

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT TURNOVER AND ITS IMPACT ON PUBLIC SECTOR GOVERNANCE

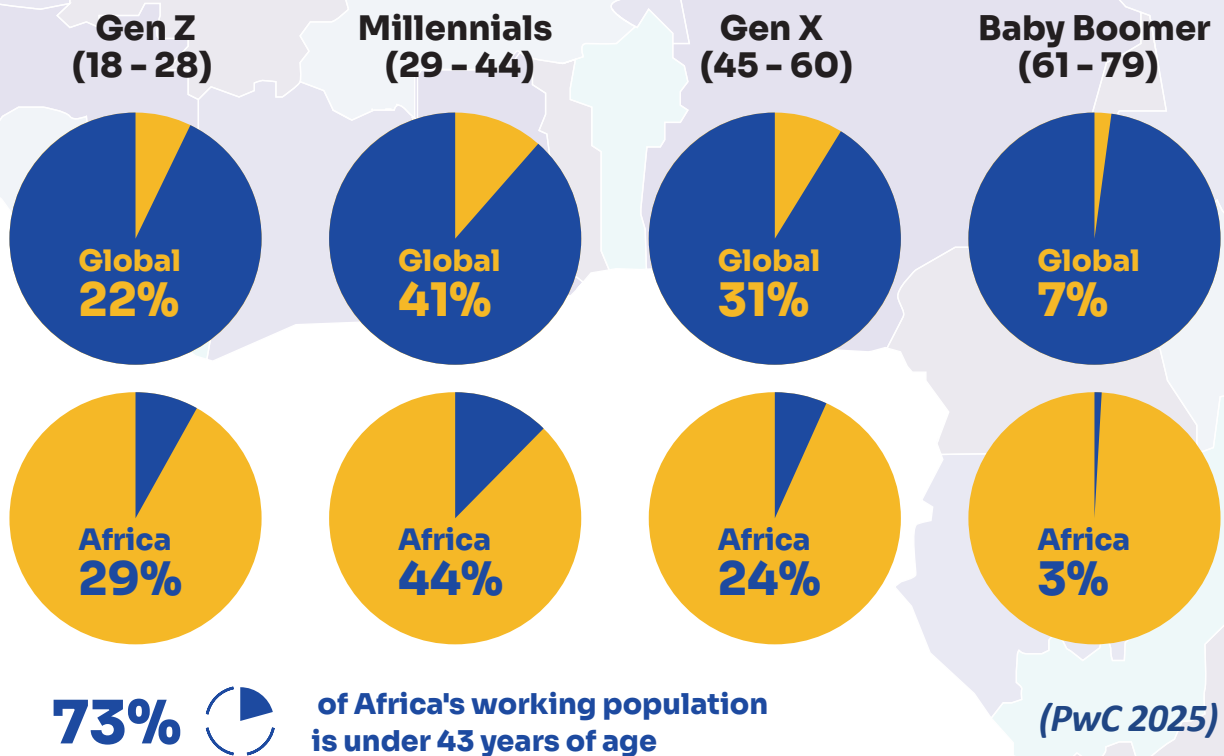
**EMERGING
PUBLIC
LEADERS**
G H A N A



Globally, the workforce is undergoing a profound generational transition. By 2030, Millennials and Generation Z are projected to constitute nearly three-quarters of the global workforce (Deloitte, 2025). In Africa, this transition is already visible, with nearly 73% of the continent's working population below the age of 43 (PwC, 2025). This generation represents the youngest, most digitally literate and most mobile workforce in modern history. Consequently, the central argument confronting governments and public institutions is no longer whether young people will dominate the labour market, but whether institutions can retain them.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, this challenge is compounded by the structure of the labour market that young people enter. Although the official youth unemployment rate stands at approximately 8.9%, this figure depicts a harsher reality. Nearly three out of every four young Africans remain trapped in insecure and informal employment, even when they are technically classified as employed (ILO, 2024). As a result, frequent movement between temporary jobs has become the norm rather than the exception.

Workforce Composition (Global and Africa)



Ghana reflects this broader regional trend. Youth unemployment stands at approximately 34.4% among those aged 15–24 and 22.5% among those aged 15–35, while seven out of every ten unemployed Ghanaians are young people (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2025). Yet the greater challenge extends beyond employment creation. It lies in the inability of institutions to retain the young professionals they recruit. Many of Ghana's highly educated young professionals frequently move between organisations, leave the public service in search of better remuneration, or migrate abroad altogether for mostly personal and economic gains. The country loses an estimated 500 nurses every month to emigration (Wilson Center, 2023). Ghana is therefore confronted not only with the challenge of creating jobs but also with the equally important challenge of retaining talented young people within the jobs that already exist.

