	FMYSD is tasked with coordination across sectors, intended to align ministerial programmes and donor projects under a shared framework. The approach anticipates joint planning, pooled indicators, and periodic reviews, with states adapting to local labour dynamics.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	To strengthen delivery, practical enablers such as a results framework with baselines, a public dashboard, statelevel compacts, and employer consortia for placements would improve traction. Clear lines of accountability, disbursementlinked indicators, and youth advisory councils could deepen legitimacy and performance.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Implementation is ongoing but inconsistent, constrained by chronic underfunding, weak institutional capacity, and M&E challenges. These bottlenecks reduce scale, hinder learning, and make it difficult to establish causal impact on employment outcomes.

### Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP) [2020]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	The Nigeria Economic Sustainability Plan (NESP) is a 2020 emergencyrecovery blueprint designed to stabilise the economy in the wake of COVID 19, with measures intended for short to mediumterm implementation.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Prepared by the Federal Government under the Economic Sustainability Committee, chaired by the Vice President, reflecting a whole-of-government crisis response.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	<a href="https://ngfrepository.org.ng:8443/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1131/1/NIGERIA%20ECONOMIC%20SUSTAINABILITY%20PLAN.pdf">https://ngfrepository.org.ng:8443/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1131/1/NIGERIA%20ECONOMIC%20SUSTAINABILITY%20PLAN.pdf</a>
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	The plan targets pandemicinduced shocks: job losses, MSME distress, supply chain disruptions, and household vulnerability. It attempts to cushion the labour market while preserving productive capacity.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The analysis underplays disproportionate impacts on youths, women, and informal workers, and lacks an agreed baseline of job losses and firm closures to measure recovery. Limited disaggregation complicates targeted relief and followup.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Stimulate economic activity, create and retain jobs, and protect vulnerable populations from falling into deeper poverty.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Support MSME liquidity and survival, scale agricultural production to ensure food security, and accelerate digital and creative sector opportunities as engines of new employment.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Key instruments include the MSME Survival Fund, Agriculture for Food and Jobs Plan (AFJP), and sectorspecific support for digital/creative industries. These combine grants, credit guarantees, and targeted programmes to retain jobs and catalyse demand.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	The MSME Survival Fund's breadth and duration are limited relative to need; AFJP operates within an agricultural system marked by low productivity and logistics inefficiencies; and many measures focus on liquidity rather than structural transformation or jobrich growth.



<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	The Economic Sustainability Committee and participating MDAs contributed, aiming for interministerial alignment and rapid deployment.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Formal representation of youth-led MSMEs, informal sector associations, and gender advocates was not prominent, limiting granularity in design.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Federal oversight with delegated execution to states and MDAs, leveraging existing programme vehicles for speed and coverage.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Stronger transparency mechanisms, beneficiary registries, and public dashboards could improve trust and enable adaptive targeting. Linking relief to productivity upgrading (e.g., digitalisation, standards) would strengthen longer-term impact.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Partially implemented, with noted delays and transparency questions. The plan skews short-term, requiring complementary structural reforms to lock in durable jobs.

### National Youth Policy (2019)

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Policy Title &amp; Coverage Period</b>	The National Youth Policy (2019) provides a framework guiding youth development priorities in Nigeria, covering the period 2019–2023.
<b>Issuing Institution &amp; Year</b>	Issued by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2019, with inputs from the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development (FMYSD), ILO, and civil society actors.
<b>URL Link</b>	<a href="https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nigeria-National-Youth-Policy-2019-2023.pdf">https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Nigeria-National-Youth-Policy-2019-2023.pdf</a>
<b>Problem the Policy Seeks to Address</b>	Addresses youth unemployment, underemployment, precarious work, and limited access to decent job opportunities, which constrain inclusive growth and social stability.
<b>Gaps in Problem Definition</b>	Under-emphasises the role of the informal economy, sub-national disparities, and non-economic drivers such as insecurity and social norms. Limited disaggregated diagnostics weaken targeting.
<b>Policy Goal</b>	To mainstream youth concerns in national development and create an enabling environment for job creation and improved working conditions.
<b>Policy Objectives</b>	Promote employability, entrepreneurship, human capital development, and social protection for youth.
<b>Policy Solutions</b>	Emphasises skills development, entrepreneurship promotion, labour market reforms, and enabling environments (regulation, infrastructure, coordination).
<b>Gaps in Policy Solutions</b>	Lacks clearly financed, time-bound implementation measures; weak operational clarity on roles, timelines, and resources.
<b>Stakeholders Involved</b>	Federal Government, FMYSD, ILO, and civil society organisations.
<b>Missing Stakeholders</b>	Youth groups, employer associations, trade unions, and state governments are not fully embedded in governance and delivery structures.
<b>Implementation Arrangement</b>	Serves as a guiding framework rather than a directly funded programme; informs downstream interventions.
<b>Additional Implementation Notes</b>	Requires state-level action plans, measurable targets, LMIS development, and tracer studies for effectiveness.



