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THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

18 September 2025 Column

By Asafika Mpako

YOUNG AFRICANS ARE SPEAKING. ARE POLICY-MAKERS LISTENING?

With a median age of just 19, Africa has more young people than anywhere else in the world. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the median age is 31, 32 in Asia, 33 in Oceania, 38 in North America, and 42 in Europe - the oldest continent globally.

Forecasts suggest that by 2100, Africa will be home to nearly half of the world's youth population, and young Africans will make up twice the size of Europe's entire population (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020).

The decisions that policy-makers take today will determine whether Africa leverages its unique demographic dividend or squanders the opportunity. Are policy-makers listening to young Africans?

The latest Afrobarometer findings from across 35 countries on the African continent highlight the priorities, evaluations, and expectations of African youth.

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Education and Employment

Young Africans (aged 18-35 years) are, on average, more educated than their elders and they are also less likely than their elders to lack formal education altogether. But African youth are considerably more likely than their seniors to be out of work and looking for a job. About four in 10 (42%) are out of work and looking for a job, while one in 3 (29%) are out of work but have stopped looking for employment.

Aside from their country's general economic situation and scarcity of jobs, nearly half of young Africans (45%) cite a lack of adequate training or preparation (26%), and a lack of experience required by employers (19%) as their most important barriers to employment.

About one in 7 point to youth's unwillingness to work certain jobs (15%), while a similar proportion cite a mismatch between education qualifications and job requirements (15%). Only one-tenth (11%) see youth's lack of entrepreneurial skills or motivation as a barrier.

