



## **2024: A Pivotal Year for Youth Transformation in Active Citizenship, Employment, Mental Health, and Migration (Japa)**

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### **Background and Methodological Approach**

As we reflect on the year 2024, Nigerian youth emerge not merely as demographic statistics, but as complex, multifaceted agents of societal transformation. Their engagement across four interconnected domains—active citizenship, employment, mental health, and migration—reveals a sophisticated narrative of resilience, innovation, and strategic navigation of systemic challenges.

This thought piece adopts a holistic, intersectional approach to understanding youth dynamics. Rather than treating these domains as isolated phenomena, we examine their intricate relationships, recognizing that economic opportunities, political engagement, psychological well-being, and geographical mobility are deeply intertwined experiences of contemporary Nigerian youth.

Our analysis is grounded in comprehensive data, institutional insights, and grassroots narratives, drawing from multiple sources including government reports, organizational research, and youth-led initiatives. The objective is not just to document challenges, but to illuminate the strategic responses and transformative potential of young Nigerians.

## Active Participation: Youth as Catalysts for Governance Reform



2024 witnessed heightened youth activism, epitomized by the #EndBadGovernance protest in Nigeria. This movement, driven by widespread economic distress—including 34.2% general inflation and 40.9% food inflation—galvanized tens of thousands of young Nigerians into action. Between August 1 and 10, 2024, activists leveraged digital platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram to organize peaceful demonstrations advocating for economic stability, security, and transparent governance, as reported by *Vanguard* and *FunTimes Magazine*. The protest reignited critical discussions on systemic reforms, building upon the legacy of 2020's #EndSARS movement, which had earlier spotlighted police brutality and governance failures. Beyond the quantitative metrics of protest participation, the #EndBadGovernance movement represents a profound psychological and political intervention. It is simultaneously an economic statement, a mental health coping mechanism, and a civic reimagining of governance. Young Nigerians are not merely challenging existing structures but constructing alternative narratives of citizenship and collective agency.

Youth-led organizations amplified these efforts by championing policy shifts to promote inclusive and equitable governance structures. For example, LEAP Africa's Nigerian Youth Future Fund (NYFF) supported initiatives like the "Path to Peace" project in Zamfara State, which empowered youth with conflict resolution tools to foster community peace.

The Youth Day of Service (YDoS) campaign engaged young Africans in volunteer activities to advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its focus on mobilizing youth and amplifying their voices for community transformation added momentum to governance reform efforts.

LEAP Africa's Policy Advocacy, and Government Relations (PAGR) unit collaborated with the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Citizenship and Leadership to organize an Access to Justice Roundtable. This initiative tackled systemic barriers to justice, advocating for reforms that prioritize youth-friendly access to legal systems.

On the policy front, the Federal government's creation of a standalone Ministry of Youth Development marked a significant shift in addressing youth-specific challenges, previously managed as an appendage to the Ministry of Sports. This move aims to centralize youth-related policies and programs, such as enhancing vocational training and providing startup grants for sectors like agriculture.

In a landmark move, the Federal Government of Nigeria also launched the [Youth Activity Dashboard](#) in 2024, a platform dedicated to youth initiatives across the country. This innovative tool aggregates data and insights from various youth-focused programmes and projects, providing a comprehensive overview of youth participation in national development. The dashboard serves as a resource for policymakers, youth organizations, and advocates, enabling them to track and assess the impact of youth-led activities in real-time. It also promotes transparency, allowing young Nigerians to actively engage in governance by monitoring youth programs and offering feedback.

These collective actions have reframed young Nigerians as key architects of governance, rather than mere participants. This transformative shift underscores the urgency for stakeholders to expand civic education and institutionalize pathways for youth-led initiatives, ensuring that their voices remain integral to Nigeria's democratic evolution.

## **Employment: Navigating Challenges with Innovation**

Unemployment among youth remains a pressing challenge globally, with rates at about 12.3%. However, 2024 saw growth in the gig economy, where platforms like [Upwork](#) witnessed a 35% rise in youth engagement. For many, freelancing became a lifeline, bridging income gaps and aligning with the global shift toward non-traditional employment.

In Nigeria, targeted vocational and digital upskilling programmes by both the public and private sectors made significant impacts. Emerging industries, including technology and renewable energy, gained traction, equipping youth for the future.

Moreover, the ongoing tax reforms aimed at fostering opportunities in the digital economy present significant prospects. Adjustments to income tax laws are expected to attract global remote work opportunities, especially in the business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, according to the *Presidential Fiscal Policy and Tax Reform Committee*. This positions Nigerian youth to thrive in an increasingly digital and interconnected world.

However, challenges persist. Despite this progress, the need for comprehensive labor market reforms and investments in job creation remains critical for sustainable employment.

The 12.3% global youth unemployment rate is more than an economic statistic—it is a complex psychological terrain where young Nigerians are developing remarkable adaptive strategies. The 35% rise in gig economy engagement reveals not just an economic pivot, but a sophisticated response to systemic constraints. Freelancing emerges as more than an income stream; it represents a form of psychological resilience, offering autonomy, flexibility, and a sense of personal agency in an uncertain economic landscape.