<b>Status of Implementation</b>	In force as a reference framework; impact depends on downstream policy implementation, funding, and institutional capacity.
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### National Employment Policy (2021)

Component	Description
<b>Policy Title &amp; Coverage Period</b>	The National Employment Policy (2021) provides a national framework for employment creation, labour market governance, and the promotion of decent work.
<b>Issuing Institution &amp; Year</b>	Issued by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2021.
<b>URL Link</b>	<a href="https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/nig229166.pdf">https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/nig229166.pdf</a>
<b>Problem the Policy Seeks to Address</b>	Responds to high unemployment and underemployment, poor job quality, and structural deficits in labour market systems affecting inclusive growth.
<b>Gaps in Problem Definition</b>	Limited attention to informality, regional disparities, and socio-political drivers such as conflict and displacement; weak disaggregation of labour market data.
<b>Policy Goal</b>	To promote full, productive, and freely chosen employment and decent work for all.
<b>Policy Objectives</b>	Strengthen labour market institutions, promote job creation, enhance employability, and expand social protection systems.
<b>Policy Solutions</b>	Focuses on labour market reforms, enterprise development, skills development (including TVET), and enabling macroeconomic and regulatory environments.
<b>Gaps in Policy Solutions</b>	Structural challenges acknowledged but not operationalised into actionable, funded, and time-bound programmes. Weak clarity on implementation mechanisms.
<b>Stakeholders Involved</b>	Federal Government, labour institutions, development partners, and civil society actors.
<b>Missing Stakeholders</b>	Youth groups, private sector employers, trade unions, and sub-national governments require stronger integration.
<b>Implementation Arrangement</b>	Serves as a strategic policy framework guiding employment interventions rather than a direct implementation programme.
<b>Additional Implementation Notes</b>	Requires institutional coordination, LMIS strengthening, and monitoring frameworks to translate policy into outcomes.
<b>Status of Implementation</b>	Active as a guiding policy; effectiveness depends on translation into programmes and enforcement mechanisms.

### Skills Development for Youth Employment (SKYE) Programme [2018]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	The SKYE Programme, launched in 2018, advances vocational skills as a direct lever to improve youth employability and ease school-to-work transitions.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	A Federal Government initiative implemented with development partners and vocational institutions, leveraging existing TVET infrastructure.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	<a href="https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2022-en-skills-development-for-youth-employment-skye..pdf">https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2022-en-skills-development-for-youth-employment-skye..pdf</a>
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	A pronounced skills mismatch between education outputs and labour market needs, resulting in high youth unemployment and employer difficulty in finding job-ready candidates.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The analysis underemphasises soft skills (communication, teamwork, problem-solving) and the absence of a functional labour market information system (LMIS) to steer programme relevance at scale.



<b>Policy goal</b>	Enhance employability through demand-driven vocational training that leads to employment, self-employment, or apprenticeships.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Deliver market-relevant vocational skills, facilitate apprenticeships, and offer targeted financial support to overcome entry barriers for disadvantaged youth.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	TVET delivery via accredited institutions, structured apprenticeships with employers, and sector-specific modules aligned to occupational standards to ensure recognisable competence.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Without robust LMIS, employer engagement, and placement services, programmes risk training for low-demand occupations. The slow pace of job creation in the broader economy can dampen absorption even for qualified graduates.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Government, vocational institutions, and donors bring resources, technical guidance, and implementation capacity.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Employer associations, small business networks, and trade unions should shape standards, apprenticeships, and hiring commitments; youth bodies can sharpen targeting and support services.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Implemented through TVET providers and training partners, with potential for sector skills councils to align industry needs and training quality.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Introduce dual training models, employer incentives for apprenticeships, portable digital credentials, and tracer studies to measure outcomes and improve relevance.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Active, but capacity constraints and social perceptions about vocational careers limit scale and attractiveness. Demand-side activation is needed to complement supply-side training.

### NPower Programme [2016]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Launched in 2016, NPower is a large-scale intervention designed to provide temporary work experience, stipends, and basic skills to unemployed youth across priority sectors.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Established by the Federal Government of Nigeria within the National Social Investment Programmes architecture to address immediate unemployment pressures.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	Not included here. An official programme manual or directive would clarify enrolment cycles, duration, stipend levels, and exit pathway design.
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	Mass youth unemployment and limited employable skills, especially among graduates lacking practical experience and non-graduates needing marketable competencies.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The framing underestimates structural barriers: sluggish labour demand, uneven service delivery capacity, and systemic governance issues that affect programme integrity and labour market functioning.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Provide short-term employment, income support, and skills exposure that can catalyse longer-term employability or entrepreneurship.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Deploy beneficiaries into education, health, agriculture, and community development roles; provide stipends; and facilitate on-the-job learning with basic employability enhancement.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Large-scale placements offering real-world work exposure, combined with stipends to stabilise livelihoods during participation and modest upskilling components.



<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Exit strategies into permanent employment or viable selfemployment are weak, limiting lasting impact. Employer engagement, entrepreneurship support, and certification recognition are not fully systematised.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Government and sector ministries coordinate placement pipelines and supervision frameworks.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Employers of labour (public and private) and youth representatives could codesign roles, competency expectations, and transition pathways to strengthen outcomes.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Delivered under the National Social Investment Programmes framework with central coordination, sectoral deployment, and statelevel interfaces.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Establish exit compacts with employers, offer microgrants or credit for entrepreneurship, and provide career services and certification to validate experience.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Largescale, with critiques around limited longterm impact due to weak pathways to sustainable jobs or enterprises after programme completion.

### Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme (YESP) [2016]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	The Youth Entrepreneurship Support Programme (YES-P), launched in 2016, aims to stimulate youth-led enterprise creation as a pathway to job generation and income growth.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with development partners and financial institutions to combine capacity building with access to finance.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	High youth unemployment and limited access to capital, mentorship, and business development services that are essential for viable entrepreneurship.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The design assumes training alone can unlock entrepreneurship, but it downplays ecosystem gaps (market access, regulatory hurdles, logistics, supplier networks) and the quality of business ideas.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Foster sustainable youth entrepreneurship that can create jobs and contribute to diversified, inclusive growth.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Provide credit, structured business development training, and mentorship to help startups move from ideation to revenue generation and scale.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Integrated support: entrepreneurship training, access to loans, and mentorship, often delivered in cohorts to build peer networks and accountability.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Postfinancing support is often thin; risksharing instruments to derisk lending are limited; and connections to procurement and anchor buyers are not systematically embedded.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Government, development partners, and financial institutions shape the programme's technical design and financing channels.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Industry offtakers, value chain integrators, and youth entrepreneur associations could enhance market access and productmarket fit.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Administered through government–financial institution partnerships, combining training providers with lending windows and mentorship pools.