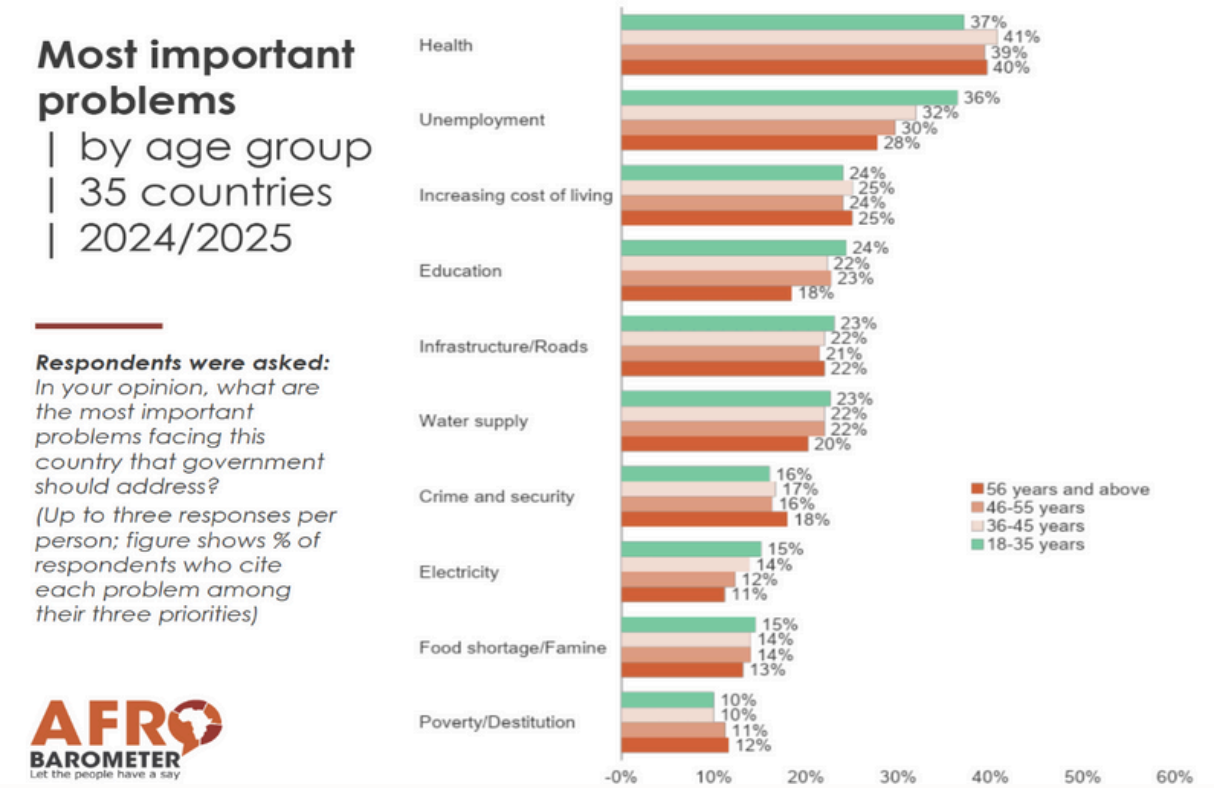
Preferred Job Sector

Given their choice of jobs, more than half (53%) of African youth would like to start their own businesses. Next in popularity is working for the government or public sector (24%), while about one-tenth (12%) say they would work for a private company or business, and less than one-tenth (6%) would work for a non-government organisation.

While more than two-thirds of young people in countries like Benin (68%), the Gambia (69%), and Senegal (74%) express a desire to start their own business, fewer than three in 10 young adults have a desire to start their own business in countries like Angola (27%), Mauritius (26%), and Namibia (19%).

Priority Problems

When asked about the most important problems facing their country that require immediate government attention, young Africans ranked health as the top concern (cited by 37%), followed closely by unemployment (36%), increasing cost of living (24%), education (24%), and infrastructure/roads (23%).



On these priority issues, youth offer mixed reviews of their government's performance, ranging from strikingly low levels of approval on keeping prices stable (17%) and creating jobs (23%) to about half approving their government's performance on addressing educational needs (51%), improving basic health services (45%), and maintaining roads and bridges (45%). Youth's approval ratings are similar to those of older citizens.

Areas for Additional Youth Investment

If governments were to increase spending on programmes to help young people, nearly half of Africans (48%) believe job creation should be the highest priority for additional investment, followed by education (16%), jobs training (14%), access to business loans (13%), and social services for youth (8%). These views are consistent among all the age groups.

In countries like Cote d'Ivoire (61%), Lesotho (62%), Congo-Brazzaville (63%), Gabon (63%), Morocco (65%), and Ghana (65%), more than six in 10 young people see job creation as a priority for additional spending to help youth, while in countries like Malawi (26%) and the Seychelles (22%), on the other hand, just about a quarter of young adults prioritise job creation.

Emigration

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the findings show that more than half of young Africans (55%) have considered moving to another country at least "a little bit," which is about twice the proportion among those aged 56 years and above (22%). More than seven in 10 young Africans in countries like Mauritius (71%), Ghana (72%), the Gambia (75%), Sao Tome and Principe (75%), Cabo Verde (76%), and Liberia (83%) have considered moving to another country. On the flipside, only about one in 10 Tanzanian youth (12%) have given it a thought.

More than half of African youth (52%) who have considered leaving their country say their main reason is to find work or better job opportunities, while over one-quarter (27%) cite escaping economic hardship or poverty.

Support for and Satisfaction with Democracy

While more than six in 10 (63%) of young Africans prefer democracy to any alternative form of government, they are disillusioned with the way that democracy currently functions in their countries. Less than four in 10 (38%) say they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way democracy works in their country.

Conclusion

Afrobarometer survey findings show that African youth are speaking clearly about their priorities: healthcare, jobs, price stability, education, and infrastructure development. Despite being better educated than their elders, many young Africans struggle to find employment and believe job creation should be a priority for additional government investment.

More than three-quarters aspire to start their own businesses or work in the public sector.

Over half have considered moving to another country at least "a little bit," with most citing better job prospects and escaping poverty as their main reasons. And while Africa's youth express a preference for democracy, they remain dissatisfied with how it functions in their countries.

The challenge remains for Africa's policy-makers to respond effectively to these and ensure that young Africans are recognised as equal partners and contributors in building a prosperous Africa. Will they listen?