This is the critical gap that conventional labour market analyses often overlook. Public discourse and policy interventions tend to focus heavily on job creation, while considerably less attention is paid to job retention. This challenge is particularly acute within the public service, where poor employee retention has consequences that extend far beyond economic costs. It is fundamentally a governance challenge with potential implications for institutional effectiveness, public service delivery and national development.

Effective governance depends on the accumulation and preservation of institutional knowledge. Such knowledge does not exist solely in policy manuals or administrative procedures; it resides within the people who implement them. When a young public officer leaves after few months of recruitment, the institution loses far more than a vacant position. It loses the time invested in training, the professional relationships cultivated, the contextual understanding acquired, and the practical experience accumulated. Newly recruited employees must often begin the learning process from scratch, frequently with limited institutional support, thereby slowing service delivery and organisational effectiveness.



The quality of governance is ultimately determined by the continuity, competence and motivation of those who deliver public services. High employee turnover disrupts service delivery and organisational continuity while imposing significant recruitment, onboarding and training costs. These expenses divert already scarce public resources away from frontline service delivery. Public institutions operating under constrained budgets cannot afford to repeatedly finance the same position because of frequent resignations. Although these costs may not appear explicitly in national budgets, they are ultimately borne by citizens through reduced efficiency and diminished public services.

The future leadership of Ghana's public service will depend not only on recruitment but more importantly on retention. The Directors, Chief Directors, and Heads of Departments who will lead ministries and agencies in 2040 are the young officers entering public service today. If these professionals leave faster than expected, the state risks creating a leadership vacuum that future generations will inherit. The consequences of high youth turnover are therefore both generational and delayed. Comparatively, unlike the private sector, which can often recruit experienced leaders from outside, senior leadership positions within the public service require extensive institutional knowledge and experience that cannot simply be purchased from the external labour market.

Moreover, the public sector suffers disproportionately from the loss of institutional memory. When a private company loses experienced employees, it risks losing market competitiveness. When a government ministry loses experienced professionals, it risks losing its capacity to formulate sound policies, implement programmes effectively, and deliver essential public services. The social consequences are therefore considerably greater. In effect, the public sector bears the highest societal cost of employee turnover while possessing the fewest mechanisms to prevent it.

Another important consequence of poor retention is reputational. When talented young professionals consistently leave public institutions, the message conveyed to both current and prospective employees is that public service is not a viable long-term career. Over time, this perception becomes self-reinforcing. The public service gradually becomes viewed as a temporary stopover or a stepping-stone to opportunities in the private sector or overseas, rather than a place where capable professionals can build meaningful and rewarding careers dedicated to national development.

The implications extend beyond public perception. Research suggests that where high youth unemployment coexists with inequality and corruption, the likelihood of political instability increases significantly (Azeng & Yogo, 2013). Consequently, poor youth retention should not be viewed merely as an economic inefficiency; rather, it constitutes a gradual but significant threat to democratic governance and national stability.

Addressing this challenge requires deliberate policy action. Employee retention should become a measurable governance indicator, receiving the same level of policy attention and monitoring as recruitment. Government institutions should routinely analyse turnover rates, retention patterns, and the underlying reasons why employees leave. Also, improving job quality must become a national priority. This could include establishment of clear career progression pathways, opportunities for meaningful work, continuous professional development, supportive leadership and transparent promotion systems based on merit rather than personal connections. Establishing robust and credible merit-based career management systems would

strengthen employee commitment while reinforcing confidence in public institutions. Furthermore, Government should adopt proactive strategies to manage professional migration rather than merely reacting to it. This could include bonded scholarships linked to genuine career advancement opportunities, targeted retention incentives for critical professional cadres, and ethical bilateral agreements with destination countries that contribute towards the training costs of the skilled professionals they recruit.

Finally, young professionals should be provided with structured platforms through which they can meaningfully contribute to governance reforms and institutional decision making. Research consistently demonstrates that employees who believe their opinions are valued and who have opportunities to influence their work environment are significantly more likely to remain committed to their organisations than those motivated solely by financial incentives.

The implementation of these recommendations has the potential to enhance the performance of Ghana's public sector, safeguard institutional continuity, strengthen democratic governance, and accelerate sustainable national development. Ghana's ability to build an effective, resilient, and accountable public service will depend largely on its capacity to retain talented young professionals and provide them with an enabling environment in which they can grow, thrive in their careers, and make meaningful contributions to national development.

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