<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Introduce investment readiness diagnostics, milestone-based disbursement, revenue-linked repayment, and market access mechanisms (e.g., e-commerce onboarding, supplier development programmes).
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Ongoing, but reach is limited relative to need, and startup failure rates remain high without deeper ecosystem supports and demand-side linkages.

### Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) [2013]

<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Launched in 2013, YESSO is a social protection and labour programme targeting unemployed and vulnerable youth through temporary employment and human capital strengthening.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria with the World Bank, coordinated through NASSCO to leverage the National Social Register and delivery systems.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	<a href="https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668361626694707304/pdf/Nigeria-Youth-Employment-Social-Support-Operation.pdf">https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/668361626694707304/pdf/Nigeria-Youth-Employment-Social-Support-Operation.pdf</a>
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	High unemployment and vulnerability among poor youth, limited access to services, and precarious livelihoods that amplify intergenerational poverty risks.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The approach addresses immediate symptoms without fully engaging structural drivers of vulnerability (regional inequality, conflict, low human capital accumulation), and it gives limited attention to postprogramme sustainability.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Provide temporary work opportunities, build human capital, and improve access to social services to stabilise households and create stepping stones to self-reliance.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Offer short-term jobs via public works, provide vocational and life skills training, and connect beneficiaries to social registries and services.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Cash-for-work schemes, targeted training, and facilitated access to the social safety net — a combination designed to provide income support while building employability.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Without pathways to lasting employment or entrepreneurship, gains can fade after programme exit. Linking to local demand, private employers, and finance is necessary but not fully integrated.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	FGN, the World Bank, and NASSCO structured the intervention around existing social protection systems and administrative capacities.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Local employers, CSOs with livelihood expertise, and youth groups could help tailor activities to local labour demand and improve retention.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	World Bank-supported and coordinated by NASSCO, using the social registry for targeting and leveraging state-level implementation units.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Introduce graduation pathways, savings groups, and linkages to productive inclusion packages (tools, inputs, coaching) to sustain gains.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Implemented with evidence of improved short-term livelihoods, but sustainability remains weak without durable labour market connections.

### YouWin! (Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria) [2011]



<b>Policy title, years the policy is covering</b>	Launched in 2011, YouWin! is a competitive grant programme aimed at catalysing youth entrepreneurship by funding promising business ideas with potential for job creation.
<b>Issuing institution, year of publication</b>	Initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria with support from development partners, signalling a policy focus on innovation-led MSME growth.
<b>URL link to policy document, if available online</b>	Not included here. Adding archived programme guidelines and evaluation summaries would clarify selection criteria, grant sizes, and cohort outcomes.
<b>Problem the policy seeks to address</b>	Young entrepreneurs face acute financing gaps at the seed and early stages, with limited access to grants or patient capital to validate and scale viable ventures.
<b>Are there gaps in the way the problem is defined?</b>	The design underplays regulatory and macroeconomic hurdles (e.g., power, logistics, taxation) that blunt the effectiveness of grants, and it does not directly address the variable quality of business ideas and execution capacity.
<b>Policy goal</b>	Spur youth entrepreneurship and job creation by providing catalytic, nonrepayable funding to highpotential ventures.
<b>Policy objectives</b>	Identify innovative proposals through competitive selection, provide grants to accelerate growth, and support business formalisation and early scaling.
<b>Policy solutions to address the stated problem</b>	Business plan competitions with due diligence and grant disbursement tied to milestones; lighttouch mentorship and visibility to attract additional financing.
<b>Are there gaps in the policy solutions proposed?</b>	Accountability and sustainability are recurring concerns: postgrant support is limited, monitoring can be uneven, and broader ecosystem constraints reduce survival and scaling odds.
<b>Stakeholders involved in the formulation</b>	Federal Government and development partners shaped the competition framework and funding vehicle.
<b>Missing stakeholders?</b>	Angel/VC networks, corporate offtakers, and entrepreneurship hubs could strengthen pipeline quality, investment readiness, and market access.
<b>Implementation: institutional arrangement</b>	Run as a federal competitive grant programme with central screening and award processes, complemented by entrepreneurship training modules.
<b>Additional information on implementation?</b>	Introduce coinvestment mechanisms, postgrant accelerators, and structured mentorship; tie disbursements to revenue or job milestones; and publish cohortlevel performance dashboards.
<b>Status of implementation</b>	Successful for select entrepreneurs, but reach was limited and longterm sustainability varied without deeper ecosystem and market linkages.

## Cross-Policy Synthesis and Systemic Analysis

To address the fragmentation inherent in policy-level analysis, a cross-cutting synthesis was undertaken to identify recurring design patterns, systemic failures, and structural bottlenecks across youth employment interventions in Nigeria. The analysis reveals that while programmes differ in scope and implementation modalities, they exhibit strong convergence in design logic, particularly around skills development and entrepreneurship promotion. However, these shared approaches are accompanied by recurring weaknesses, pointing to deeper systemic constraints within the youth employment ecosystem.