### **Mental Health: Prioritizing Youth Well-Being**



# YOUTH DAY OF SERVICE 2024

In commemoration of  
"World Mental Health Day"

THEME:

Pause and Breathe:  
Stress Management  
for Teens.



Globally, World Mental Health Day 2024 centred on the theme "Prioritizing Mental Health in the Workplace," sparking critical discussions about mental health challenges in professional environments. For young people in Nigeria, these conversations hold particular relevance as they increasingly represent a significant portion of the nation's demographic and future leaders.

Youth face unique stressors, including unemployment, academic pressures, and the transition into adulthood. These factors contribute to a rise in mental health challenges, with the *The World Health Organization* (WHO) estimating that 14% of individuals aged 10–19 globally experience untreated mental health conditions. In Nigeria, initiatives in 2024 sought to bridge this gap and empower youth with tools to prioritize mental well-being.

Programmes like *LEAP Africa's mental health awareness seminar for secondary school students* highlighted the importance of early intervention and building resilience in young minds. These efforts align with a growing recognition that mental health literacy must start early to equip youth with coping mechanisms for future challenges.

At the policy level, the National Mental Health Policy 2023 advanced access to care by decentralizing services. Nigeria also achieved a global milestone as the first country to contextualize the WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) version 3.0, ensuring mental health services are contextually relevant and accessible to diverse populations, including young people in underserved areas, *according to the Health and Social Welfare Minister, Professor Ali Pate*.

State-led initiatives further emphasized community engagement. *Anambra State* launched campaigns targeting depression and substance abuse across 179 communities, focusing on youth populations disproportionately affected by these challenges. Similarly, *Lagos State* introduced a mental health helpline, offering young people a lifeline to support during moments of crisis.

Despite these advances, stigma and limited accessibility to services remain significant barriers. For many Nigerian youth, the workplace represents both a challenge and an opportunity for mental health advocacy. Integrating mental health support into workplace policies and creating youth-friendly resources is vital for fostering a culture of openness and resilience.

By treating mental health as a systemic priority, Nigeria can empower its youth to thrive both personally and professionally. Sustained investments in awareness, accessibility, and support will ensure the next generation contributes to a healthier and more productive society.

Mental health in 2024 must be understood as a foundational layer influencing all aspects of youth experience. The 14% global estimate of untreated mental health conditions among 10-19 year-olds is not merely a clinical statistic, but a complex narrative of systemic pressures, adaptive strategies, and collective resilience. Mental well-being is intrinsically linked to economic opportunities, civic engagement, and mobility decisions.

## Migration (Japa): Opportunity Amid Brain Drain



Migration plays a pivotal role in shaping Nigeria's economy and development landscape. According to the 2024 *World Migration Report*, Nigeria received \$20.13 billion in remittances from its diaspora, positioning it among the top remittance-receiving nations globally. These remittances significantly bolster the economy. However, while remittances from the diaspora significantly support Nigeria's economy, the loss of critical talent presents long-term challenges.

Notably, the *LEAP Africa 2024 JAPA Report* detailed an ongoing surge in youth migration, with a 20% rise in the number of Nigerians emigrating compared to 2023. Key drivers include better educational prospects, employment opportunities, and a desire for improved living standards, with Canada, the UK, and the USA emerging as top destinations.

While this vibrant migration complex offers immense potential, it also presents challenges, such as the loss of critical talent due to brain drain. This talent loss has long-term implications for national development. To effectively harness the benefits of migration while addressing its challenges, evidence-based policies and strategies are imperative. The *LEAP Africa report* emphasizes approaches such as fostering return migration, engaging the diaspora in nation-building, and creating competitive opportunities within Nigeria to retain talent.

Youth mobility, in particular, remains a double-edged sword. While it provides opportunities for skill acquisition and global exposure, it also poses risks that must be carefully managed to ensure a positive contribution to Nigeria's development goals. With strategic interventions, Nigeria can transform migration into a powerful catalyst for inclusive and sustainable growth.

Migration in 2024 represents a multidimensional strategy of personal and collective transformation. The 20% rise in youth migration was not a simple narrative of departure, but a nuanced process of skill acquisition, psychological repositioning, and global citizenship. The \$20.13 billion in remittances symbolizes more than economic exchange—it represents a complex network of transnational support, resilience, and collective aspiration.

## **Charting a Path Forward**

To truly support youth transformation, stakeholders must adopt an intersectional, holistic approach that recognizes the intricate connections between mental health, economic opportunities, civic engagement, and mobility. This requires:

- Developing integrated support ecosystems that address psychological, economic, and political dimensions simultaneously
- Creating flexible, adaptive policy frameworks that recognize youth as strategic agents of change
- Investing in comprehensive capacity-building that goes beyond skills training to include psychological resilience and systemic understanding
- Fostering transnational connections that transform brain drain into dynamic knowledge circulation

## **Concluding Reflection**

As we begin 2025, the narrative of Nigerian youth remains complex yet beaming with extraordinary potential. They are not waiting for transformation—they are actively constructing it, navigating challenges with remarkable strategic intelligence, psychological resilience, and collective creativity.



The future is not something that happens to young Nigerians. It is something they are deliberately, strategically, and courageously creating—one initiative, one protest, one innovative solution at a time.