

# Improving youth livelihoods

## IVORY COAST

**After more than a decade of political and military struggles, job creation, especially for youth, is one of the Ivorian government's biggest concerns.** A scoping paper commissioned by the International Development Research Centre and the MasterCard Foundation highlights the importance of useful and practical data to support youth employment in Ivory Coast and makes suggestions for further research to fill knowledge gaps.

The 1980s were tough years for the Ivorian economy, and living conditions have deteriorated since the 1990s. The poverty rate increased from 32 percent in 1993 to 49 percent in 2008, with high concentrations in rural areas.

The current situation is a result of the series of social and political crises that have rocked the country and hampered its growth.

With a high fertility rate, the Ivorian population is dominated by youth. Over 79 percent of the population is under 35 years old. Youth aged 14 to 35 years make up

over 60 percent of the working-age population. This segment of the population was used as a reserve army during the political and military crises of the 2000s, which saw several thousand young people fighting in conflicts.

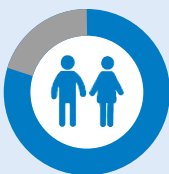
Since the end of the crisis in April 2011, the Ivorian government has made reducing unemployment one of its main concerns. Job creation, especially for youth, is one of the top priorities for the government.

### Youth employment trends and challenges

Recent statistics show that youth are the most likely to be affected by unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment.

The unemployment rate in Ivory Coast is relatively low at 5.3 percent. However, the average duration of unemployment is long. Unemployment rates are higher in urban areas than rural areas, and youth experience higher unemployment rates than adults, with 9.7 percent of

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young men and 15 percent of young women unemployed. Almost three-quarters of the unemployed are youth aged 14 to 35.



Despite relatively low unemployment rates, poverty among the economically active population remains high. This can likely be explained by high rates of underemployment, which affects over 22 percent of employed youth aged 14 to 24 and almost 24 percent of employed Ivorians with high levels of education.

The issue of underemployment relates to increasingly prevalent forms of informal employment in Ivory Coast. Only 9 percent of jobs are in the formal private or public sectors. Most youth (91.1 percent) aged 14 to 24 work in the informal sector. The predominance of this sector is a cause for concern, since informal sector jobs are often precarious and underpaid.

## Transitions into working years

The transition to the labour force is often a difficult one for young graduates. On average, young job seekers remain unemployed for 4.4 years before landing their first job. At the same time, companies are seeking qualified employees—in the occupational fields in which youth are educated—and are not finding the right candidates. A survey of firms suggests that many employers believe that youth do not possess the qualifications that are required for various positions. They believe this lack of skills is a result of the weak Ivorian educational system.

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Apprenticeship-based training can help youth gain the relevant skills they need to find good jobs. However, informal apprenticeships can lead to the exploitation of cheap labour, or reduce innovation by allowing companies to transmit existing knowledge without creating any new

knowledge. Apprenticeship-based training programs must therefore be designed for the benefit of young people as well as employers. Programs should also be monitored to ensure that they are fair and effective.

## Policy and program environment for youth employment

Youth employment policies have been shaped by the different stages of Ivory Coast's economic development. The decade from 2000 to 2011 was marked by a series of political and military crises and an atmosphere unsuitable for job creation. In response, the government implemented various funds and programs and created a platform of services to increase education and employment for youth. These programs can be divided into three broad categories: programs to train job seekers, programs to help job seekers find jobs, and programs to fund micro and small businesses. In 2009, these programs generated a total of 6,106 direct jobs in fields such as agriculture, ICT, infrastructure, chemical industries and forestry. The recent political and economic crisis put an end to such initiatives.





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The Plan National de Développement (PND 2012–2015) is now the reference framework for public action in Ivory Coast. Its main goal is to transform the country into an emerging economy by 2020. Under the PND, Ivorian authorities expect improvement in the governance of employment and labour programs, guided by strong institutional and legal frameworks. This could result in better access to employment for youth, and increased job creation through labour-intensive public investments and support for entrepreneurs. Overall productivity is also expected to rise. These new reforms are an opportunity to revitalize coordination among the youth employment promotion programs in the country.

### Building an evidence base for effective interventions

The youth employment challenge requires specific action from leaders, yet much about young people's employment experiences remains unknown. Statistics on employment are often inconsistent and unavailable. Few studies exist on youth employment in Ivory Coast. These fail to determine any root causes of youth unemployment, making it difficult to use the findings to provide accurate advice to policymakers.

Future research on youth livelihoods needs to focus on several key areas. A first priority is to collect more accurate data on basic characteristics of unemployed youth, such as their gender, geographical location, and level of education.

The circumstances of employed youth also need to be better understood, including how they found jobs, what sector they are employed in, and whether they are experiencing underemployment.

Research is also needed to better understand young people's experiences in the transition from school to work. Many young job-seekers face difficulty finding a job, and employers have difficulty filling vacant positions with qualified candidates. Understanding the roots of this skills mismatch can help decision-makers to design more demand-driven education programs and to match job-seekers to relevant positions.

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There are many programs that are designed to improve youth employment, including those that encourage youth to start their own businesses. However, the effectiveness of these interventions is often unknown. These programs need to be evaluated so that decision-makers can learn what does and does not work in improving youth employment prospects.



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As Ivory Coast works to expand and diversify its economy, youth are seeking employment in new sectors, like sports, music, and art. There are also promising opportunities related to the environment and climate change adaptation, where youth could play a leadership role in creating green jobs. These strategies would not only improve youth employment, but could also contribute to the growth of the Ivorian economy.

Research can help fill existing knowledge gaps and create new knowledge on the future of youth employment in the changing Ivorian economy to help stakeholders design effective, scalable interventions to improve youth livelihoods.



This brief is one of a series jointly commissioned by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the MasterCard Foundation to shed light on the critical challenge of youth employment in sub-Saharan Africa. It highlights key findings from the 2015 paper, "Youth employment in Ivory Coast: A diagnostic study" by Clément K. Kouakou and Adébo T. Koba. Full citations for the statistics highlighted here can be found in the source paper.

Opinions stated in this brief, and the paper it draws from, are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDRC and the MasterCard Foundation.

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