## Cross-Cutting Policy Design Patterns Across Youth Employment Interventions in Nigeria

Thematic Area	Cross-Cutting Pattern	Policies Exhibiting Pattern	Analytical Insight
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Skills Development Focus	Strong emphasis on training as primary intervention	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT, SUPA	Indicates a systemic assumption that unemployment is primarily a skills deficit problem rather than a demand-side constraint
Supply-Side Orientation	Training delivered without strong labour market linkage	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT	Policies prioritise human capital development but under-integrate employer demand and job creation pathways
Entrepreneurship as Default Alternative	Self-employment promoted where wage jobs are limited	YES-P, YouWin!, SMEDAN Agribusiness	Reflects weak formal job creation; shifts burden of employment to youth themselves
Government-Led Programme Design	Strong central government leadership in design and rollout	N-Power, NIYEAP, NYSP, NESP	Suggests top-down policy architecture with limited decentralisation and stakeholder co-creation
Multi-Ministerial Fragmentation	Multiple MDAs implementing overlapping programmes	NIYEAP, NESP, NYSP, SKYE	Weak coordination leads to duplication and inefficiencies across programmes
Weak Labour Market Intermediation	Limited job matching, placement, and career services	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT, N-Power	Absence of structured school-to-work transition systems
Certification and Formalisation Push	Emphasis on credentials and formal recognition	SUPA, SKYE, NYSP	Attempts to standardise skills, but not always linked to employer demand
Social Protection + Employment Blending	Programmes combine income support with skills	N-Power, YESSO	Reflects dual objective of poverty alleviation and employment generation
Private Sector Engagement (Limited Depth)	Private sector consulted but not fully embedded	3MTT, NYSP, SKYE	Engagement often advisory rather than demand-driven or binding
Targeting Youth Broadly	Youth treated as a homogeneous group	Most policies	Weak differentiation by gender, geography, education level, or vulnerability

### Repeated Policy Failures and Design Weaknesses

Failure Category	Repeated Issue	Affected Policies	Underlying Cause	Implication
Weak Employment Outcomes	Training does not translate into jobs	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT	Lack of employer linkages and placement systems	High underemployment and low return on training investments
Poor Exit Pathways	Beneficiaries lack transition into sustainable livelihoods	N-Power, YESSO	Temporary programme design without structured graduation strategies	Cyclical dependency and limited long-term impact
Limited Demand-Side Integration	Employers not embedded in programme design	NYSP, SKYE, SUPA	Weak industry coordination and incentives	Skills mismatch persists



Inadequate Financing Support	Lack of access to capital/tools post-training	NYSP, SUPA, YES-P	Fragmented financing ecosystem	Limits entrepreneurship and productivity
Weak Monitoring & Evaluation	Absence of tracer studies and outcome tracking	NIYEAP, N-Power, SKYE	Poor data systems and accountability mechanisms	Inability to assess impact or improve programmes
Fragmentation and Duplication	Overlapping programmes with similar objectives	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT	Lack of central coordination framework	Inefficient use of resources
Overemphasis on Training	Skills development treated as universal solution	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT	Policy bias toward supply-side interventions	Neglect of structural economic constraints
Limited Inclusion Mechanisms	Weak targeting of vulnerable groups	SMEDAN, NYSP, NESP	Insufficient disaggregated data and design	Exclusion of women, rural youth, PWDs
Sustainability Challenges	Short-term gains not sustained	YESSO, YouWin!, N-Power	Lack of ecosystem support and market integration	Programme impacts fade after completion
Administrative Capacity Constraints	Weak implementation systems	Student Loan Programme, N-Power	Institutional inefficiencies and scale challenges	Delays, leakages, and reduced effectiveness

**Table 3: System-Level Bottlenecks in Nigeria’s Youth Employment Policy Ecosystem**

System Level	Bottleneck	Description	Affected Policy Areas	Systemic Effect
Institutional	Fragmented Governance	Multiple MDAs operate without strong coordination	NIYEAP, NESP, NYSP	Policy duplication and weak coherence
Economic	Limited Job Creation	Slow growth in labour-absorbing sectors	All policies	Training outputs exceed labour market demand
Labour Market	Weak Information Systems (LMIS)	Absence of real-time labour market data	SKYE, NYSP, NIYEAP	Misalignment between skills and jobs
Financial	Limited Access to Finance	Youth lack affordable credit and capital	YES-P, SMEDAN, SUPA	Constrains entrepreneurship and scaling
Social	Negative Perception of TVET	Cultural bias against vocational careers	SUPA, SKYE	Low uptake and limited effectiveness
Infrastructure	Digital and Physical Constraints	Poor connectivity, power, logistics	3MTT, Agribusiness programmes	Limits programme delivery and productivity
Governance	Weak Accountability Systems	Limited transparency and monitoring	N-Power, NESP	Reduces trust and programme efficiency
Political Economy	Politicisation of Programmes	Programmes designed for visibility and patronage	N-Power, large-scale schemes	Prioritises scale over effectiveness
Education System	Skills Mismatch	Curriculum not aligned with industry needs	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT	Persistent unemployability
Inclusion	Gender and Spatial Inequality	Uneven access across regions and groups	SMEDAN, NESP, NIYEAP	Reinforces inequality in outcomes



## Policy Clustering by Intervention Type

Policy Cluster	Policies	Core Intervention	Shared Limitation
Skills Development Programmes	NYSP, SKYE, 3MTT, SUPA	Training and capacity building	Weak job placement and employer integration
Public Employment / Social Protection	N-Power, YESSO	Temporary jobs + stipends	Weak sustainability and exit pathways
Entrepreneurship Promotion	YES-P, YouWin!, SMEDAN	Business support and financing	Limited market access and high failure rates
System-Level Frameworks	NIYEAP, National Employment Policy	Policy coordination	Weak implementation and enforcement
Crisis Response Programmes	NESP	Economic stimulus and job protection	Short-term focus, limited structural impact

## Performance Assessment Framework for Youth Employment Policies in Nigeria

Beyond identifying common design patterns, it is essential to assess the relative performance of youth employment policies to understand which approaches yield results and which fall short. A comparative assessment was conducted using criteria including scale, employment outcomes, sustainability, demand-side integration, and institutional efficiency. The findings indicate that while some programmes achieve broad outreach, their long-term employment impact remains limited, whereas smaller, targeted interventions demonstrate stronger outcomes but lack scalability.