PREVIOUS ISSUES

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

18 August 2023 Column

By Stephen Ndwiga

XENOPHOBIA'S SHADOW: A THREAT TO SOUTH AFRICA'S FUTURE

South Africa is an economic giant of Southern Africa and stands out as a preferred top destination for migrants from within and beyond the region. In 2023, South Africa had an estimated total of 2 860 405 officially recognised immigrants (Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, 2023). Due to its socio-economic and political status, South Africa attracts foreign migrants for economic, safety and security reasons (Patel & Essa, 2018). It is also home to many refugees and asylum seekers from various African countries.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNCHR) reports that there were 250 250 refugees and asylum seekers in South Africa, although the figures may be inaccurate due to the presence of many undocumented refugees (UNCHR, 2025 and Freedom House, 2022). These refugees and asylum seekers are driven away from their countries of origin due to poverty, political violence and war. These countries include Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Somalia, and Zimbabwe (The Conversation, 2020, UNCHR, 2025).

[Xenophobia's Shadow: A Threat to South Africa's Future]

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

11 August 2023 Column

By Crystal Ordreson

WHAT DOES IT TAKES TO BRING PEACE TO EMBATTLED SUDAN?

Some years ago, while working as a journalist for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), I was on assignment in Sudan. I recall being in the capital, Khartoum, where I had to pay for everything, including my hotel, in US dollars as no credit cards were accepted. At the time, the country was under international sanctions and excluded from the international SWIFT payment system. This was during the Omar al-Bashir regime, the former Sudanese leader who was later ousted from power. The Sudanese people I met were unwilling to speak in public about the regime, not even in their own homes. There was a culture of fear and distrust– something the Bashir regime was successful in creating with the constant threat of arrest.

I also travelled to Darfur, about 1,000 kilometres from the capital, to visit a UN refugee camp. I was escorted by several UN soldiers, who happened to be South African. During our journey, the soldiers pointed out the militia members of the rebel group Rapid Support Forces (RSF). They carried sniper rifles, but because we were part of a UN envoy, we were safe in that moment. The soldiers did warn us, however, that the militia were young, and some did not follow the rules of war.

I often reflect on this reporting assignment, as Sudan is a beautiful country despite its troubled history. For the past two years, however, it has been plagued by a war that has devastated many parts of the nation. Sudan, Africa's third-largest country, shares borders with Egypt, Chad, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Eritrea.

Many Sudanese people have fled the country, becoming refugees and facing a humanitarian crisis. Millions have been displaced, and some

[What Does It Take To Bring Peace To Embattled Sudan?]

THE IJR LENS ON AFRICA

28 July 2023 Column

By Norman Taufield

VELVET CRATES AND TERMITE SHELVES: REFLECTIONS ON RESTITUTION IN AFRICA

An open letter to the Honourable Director of the Museum of Civilised Conscience, somewhere in Europe

Dear Director,

We acknowledge receipt of the sculpture – whether a rain god, fertility totem, or as you described it, a "decorative artefact." It arrived with care: wrapped in velvet, accompanied by a brochure that celebrated your institution's efforts.

Thank you for this meaningful gesture. We understand that it was not without difficulty – that it required introspection and institutional reckoning.

And yet, Africa received no phone call. There was no consultation, no shared curation – only a press release. The object made its way from your display case to our fragile shelves. Cameras captured the moment. The world applauded. You perhaps found a measure of closure. We, once again, found ourselves in our familiar role: present, dignified, but largely unprepared.

Since President Macron's 2017 Ouagadougou declaration that "African heritage cannot remain a prisoner of European museums," we've seen increasing efforts toward repatriation. The 2018 Sarr-Savoy Report gave this commitment form and language. In 2022, Berlin followed suit with a joint declaration and a symbolic return of Benin Bronzes – while many more remain in storage.

[Velvet Crates and Termite Shelves: Reflections on Restitution in Africa]

Reference

Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2020. International Youth Day Research Brief: Africa's Youth: Action Needed Now to Support the Continent's Greatest Asset. London: Mo Ibrahim Foundation. Available at: https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2020-08/international-youth-day-research-brief.pdf.

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