

BAGHDAD, 20 July 2011 - A just released national youth survey in Iraq says youth unemployment is running at over 20 percent and many young people are thinking of emigrating.

Up to 23 percent of males and 21 percent of females aged 15-24 are unemployed, according to a 2009 National Youth Survey by the government and the UN Population Fund (released on 16 July). Of these, 33 percent intend to go abroad in search of work, it said.

"The youth are the mainstay of every society; they are an energy-producing force but are at the same time a source of grave danger when they do not have jobs and opportunities for a decent life," the 189-page report noted.

Young people, it warned, faced "violence, unemployment and marginalization".

Baghdad taxi driver Ahmed Hassan qualified as a mechanical engineer in 2001, but has since struggled to find a job commensurate with his skills, despite sending off numerous applications.

"I've made up my mind to emigrate," Hassan, 36, said. "I am desperate for a permanent job with a steady income which I'm certain I will not find here."

The survey report recommends that a national youth strategy be developed to take advantage of a demographic window that will open up within the next decade when the economically active population (aged 15-64) exceeds the dependent population (below 15 and over 64).

"This report will definitely grab the government's attention as it offers a good and comprehensive database on youth, their problems and the best ways to invest in this community," said Ali Al-Moussawi, a spokesman for Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki. He hoped the government would have a "thorough and detailed" strategy "by next year".

However, Basil al-Azawi, who heads the Iraqi Commission for Civil Society Enterprises, a coalition of over 1,000 NGOs, expressed doubt that a youth-related strategy could be implemented by the government any time soon.

"This [the survey report] is no more than visions and theories on paper," Al-Azawi said. "In recent years we have not seen any serious measures to help the youth build their future." Political wrangling and security challenges had diverted the government from focusing on youth unemployment, he explained.

Baghdad-based economist Aziz Falih said the private sector offered the best hope, and that the government should make loans available to young people to help them get started in business.

Source: [IRIN](#)