## Comparative Performance Assessment of Key Youth Employment Policies

Policy	Scale			Demand-Side		Inclusion	Overall
N-Power	High	Weak	Low	Weak	Medium	Medium	Low–Moderate
YESSO	Medium	Moderate (short-term)	Low	Weak	Medium	High	Moderate
NYSP	Medium (emerging)	Weak (projected risk)	Low	Weak	Medium	Medium	Low
SKYE	Medium	Moderate	Medium	Moderate	Medium	Medium	Moderate
3MTT	High (targeted)	Uncertain (early stage)	Medium	Moderate	Medium	Medium	Moderate (emerging)
SUPA	Medium	Moderate	Medium	Weak–Moderate	Medium	Medium	Moderate
YES-P	Low–Medium	Weak–Moderate	Low	Weak	Medium	Medium	Low–Moderate
YouWin!	Low (selective)	Moderate (for beneficiaries)	Medium	Moderate	Medium	Low	Moderate
SMEDAN Agribusiness	Medium	Moderate	Low–Medium	Moderate	Medium	Low–Medium	Moderate



NIYEAP	Low (framework)	Weak	Low	Weak	Low	Medium	Low
National Youth Policy	Low (framework)	Weak	Low	Weak	Low	Medium	Low
National Employment Policy	Low (framework)	Weak	Low	Weak	Low	Medium	Low
NESP	High (broad reach)	Moderate (short-term)	Low	Moderate	Medium	Medium	Moderate

### Performance Drivers and Constraints (Why Policies Succeed or Fail)

Policy	Key Performance Drivers	Key Constraints	Explanation
N-Power	Large-scale funding and political backing	Weak exit pathways, limited job absorption	High reach but low long-term employment impact
YESSO	Strong targeting via social register	Lack of sustainability mechanisms	Effective for short-term poverty relief but not jobs
NYSP	Sector-focused design	Weak employer integration	Risk of repeating skills mismatch issues
SKYE	Donor support and structured TVET model	Limited scale and labour demand constraints	Better alignment but constrained by macroeconomy
3MTT	Strong private sector involvement (tech)	Infrastructure gaps and uncertain absorption	Potential high impact if demand linkages improve
SUPA	Certification and formalisation approach	Weak financing and demand-side linkages	Improves skills but limited income impact
YES-P	Access to finance + training	Weak ecosystem support and market access	High business failure rates
YouWin!	Competitive selection and funding	Limited scale and sustainability	High impact per beneficiary but not scalable
SMEDAN Agribusiness	Value chain focus	Land, finance, and logistics constraints	Structural barriers limit outcomes
NIYEAP	Comprehensive framework design	Weak implementation and coordination	Strong intent, weak execution
National Policies	Strategic direction-setting	Lack of operationalisation	Policy without implementation mechanisms
NESP	Rapid response funding	Short-term focus	Stabilisation effect but limited structural change

### Policy Effectiveness Typology

Performance Category	Policies	Key Characteristics
High Scale, Low Impact	N-Power, NESP	Wide reach but weak sustainability and job outcomes
Moderate Impact, Structurally Constrained	SKYE, SUPA, SMEDAN, YESSO	Some positive outcomes but limited by systemic barriers
High Potential (Emerging)	3MTT, NYSP	Strong design intent but early-stage risks



Targeted High Impact (Low Scale)	YouWin!	Effective for beneficiaries but not scalable
Low Effectiveness (Framework-Level Weakness)	NIYEAP, National Youth Policy, National Employment Policy	Weak implementation and coordination

## 10. Annex 3: Secondary Data Analysis Charts

**Table 1: Background Characteristics of the youth**

Characteristics	Nigeria Labour Force Survey						
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2022	2023
	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)	Freq. (%)
<b>Sex</b>							
Male	24462 (48.21)	24684 (47.38)	24001 (47.75)	43780 (47.70)	49965 (48.15)	20718 (47.82)	6965 (46.82)
Female	26279 (51.79)	27414 (52.62)	26260 (52.25)	48005 (52.30)	53808 (51.85)	22603 (52.18)	7912 (53.18)
<b>Age group</b>							
15 - 24years	26707 (52.63)	27044 (51.91)	26438 (52.60)	46493 (50.65)	53496 (51.55)	19547 (45.12)	8290 (55.72)
25 - 35years	24034 (47.37)	25054 (48.09)	23823 (47.40)	45292 (49.35)	50277 (48.45)	23774 (54.88)	6587 (44.28)
<b>Education</b>							
No Formal Educ	16423 (32.37)	97 (0.25)	13862 (27.58)	26475 (28.84)	27444 (26.45)	12490 (28.83)	2933 (20.83)
Primary & Below	5828 (11.49)	6293 (16.51)	5615 (11.17)	9235 (10.06)	11266 (10.86)	11034 (25.47)	1837 (13.05)
Secondary	22468 (44.28)	24749 (64.93)	24039 (47.83)	42584 (46.40)	49621 (47.82)	15026 (34.69)	7875 (55.93)
Post Secondary	6022 (11.87)	6980 (18.31)	6745 (13.42)	13491 (14.70)	15442 (14.88)	4771 (11.01)	1436 (10.20)
<b>Marital Status</b>							
Single	28069 (55.32)	28604 (54.90)	28194 (56.10)	50743 (55.28)	59040 (56.89)	21341 (49.26)	8771 (58.96)
Married/cohabiting	21808 (42.98)	22669 (43.51)	21385 (42.55)	40104 (43.69)	43607 (42.02)	21203 (48.94)	5905 (39.69)
Widowed/divorced/ separated	864 (1.70)	825 (1.58)	682 (1.36)	938 (1.02)	1125 (1.08)	777 (1.79)	201 (1.35)
<b>Place of residence</b>							
Urban	12872 (25.37)	12955 (24.87)	12074 (24.02)	23338 (25.43)	25709 (24.77)	20122 (46.45)	7817 (52.54)
Rural	37869 (74.63)	39143 (75.13)	38187 (75.98)	68447 (74.57)	78064 (75.23)	23199 (53.55)	7060 (47.46)
<b>Geopolitical zone</b>							
North Central	10740 (21.17)	10541 (20.23)	10006 (19.91)	19240 (20.96)	22483 (21.67)	9400 (21.70)	2868 (19.28)



