Youth Unemployment: What It Really Means for Your Money

Someone got sacked from their job last month. Someone else has been "in between things" since NSS ended, which was over a year ago now. A third person is technically employed, but the job pays GH$1,800 and the rent alone is GH$1,500. Nobody is saying the word out loud, but everyone is doing the same quiet math in their heads at night.

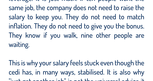
This youth employment conversation needs to be tackled more aggressively.

The numbers are hard to ignore, and they get harder when you zoom in on the people who do everything right. Data from the University of Ghana's Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) shows that only 9 per cent of Ghanaian graduates secure employment within a year of graduation.[1] Those with tertiary education spend an average of seven months searching for work.[2] And the structural picture is just as sobering. Between 2012 and 2023, Ghana's working-age population grew by 2.7 million, but only 250,000 new jobs were created, and most of those were informal, low-paying ones.[3] That degree that you, your parents, and in some cases your extended family sacrificed for does not place you where it used to. And that is before NSS postings, before the "we will get back to you" emails, before the unpaid internships marketed as opportunities.

Here is what nobody in the headlines will tell you plainly, even if you are currently among those affected. High youth unemployment is not just a "them" problem. It is an "us" problem. It shapes what your salary can become. It shapes how easily you can leave a bad job, and much more.

So let's talk about what this actually means for your money, whether you are currently job-hunting, job-hopping, or just job-holding on.

First, The Part Nobody Explains



When unemployment is high, employers have leverage. It is just math. If ten people want the same job, the company does not need to raise the salary to keep you. They do not need to match inflation. They do not need to give you the bonus. They know if you walk, nine other people are waiting.

This is why your salary feels stuck even though the cedis has, in many ways, stabilised. It is also why "just get another job" is not the universal advice it used to be. For many young Ghanaians, the next job offer may not wait yet. And waiting for it to appear while your rent accumulates is a specific kind of panic that budgets are not built to absorb.

What This Actually Does To Your Wallet

Reason 1: It compresses your bargaining power.

You accept less because less is what is on the table. Picture a company posting a role paying GH$ 3,500 that should pay GH$ 5,500. Two hundred people apply. Someone takes it. That person is now earning 40 per cent below market rate, which sets the ceiling for every raise they negotiate for the next five years. What this means for you is that everyone in the bank is what pays you the power to turn down a bad offer and wait for a better one.

Reason 2: It delays every adult milestone by about five years.

Moving out. Marriage. Kids. Car. You did not become lazy. The economy got slower at absorbing you.

How many young people still live at home with their parents? There is no shame in this, but if you ask many people if this is their preference, many will tell you, it is simply not an option but to stay at home. You may lose your sanity, but at least your rent is free.

For example, a 27-year-old with a decent job does the math every year, realises that moving out will cost 70 per cent of their salary, and quietly stays in the family house for another year. Then another. Every year they wait to "feel ready" to move out, is a year they can use to build the cushion that actually makes moving out possible. Readiness is not a feeling that arrives. It is a position you build on purpose, usually while still at home, by putting money to work before life forces your hand.

Reason 3: It pushes you into work with no safety net.

Freelancing, contract roles, content, deliveries. The work sounds flexible until you realise it comes with zero benefits, no pension, no health insurance, and income that arrives on nobody's schedule but the clients. Picture the graphic designer earning GH$ 8,000 in a good month and GH$ 0 in a bad one. What this means for you is that without a cushion, one slow month becomes a crisis. With a cushion, one slow month becomes a season. Same event. Completely different outcome.

Reason 4: Every side hustle becomes a gamble.

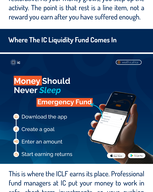
The pressure to "create your own job" is real and sometimes necessary. But most side hustles in Africa fail in year one not because the idea was bad, but because the person poured their last GH$ 2,000 into stock with no buffer behind them and could not survive the first slow month. A side hustle without a cushion is not a business. It is a risk dressed up as ambition. What this means for you is that before you fund the dream, you need to build a foundation.

The Employed Reader's Blind Spot

If you are currently employed and reading this feeling relieved, pay attention to this part. The employed young person in 2026 needs the same emergency fund as the unemployed one.

Why? Because a job is not a guarantee. It is a lease, and the landlord can end it at any time.

So What Do You Actually Do?



This is where the ICLF earns its place. Professional fund managers at ICLF put your money to work in safe, short-term investments, so your cushion grows in the background while you focus on the rest of your life. And if cost is the worry, it should not be. You can invest through MTN MoMo with zero transaction fees, starting with whatever you have right now.

The Bottom Line

You cannot fix the economy. You cannot guarantee your job. You cannot predict which friend calls next with the news.

But you can build the cushion. And in this economy, the cushion is the closest thing to freedom most young Ghanaians will ever today.

Start today. Do not let your money sleep.

[1] Nyarko, J. A., et al. "Education, skills, and duration of unemployment in Ghana." Cogent Economics & Finance, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2021. Table 1. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322039.2021.2058680

[2] Nyarko, J. A., et al. "Education, skills, and duration of unemployment in Ghana." Cogent Economics & Finance, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2021. Table 1. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23322039.2021.2058680

[3] The World Bank. Transforming Ghana's Generation 2025 Policy Notes. Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2025. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/099104292022504040