Northwest	11542 (22.75)	11991 (23.02)	12470 (24.81)	19403 (21.14)	19978 (19.25)	9604 (22.17)	3485 (23.43)
Northeast	9813 (19.34)	10456 (20.07)	9964 (19.82)	22411 (24.42)	25122 (24.21)	11114 (25.65)	3592 (24.14)
Southwest	5975 (11.78)	5558 (10.67)	5347 (10.64)	8693 (9.47)	10382 (10.00)	3115 (7.19)	858 (5.77)
Southsouth	7364 (14.51)	7646 (14.68)	7044 (14.01)	12232 (13.33)	14046 (13.54)	5134 (11.85)	2101 (14.12)
Southeast	5307 (10.46)	5906 (11.34)	5430 (10.80)	9806 (10.68)	11762 (11.33)	4954 (11.44)	1973 (13.26)

**Table 2: Employment characteristics of the working age population**

	NLFS 2022	
Employment characteristics	Freq	%
<b>Category of unemployment</b>		
Unemployed previously employed	1267	41.35
Unemployed seeking their first job	1797	58.65
<b>Status in employment</b>		
Employees	5580	13.89
Employers	6244	15.54
Own-account workers	20365	50.68
Contributing to family workers	7995	19.90
<b>Nature of job</b>		
Informal main job	38605	96.07
Formal main job	1579	3.93
<b>Type of contract</b>		
Permanent	2749	6.84
Temporary	762	1.90
Unknown	36673	91.26
<b>Entitlement to social security</b>		
Yes	650	1.62
No	4811	11.97
Not stated	34723	86.41
<b>Employment sector</b>		
Agriculture	14340	29.08
Market services	9703	27.04
Non market services	9409	24.97
Manufacturing	5383	15.29
Construction and others	1338	3.62

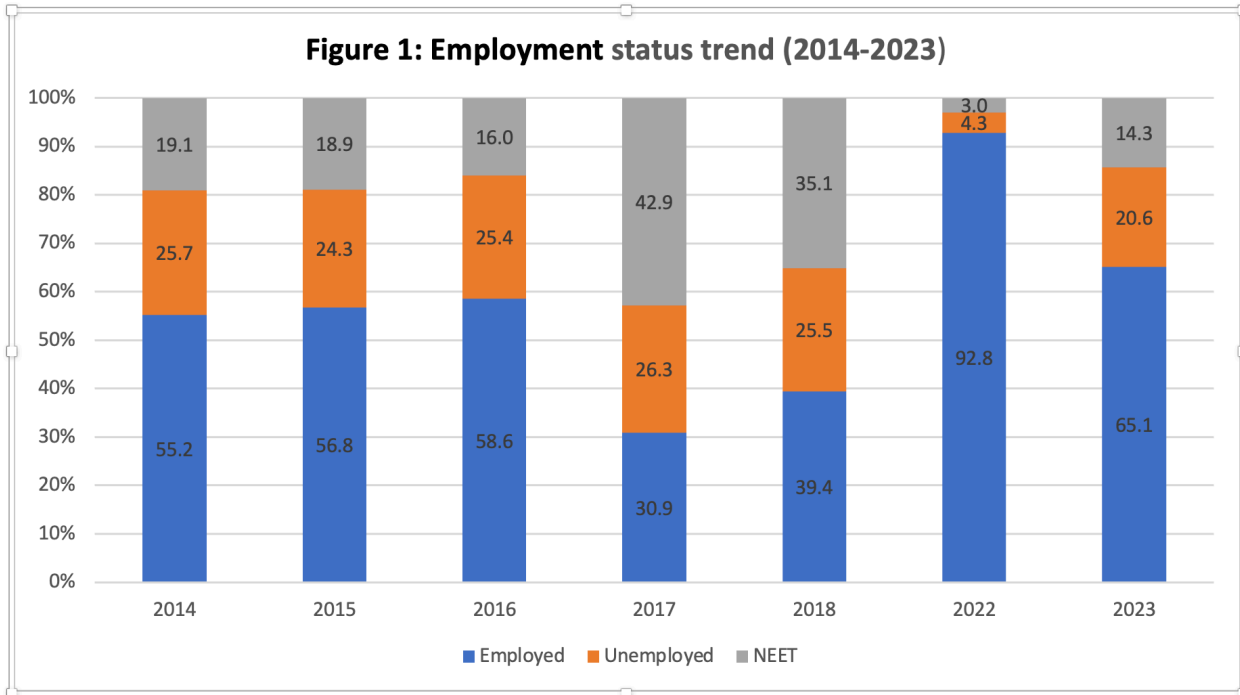
**Table 3: Distribution of Unemployed Youth Seeking a Job by Some Background Characteristics (NLFS 2022)**



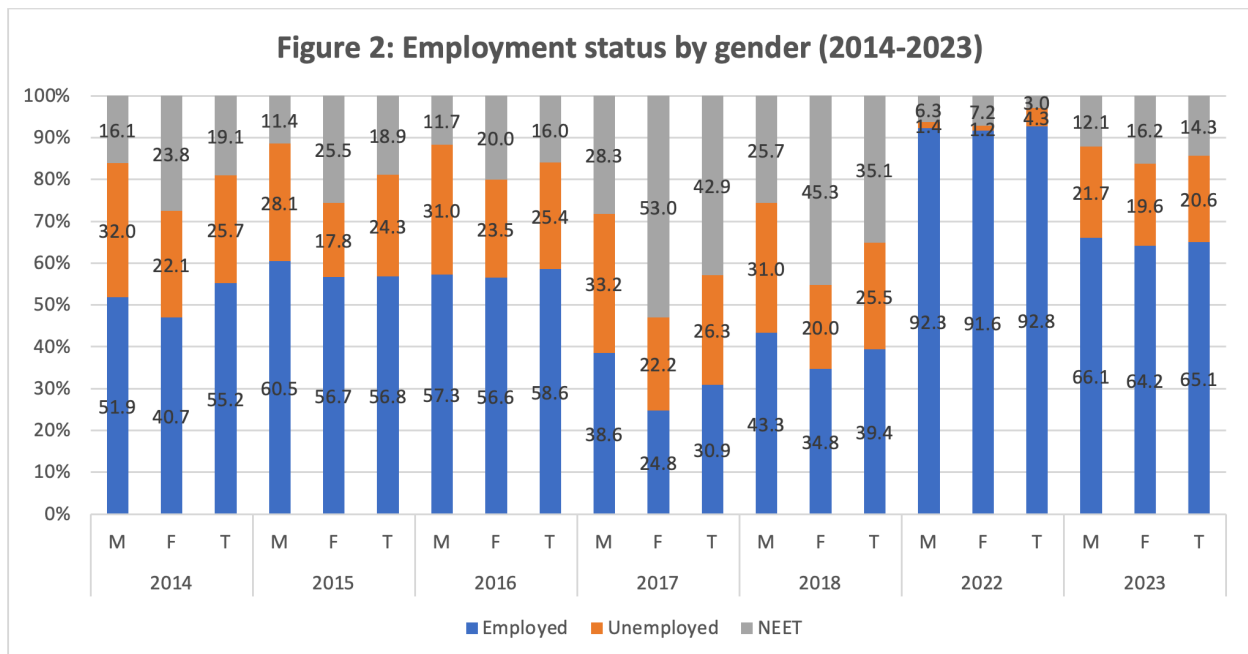
Background characteristics	Unemployed previously employed	Unemployed seeking their first job
<b>Sex</b>	Freq (%)	Freq (%)
Male	510 (40.25)	790 (43.96)
Female	757 (59.75)	1007 (56.04)
<b>Age group</b>		
15 – 24 years	555 (43.80)	1084 (60.32)
25 – 35 years	712 (56.20)	713 (39.68)
<b>Rural/Urban</b>		
Rural	768 (60.62)	1221 (67.95)
Urban	499 (39.38)	576 (32.05)
<b>Zone</b>		
North Central	249 (19.65)	324 (18.03)
Northwest	256 (20.21)	366 (20.37)
Northeast	270 (21.31)	240 (13.36)
Southwest	103 (8.13)	345 (19.20)
Southsouth	191 (15.07)	303 (16.86)
Southeast	198 (15.63)	219 (12.19)



**Figure 1: Employment status trend (2014-2023)**

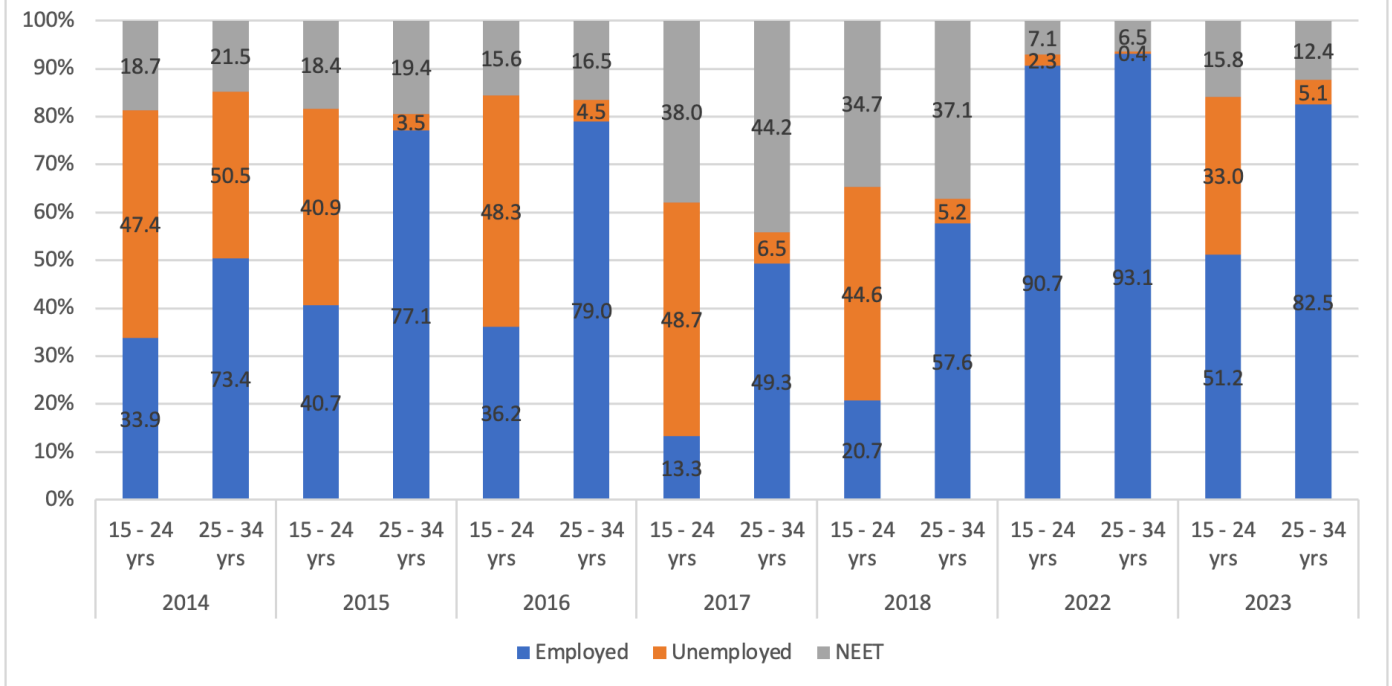


**Figure 2: Employment status by gender (2014-2023)**

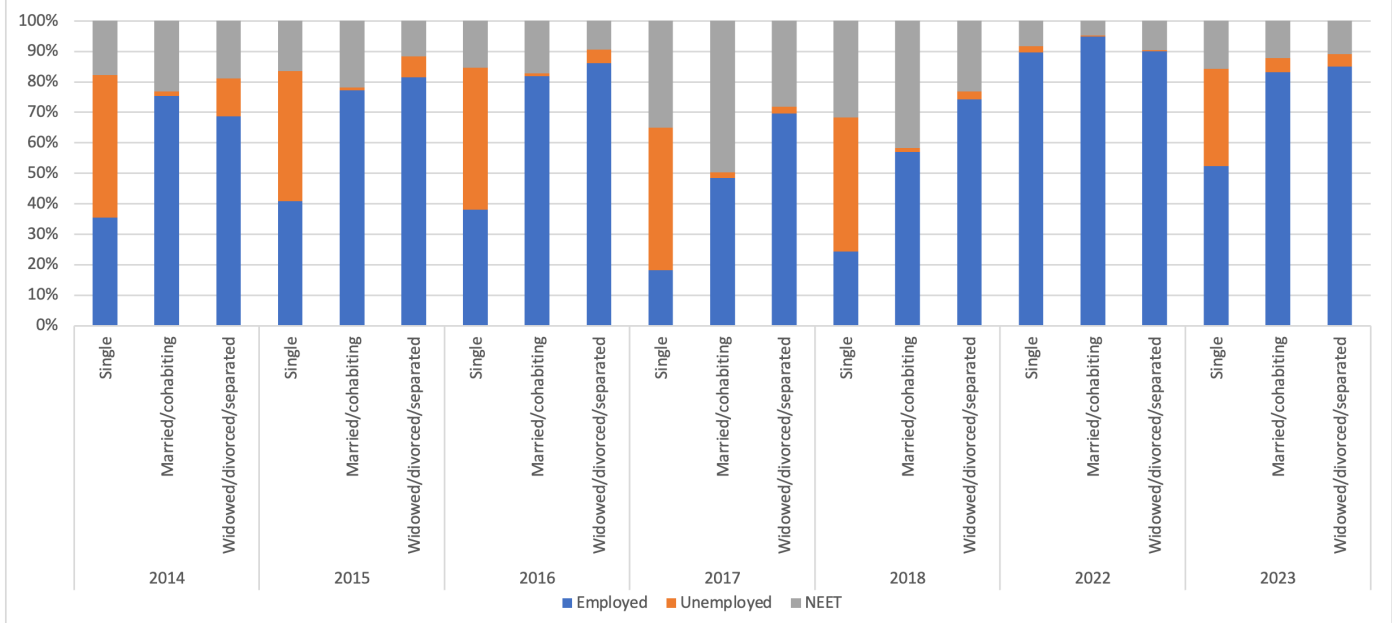




**Figure 3: Employment status by age group (2014-2023)**

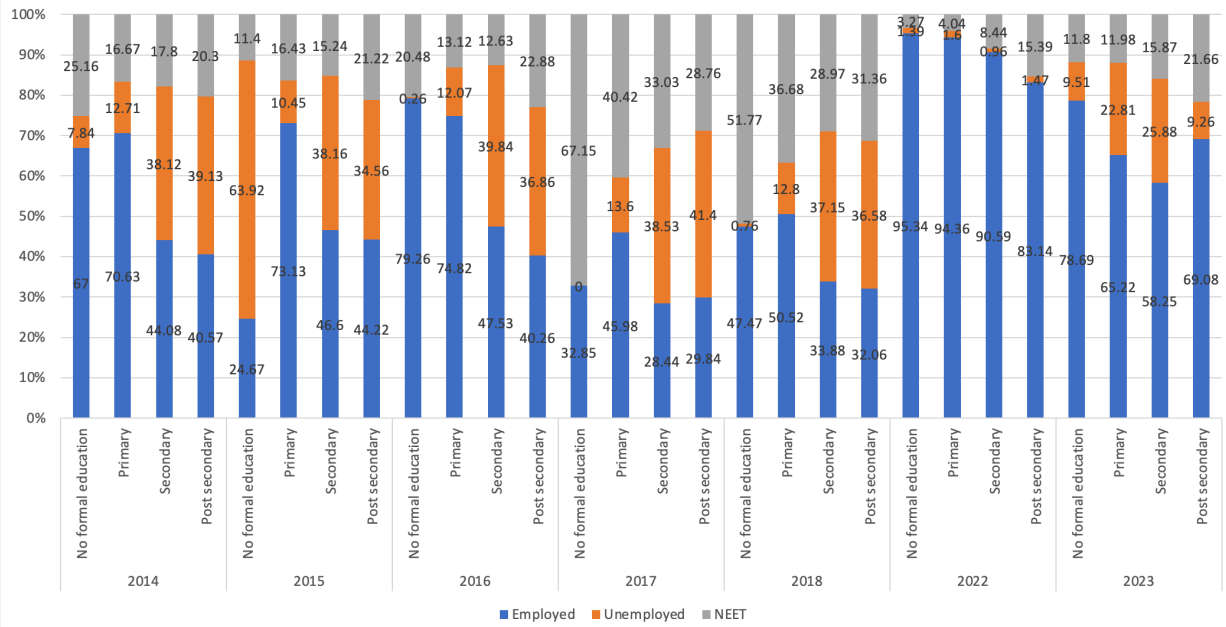


**Figure 4. Employment status by marital status (2014 - 2023)**





**Figure 5. Employment status by education (2014 - 2023)**



**Figure 6. Employment status by rural/urban residence (2014 - 2023)**

